



# Discourses shaping language-in-education policy in Nepal: An intersectional perspective



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# Outline

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  - Methodology
  - Findings and discussion
- **Conclusion**
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# Background & Theoretical Perspective



# Language & Mobility

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- Language is one of the parallel travelling features along with human mobilities.
- Increasingly mobile communities face multiple but interlocking discourses such as globalization, neoliberal capitalism, nationalism and ethnolinguistic identity and selectively engage with them in their decision-making.
- When multiple forces come together, sometimes they create synergy and some other times they cancel each other out, giving rise to intersectional relationships.
- It is therefore likely that ‘beyond-the-school’ factors, e.g., mobility, affect individuals’ language preferences.
- In many contexts, certain languages embody particular discourses, e.g., English-globalization/pragmatism vs Korean-patriotism, nationalism (e.g., Choi, 2016); and mobility, e.g., English, Chinese and Korean (Poudel & Choi, 2022)

# Previous Research

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- Language policies are embedded in complex social structures such as histories, social class, ethnicity, caste, and religion.
- Studies have also documented the complex interplay of social, educational, geopolitical, and economic aspects of national and international languages (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016; Poudel & Choi, 2021).
- Discursive forces such as globalisation, nationalism, ethnicity, social inequalities and equity intersect as inherent part of policy-crafting in the schools' LEP or other education policies. However, this concern has not received sufficient attention (Choi, 2019; 2022).
- In this paper, we explored how several discursive elements intersect in Nepal's school-level language-in-education decision-making.



# Theoretical perspectives

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- Discourse as the shaping force of a language in education policy
  - 'A dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s), which frame it' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258)
- The theory of intersectionality as an analytical framework
  - First introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, useful in analysing the convergence of multiple forms of forces to shape people's lives (Artiles, 2011)
  - Intersectional perspective unravels the relationship between different but co-existing and interconnected forces shaping language-in-education policy (Gay, 2018), and individuals' and institutions' decision-making (McCall, 2005; Varcoe et al., 2011).
  - It helps reveal how diverse discourses exert power across levels, including the school level.

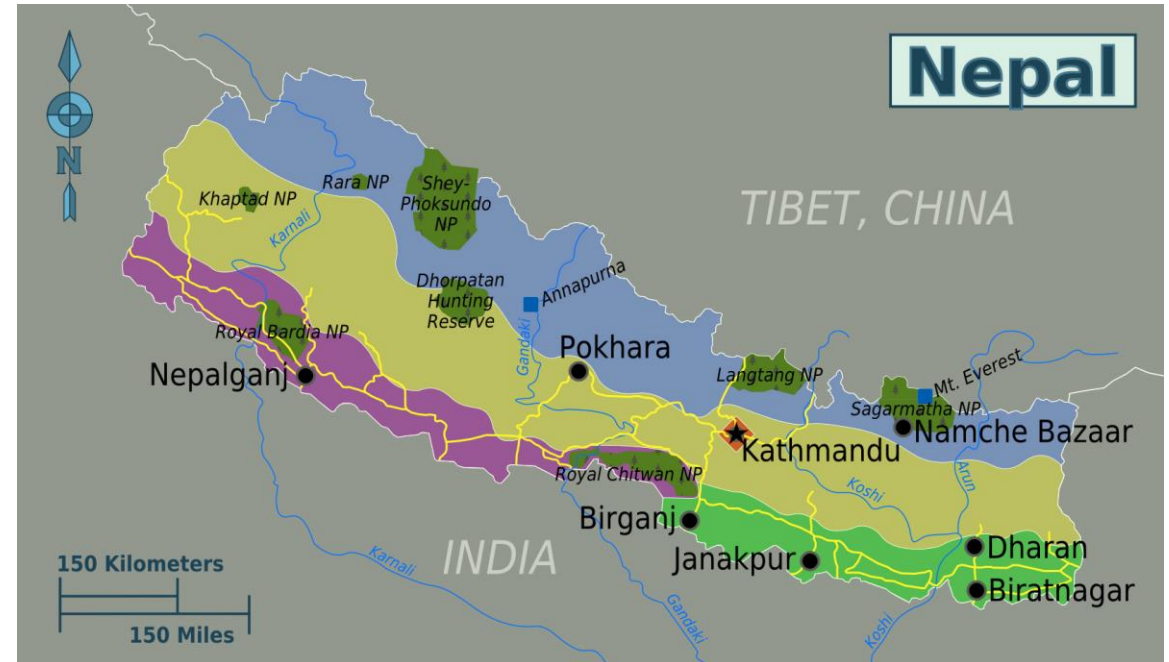
# Context & Methodology



# Nepal context

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- More than 124 languages
- more than 125 ethnic/indigenous groups
- the growing use of English and Nepali in schools.
- An intergenerational shift in language preference
- People's aspiration to participate in globalization processes and promoting nationalism





# Methodology

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Qualitative case study conducted in purposively selected five secondary schools (3 public, 2 private) in Nepal, based on the MOI policy.

Municipal heads of each school area were contacted to learn their priorities and policies.

Each schools exhibited unique demographic and linguistic characteristics, i.e., diversity in terms of social and geographical context, language background, and nature of establishment.

Interviews & focus groups were conducted with 30 students, 10 teachers, 5 head teachers, 20 parents and 3 municipal heads of the respective local government

Thematic content analysis (Miles et al., 2014)



# Findings and Discussion

# **Dominance of globalization and neoliberalism in LEP decisions (1)**

- This study found that globalization and nationalism as the dominant discourses contributed to the ascendance of English-only monolingualism in school practices.
- Despite the multilingualism being a constitutional commitment, monolingual ideologies shaping the language education practices.
- Ascendance of English over Nepali and other languages as medium of instruction in school has been highly justified by a neoliberal rationale, e.g., English as a global language of global opportunity.
- The 'more English, more globalized learning' perception influenced language policy decisions in schooling.

# **Dominance of globalization and neoliberalism in LEP decisions (2)**

Neoliberalism as language policy (Pillar & Cho, 2013):

- Neoliberalism serves as a covert language policy mechanism pushing the global spread of English.
- The 'competition', heavily structured through a host of testing, assessment, and ranking mechanisms, many of which explicitly privilege English as a capital.
- The internationalization, a by-product of neoliberal globalization, strongly favours English as MOI.
- It neutralizes the global spread of English as the language of global competitiveness.

# **Nepali language Nationalism as a monoglossic ideology**

- Nepali, the official language, was promoted as an indicator of nationalism and that undermined the potential use of local ethnic/indigenous languages in formal processes.
- Historically, while the place of ethnic/indigenous languages were recognized as resources of the nation, they rarely came into practice in schooling system.
- Projected a social image that 'use of minority languages in education' as inferior practice.
- After 1990s, nationalism and linguistic human rights came into intersection, creating discursive tensions between Nepali and minority languages in education.

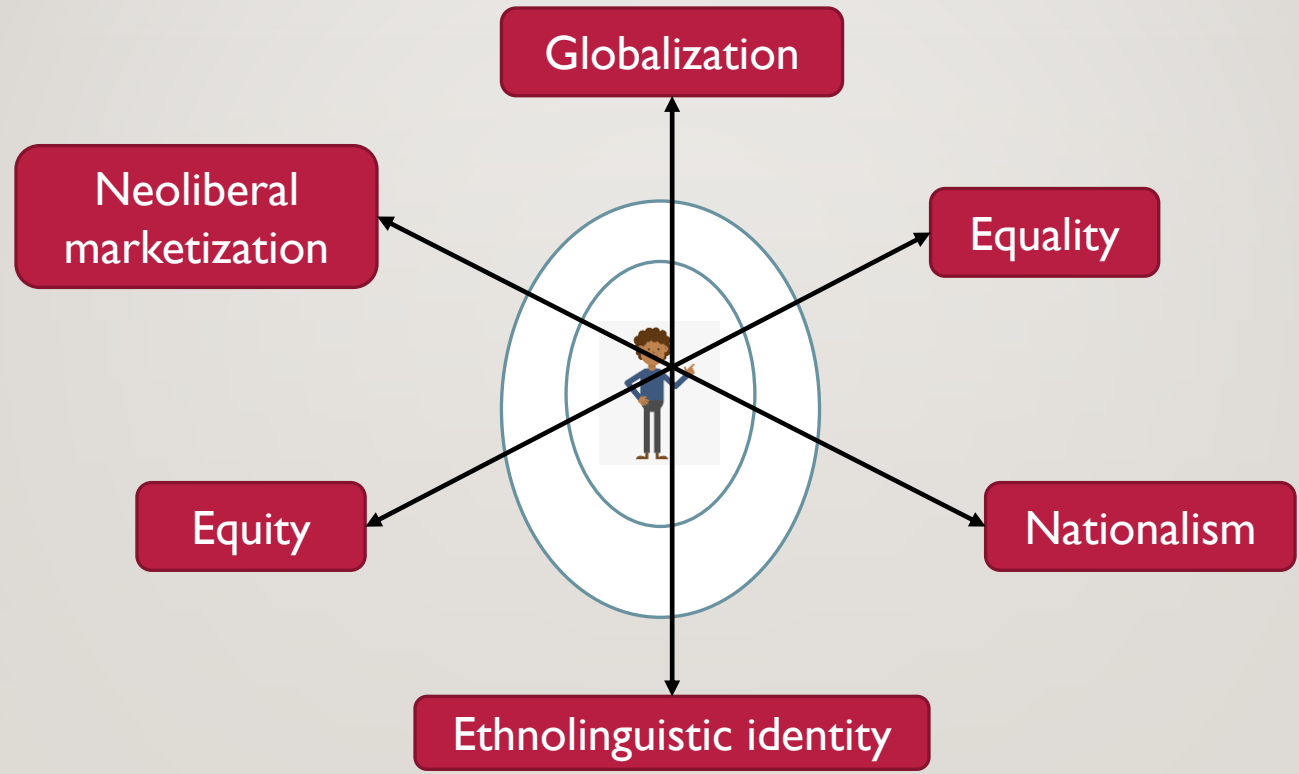


# **The politicization of minority language and identity**

- The discourse on the preservation and promotion of ethnic/indigenous languages was more political than educational.
- Language protection was essentialized over children's learning
- A discourse of mother-tongue based multilingual education was promoted, most often with political rationale, i.e., protection of ethnolinguistic identity, rather than facilitation of children's learning.

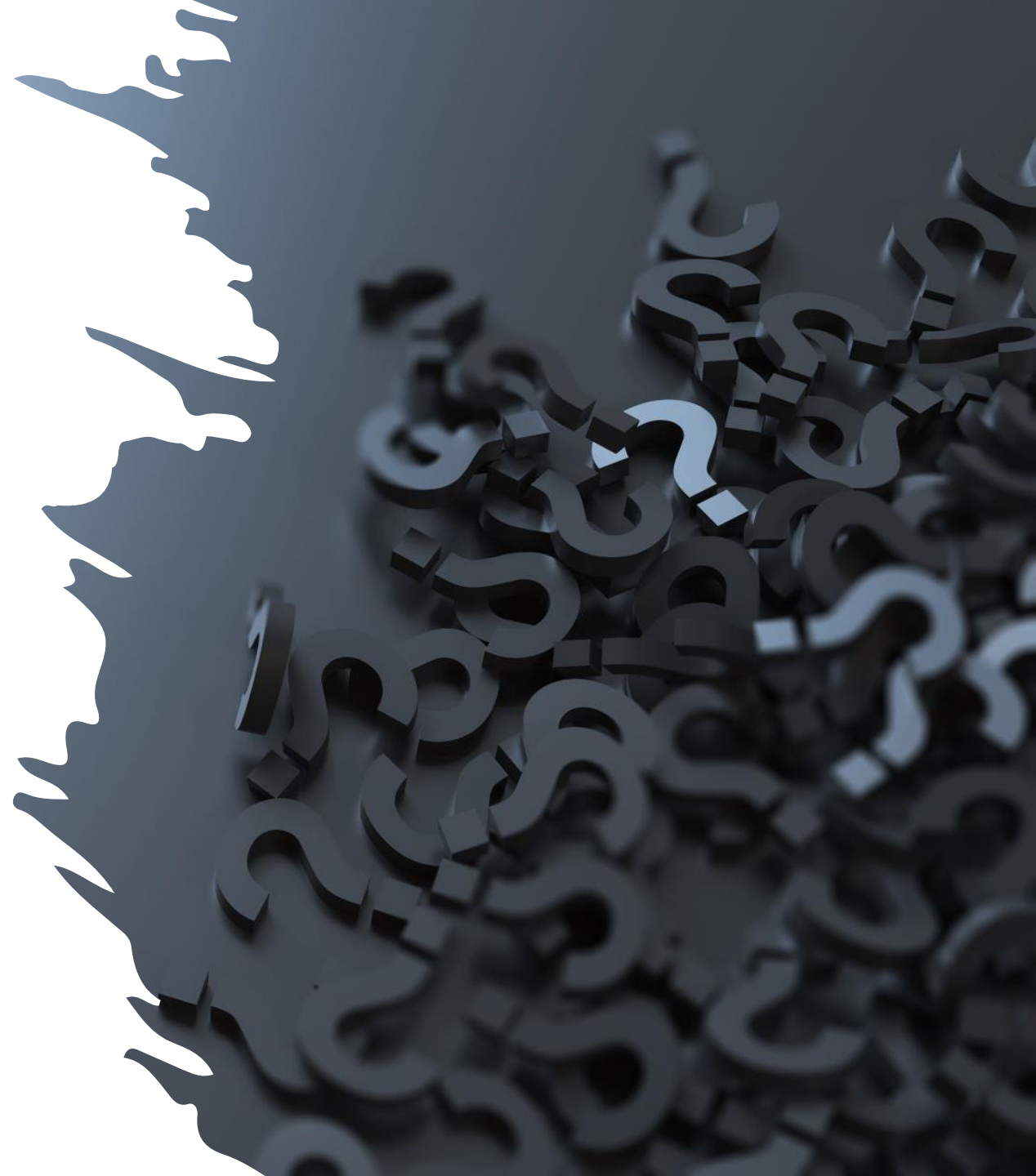
# DISCOURSE INTERSECTIONALITY IN LANGUAGE POLICY

Convergence of multiple forms of forces shaping people's life, beliefs and their environments



# Conclusion

- Several discursive forces intersect in complex sociolinguistic contexts, and their relationships are not binary.
- Such intersectional contexts delimit the spaces for ethnic/indigenous languages due to preference to dominant discourses that promote dominant languages.
- Leads to marginalization of the previously marginalized despite policy goals that address equity concerns in political grounds.
- The policies (both formed and enacted) are outcomes of discursive contestations or negotiations of multiple material (e.g., economic) and social (e.g., identity and mobility) orientations of the subjects of the discourses.
- Societies are coloured by several ideologies which enmeshed in a variety of discordant, incoherent and contradictory discourses' (Ball, 1993, p. 15), intersections of these develop, contest and reproduce language policy at the cost of minority languages.
- Interplay between broader discourses such as globalisation, neoliberal marketisation, nationalism, equity and equality play significant role in shaping language policy decisions and localised practice of language(s).



# Implications & Future direction

- **Practical Implications**

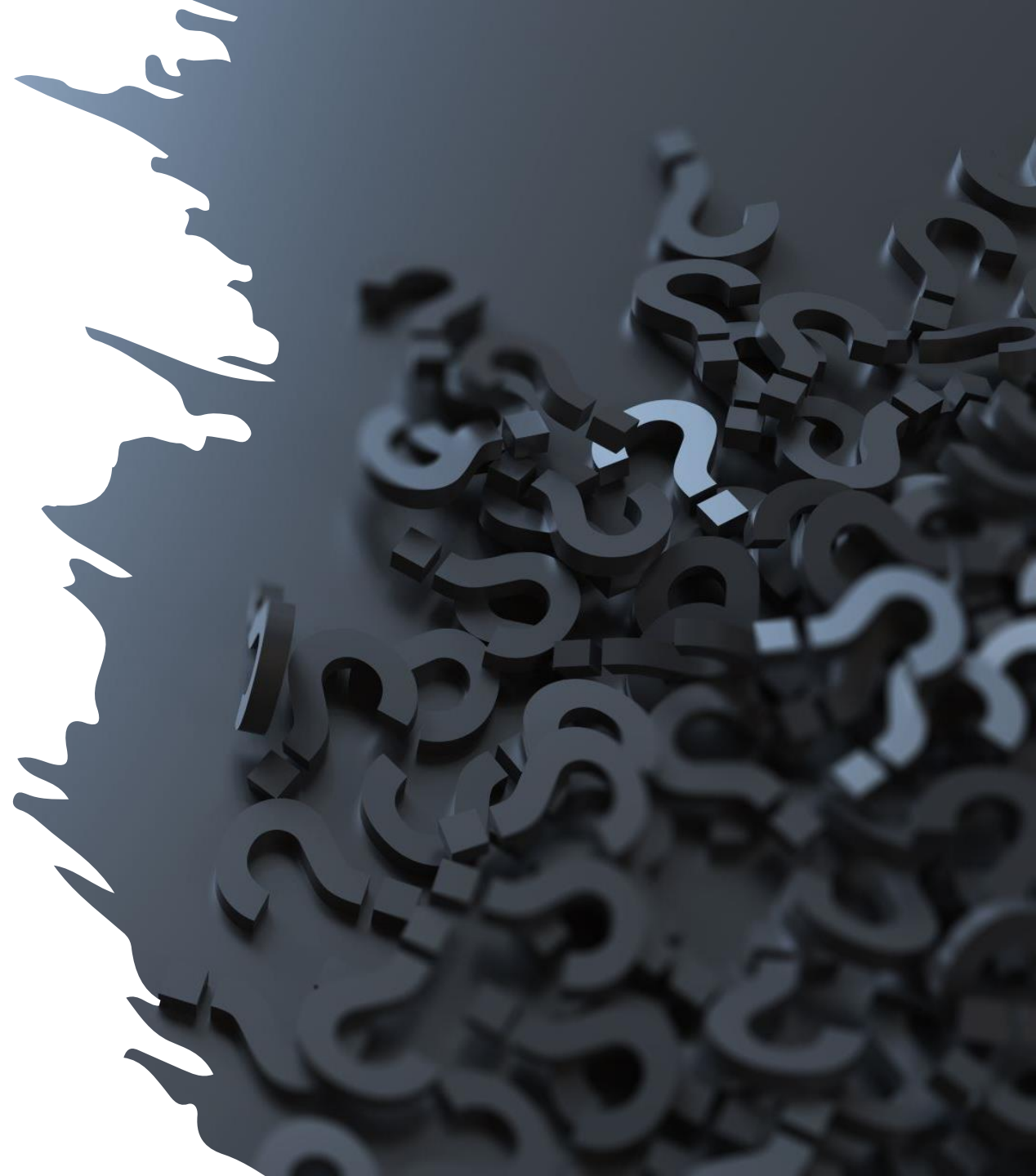
- When designing an LEP, the complex relationship between language identity and proficiency needs to be integrated (e.g., ethnic background  $\neq$  proficiency)

- **Theoretical Implications**

- We confirmed the utility of the intersectionality framework in understanding the enactment of a multilingual policy at a school level

- **Future direction of Research**

- How to protect the indigenous languages when new powerful languages enter the scene
- How the policy can use the families as partners in maintaining indigenous languages and creating spaces for them
- How other factors, e.g., time, space, play into the relationship between mobility & languages



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