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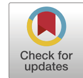

Enactment of English medium instruction in under-resourced educational contexts: A case of multilingual public secondary schools in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) policy has shown substantial growth in all levels of education, driven by diverse aspirations such as raising individuals' global competitiveness and internationalization of education. Such a growth of EMI has been questioned from equity perspective. However, they largely draw on perception-based evidence, and do not capture exactly why and how the EMI has arisen and been practiced at the school and classroom levels, against the official, multilingual policy. This paper explores the practiced EMI policy through a qualitative multi-case study, involving in-depth interviews, focus groups and classroom observations in three Nepalese public secondary schools. The data were analysed thematically drawing on the theory of policy enactment and translanguaging. Findings showed that schools consciously chose EMI in full or part for practical reasons (e.g., career prospect) opening some equity-related issues, but teachers and students commonly adopted translanguaging strategies to deal with language and content-related problems and to level the ground for students with limited English proficiency. The findings ask critical language policy researchers to seriously consider the context in theorising equitable language policy. Practical measures to increase educational equity, such as legitimising the use of community languages in class, are also proposed.

1. Introduction

In this study, we analyse the school-level English medium instruction (EMI) practice against the multilingual reality and the equity-related issues arising therein. Disagreements have been reported over the use of the term EMI. Similar practice is described with a plethora of terms such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and English for Academic Purpose (EAP), and all those terms are often used without definition (Macaro, Samantha, Pun, An & Dearden (2018); see also, Airey, 2016; Gilanyi et al., 2023). We base our understanding on Macaro's (2018) definition as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (p. 19), due to its succinctness. Our understanding is more nuanced, however, as we concur with Macaro & Samantha et al.'s (2018) exclusion of cases where English is used as a second language, but part ways with them by conceiving it to go beyond geographically-bound definition, e.g., including the case of migrant students learning with EMI in Australia. We consider that EMI is an umbrella term referring to the

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practice of teaching all or selected content subjects in English. Unlike other terms, such as EAP which focuses on the development of English proficiency at the tertiary level or CLIL which focuses on the mastery of the disciplinary/subject content, we investigate the practice focusing on the relationship between English and its users.

The term EMI often refers to the practice of tertiary education (e.g., Airey, 2016; McKinley & Rose, 2022). Recently, however, its usage expanded to include practice from pre-primary through basic education to tertiary education (Macaro, Tian & Chu, 2018), partly reflecting the global expansion of the EMI practice to these wider contexts. For instance, Milligan (2022) reports on "a significant body of literature" that investigates EMI practice at primary schools in the context of the Global South (p. 928); Gilanyi et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of studies on the EMI practice in Asian primary and secondary schools between 2015 and 2022, to find over 60 relevant studies.

Nepal exhibits the expansion of EMI, though it misaligns with the official policy. The Government of Nepal (GoN) principally adopts a multilingual policy in governance and education, as this state policy has been articulated in the Constitution of Nepal- 2015 (the major legislative policy document). Contrary to this intended policy of realizing multilingualism that promotes simultaneous use of English, Nepali (the national language) and other local ethnic/indigenous languages in education, EMI continues to dominate schooling as well as higher education. Similarly, since their beginning, especially after 1990s with the rise of neoliberal privatization in public education, the private schools have adopted English as a *de facto* medium of instruction (MOI). In response to this EMI practice of private-sector education, public schools have been increasingly shifting to EMI from their previously practiced Nepali medium instruction (NMI) (Phyak, 2021; Poudel & Choi, 2021; 2022; Sah, 2021). This shift to English medium education (EME) in school and higher education has raised several concerns such as limiting some students' content knowledge and comprehension (Pun & Macaro, 2019) and reduced quality of content teaching in some schools (Hu & Lei, 2014). In response to the call to investigate the EMI practice in basic education (Gilanyi et al., 2023) and in particular concerning its equity-related implication (Milligan, 2022), we investigate the EMI practice in secondary school (i.e., in K12 education) within the multilingual social context of Nepal. Nepal at this juncture makes a suitable case to investigate the equity implication of EMI, since the shift to EMI from earlier NMI in public schools and the establishment of EMI as a *de facto* medium in private schools in Nepal has become a subject of heated debates on social justice and equity in educational provisions, along with other issues (e.g., Ng, 2014; Poudel & Choi, 2022; Rose et al., 2022).

1.1. EMI movement: international trend and recent development in Nepal

In many contexts, EMI has just been expanded unchecked, which has raised concerns that such expansion of English might cause 'domain loss' of local languages (e.g., Macaro, Samantha, et al., 2018) as well as disadvantage the students having low-level English language proficiency through denying their access to education and leading to their development of depreciated self-identity (Milligan, 2022).

The EMI movement has long been rationalized equating it with quality education and easier transition to higher education. For instance, Aizawa et al. (2020) through their study in Japan found that 'soft-EMI' high school experiences may lead to an easier transition to university-level EMI context. The desire to improve students' English language competence while teaching other academic subject contents was also a prominent driver in Thailand and Vietnam (Sahan, Gallaway & McKinley, 2021). More importantly, EMI is used as an internationalization strategy and to raise the ranking of the university in the global university ranking exercises (Choi & Adamson, 2021; Galloway et al., 2020).

EMI wave not only grants a prominent role to English both as a medium and a taught subject of the curriculum but may result in disadvantaging students with insufficient proficiency in English (Hornberger, 2002). For instance, multiple scholars (e.g., Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Choi & Adamson, 2021; Milligan, 2022) have documented how EMI can sacrifice student learning in different multilingual contexts. It also rewards knowing and being in an "English" way at the cost of devaluing the local, indigenous epistemology (Milligan, 2022; Poudel, Jackson & Choi, 2022).

The growth of EMI in Nepal resembles these global trends. The stakeholders of education such as policymakers, parents, teachers, and students perceive development of English language skills as essential to participation in the global economic race and mobility (Poudel & Choi, 2021; Poudel & Choi, 2022). This motivation has not only expanded English as the primary language of instruction, but also as the *de facto* MOI in both public and private schools. Poudel & Choi (2022) found that the EMI ascendency is not necessarily an intentional outcome but rather resulted from the inability of governments and schools, to navigate through resource limitation or subscribe community support.

In sum, despite well-intended multilingual education policies at all levels of government in Nepal, the translation of such policies has been incomplete and shaped by several discourses pertaining to non-linguistic factors, such as political, social, and economic dimensions that intersect with language policies (Rana & Sah, 2022). The necessity to consider several non-linguistic factors such as parents' motivation and support, demographic characteristics and social mobility-induced challenges formed constraints for policy-makers in enacting the ideal goal of multilingual education (Poudel & Choi, 2021) and consequently continuing EMI as the most preferred MOI in all levels of formal education. This leads to continuation of MOI related inequalities in schooling, as to be explained below.

1.2. Equity related issues around the EMI trend

Despite the mixed reactions to the growing trend of EMI from policy arbiters and educational actors, its expansion in non-native English-speaking multilingual contexts has been largely unchecked. EMI has been promoted based on the unverified assumption that it is the best strategy to develop second/foreign language proficiency (e.g., in English) and subject content knowledge, concurrently.

According to Hu (2019), it has been driven by "popular but simplistic assumptions about how EMI can benefit students' disciplinary and English learning" (p. 2). English language proficiency has also been associated with the possibility of enhancing the economic status, social mobility, and other life chances of individuals such as participation in a global labour market (Choi, 2023). The use of the term differs across scholars, which further confuses stakeholders. Airey's (2016) claim that EMI is just about content learning through the English language, different from simultaneously existing approaches such as EAP and CLIL. In this paper, given our focus on practised MOI, we do not enter the debates across the concepts of EAP, CLIL and EMI. We only centre around the enactment of MOI, especially the 'claimed' EMI in the selected schools.

Critical discourses on language policy have highlighted the emergence of a controversial relationship of English with other, national and ethnic/indigenous languages, primarily in the contexts where the local linguistic practices and landscapes are predominantly non-English (e.g., Galloway et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2022). In such contexts, the substantial growth of EMI policy has been observed either for the entire curriculum or in selected subjects such as mathematics, and science and technology. Concerns about the impact of such practice in the linguistic ecology as well as learning outcomes of the students have been raised (e.g., Macaro, Samantha, et al., 2018; Poudel & Choi, 2021; Rose et al., 2022). For instance, Rose et al. (2022) in their study in China's higher education identified that the unplanned and simultaneous emergence of EMI has caused several social and academic issues such as unequal access to learning resources, (e.g., those available in English), which caused inadequate learning outcomes and poor teaching quality (also see Rose et al., 2020). In response to these rising concerns, some countries (such as Japan, and Korea) have tried to curb the unintended impact such as inequity from EMI through diverse initiatives. For instance, Korea invested heavily to level the ground by dispatching native speaking English teachers to all schools, creating an English immersion environment by building numerous English villages, and recently by drastically reducing the relative importance of English in college entrance exams (Choi, 2023). Reactions and attitudes to EMI appear far from homogenous (Hultgren, Jensen & Demova, 2015) evidenced from the cases of resistance, to uncritical adoption in some contexts driven by aspiration for internationalization of education or for competitiveness in the globalized world (e.g., Aizawa et al., 2020; Bradford, 2020; Choi, 2023; Hultgren et al., 2015).

While empirical EMI research studies have aptly highlighted the educational quality and inequality issues, they draw on a more descriptive, perception-based evidence, and a systematic documentation and analysis of the practised EMI policy in multilingual classrooms and its theoretical underpinnings are still desired (Poudel & Choi, 2022; Simpson, 2017). In particular, how and in what ways has the EMI been practised at the school-level has not been adequately explored, especially in the under-resourced multilingual contexts. Further, the inequities created by the elite's appropriation of English in education and its relationship with the other historically minoritised languages, and the issue of how the EME plays out with the well-intended goals of realizing truly multilingual policies in schools have not received due scholarly attention. In Nepal's case as well, although several studies have been carried out exploring the context of language-in-education policies and their practice (e.g., Poudel & Choi, 2021, 2022; Sah, 2021), the research that documents the actual, observation-based, school- and classroom-level practice of EMI are insufficient.

This paper addresses this research gap by drawing on the theory of policy enactment (e.g., Ball et al., 2012, Choi, 2018; see also, Spillane et al., 2002) and empirical studies of translanguaging in a classroom setting (e.g., Choi & Leung, 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016) to explore and interrogate the practised MOI in the diverse, multilingual secondary schools in Nepal.

1.3. *Theoretical framework*

This study draws on the theory of policy enactment that explores more contextualised and nuanced practice of policies in specific contexts. Understanding of what policy actors do in terms of interpreting, adapting and transforming policy massages and how they create their context-specific policy actions to scaffold student learning is an important policy leverage from what was traditionally understood as being a policy (Ball et al., 2012). Moreover, language policies are born from realities embedded and influenced by the unique interplay of political, cultural, educational and economic characteristics of the language use contexts calling for more contextualised perspectives (Spolsky & Shohamy, 2000). Acknowledging the complexity and incoherence in policy process, and a need to make an in-depth understanding of each context of language use, we intended to explore how school heads, teachers, students and parents interpret and provide practical response to a policy. Ball et al. (2012) provided us with an adequate space to claim that the enactment of MOI in Nepal's schools is largely inconsistent, and therefore requires more case-specific elaboration of how the school stakeholders do policy. This focus led us towards the exploration of how (fully or partially) have MOI policies been appropriated in the selected schools.

As we based on a grounded approach to understanding the data, the analysis showed rapidly increasing positioning of translanguaging in the school classrooms despite officially being labelled as being 'monolingual' medium. Translanguaging is the fluidity of language use as a natural bilingual or multilingual practice (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Li, 2014). In this study, we use translanguaging in a broader sense, including codemixing and codeswitching, considering that L1 use in EMI contexts as 'a value-neutral term' (Macaro et al., 2018) and a resource for facilitating students' content comprehension and confidence.

This practised trend and our earlier research experiences attracted our attention to a translanguaging framework to realistically explain MOI policy enactment in the public schools, hence rationalising the close association between the theory of enactment and translanguaging in this study. This theoretical base enabled us to analyse the fluid, dynamic and borderless language practices in the classrooms. While there have been sizable research studies on translanguaging in EMI classrooms, they primarily describe the practice focusing on actors' strategies to bring translanguaging into the classrooms (e.g., Tai & Li, 2020) or the roles of respective languages (e.g., Choi & Leung, 2017), rather than critically engaging with the impact of such practice such as educational equity.

Drawing on these theoretical underpinnings, this study documented and analysed how the practised MOI policy is conditioned by several factors such as resource availability, teachers' awareness, teacher-student collaboration, and students' motivation, and how

they engage in need-based language use in their respective contexts. Equally significant is the understanding of how the MOI (more specifically the EMI) practice reciprocally shapes and is shaped by Nepal's multilingual social fabric while impacting students' learning participation, raising the issue of educational inequity.

1.4. Research questions against Nepal's language policy and practice landscape

The linguistic diversity of Nepal is made up of approximately 30 million people belonging to 125 ethnic groups/communities speaking more than 124 languages (National Statistics Office, 2021). In recent years, shaped by the mobility of people within and across the country, the conventional linguistic landscape and the ecology of diversity have been considerably changed, showing increasing language contact especially in the urban contexts. Amidst these changes, while Nepal's constitution imagines a multilingual and multi-ethnic social formation, English and Nepali languages have secured an uncontested space in education, primarily as compulsory subjects taught as part of the curriculum as well as the MOI. The domination of English and Nepali in education has been further strengthened due to the lack of development of robust curricular models to respond to the multilingual habitus of Nepalese society (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Poudel & Choi, 2022).

Recently, the EMI has become a ubiquitous practice in both public and private schools as the subjects such as science, mathematics and other technical subjects (e.g., accountancy, engineering) have been taught or allowed to be taught in English medium. This shows that language-in-education policies in Nepal are largely negotiated between English and Nepali despite the state-enforced multilingualism policy to create spaces for ethnic/indigenous languages within the school systems. Nepal's school practices have also reflected the unfounded folk assumption that EMI is the best solution to simultaneously develop students' disciplinary knowledge and English proficiency (Poudel & Choi, 2022; Rana & Sah, 2022).

This paper explores the MOI policy enactment against this context, especially within the institutional resource limitations (such as learning materials and human resources) and diversity of learner population, and the strategies teachers and students develop to navigate through the tensions arising with the growth of EMI. The study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

1. How does EMI arise at the institutional level?
2. How is the EMI practised at the classroom level?
3. What issues arise and how do teachers and students cope with them?

2. Study design and methods

2.1. Qualitative multi-case study: Case schools and their linguistic backgrounds

This paper draws on a qualitative multi-case study. The case method was deemed most suitable in capturing a practice (e.g., enacted language policy) in its naturally occurring setting (Thomas & Myers, 2015), as well as the perceptions of actors (e.g., rationale for actors' decision-making), situated within the local context (structure and discourses) (Duff, 2007). Investigating multiple cases, drawing on different sets of data (i.e., interviews and focus groups, observation, document study), and listening to diverse groups of actors (see below for details), lead to robustness of research, enabling contrast and comparison of diverse subjectivities (e.g., Miles et al., 2019). Moreover, a multi-case study enables the critical analysis of the impact of policy, which this study undertook to understand the equity-related implications of the practiced policy (Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018).

The three purposively selected case schools are from urban, rural and semi-urban contexts of Nepal. The schools were selected to reflect diverse linguistic, territorial and educational characteristics. School A (official MOI: English in the EMI shift and Nepali in the NMI shift) was from an urban context. English, Hindi, and Bhojpuri were frequently used in this school community. School B (official MOI: Nepali with subject-specific use of English in classroom practice) is in a rural context, where most students come from a monolingual background (i.e., Maithili speaking community). School C (official MOI: English) serves a mixed community consisting of ethnic groups Newars, Tamangs, Brahmis, Chhetries, Tharus, and others, located in a semi-urban context. Our observation showed that students attending to all these schools were generally proficient in Nepali.

None of the three schools officially mandated the community language(s) as an MOI in the classroom but used Nepali and English as the major 'practised' MOIs. This practice shows that, officially, these schools adopted 'restrictive' language policies (Darder, 2014; Kan & Adamson, 2009; Menken, 2013), guided by standard language ideologies. The policing of non-official languages, however, diverged. School A officially restricted the local community language (i.e., Bhojpuri) and promoted Nepali and English in the school premises. Schools B and C were not as restrictive as School A but portrayed the students' use of their home/community languages as deficient.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

From the data generated from the case study, the interviews and focus group discussion (FGD), and documents were used to answer all RQs, and the observation data, RQs 1 and 3. Fifteen in-depth individual interviews (3 headteachers and 12 teachers) and 3 FGDs (15 students) were conducted. From each school, four teachers from each subject category, mathematics, language, science, and technical subject were chosen purposively. Students for FGD were chosen considering their linguistic, ethnic and educational backgrounds to make the group as representative as possible. Engaging students in a FGD instead of one-on-one interviews helped them better express themselves without feeling threatened.

The analysis of language policy across levels (i.e., government, institutional and classroom) and language use was guided by the

theory of (language) policy enactment (e.g., Ball et al., 2012; Choi, 2018), as well as by previous empirical research on intentional and unintentional practice of translanguaging (e.g., Choi & Leung, 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016; Li, 2018). The interview data were analysed through thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2019), but guided by the RQs. The broad nature of the RQs allowed for this approach. As the analysis was data-driven, grounded and inductive, both authors iteratively analysed and interpreted the emerging codes, and collectively developed themes to finally relate them with the research questions, establishing a high-level inter-rater reliability.

The observation and document data were gathered from 12 classrooms of the chosen subjects. The structured observation was three-week long which generated data on teachers and students' language use, pedagogical moves, content and activities. Moreover, any other notable emerging features were recorded in a diary, such as specific teacher-student interactions on particular content and social concerns. As the language practice was patterned and similar across lessons, the typical multimodal linguistic practice in each school was presented phase-by-phase, i.e., start of the lesson, during the lesson, and close of the lesson, and the sub-activities of each phase (e.g., greeting, peer interaction)[1] (see Appendix for a sample, comparative observation note). The Appendix table's final column of *Remark* illustrates language use with sample expressions.

In the findings section, the interview data are often reported in a narrative form, rather than in a direct quote, constrained by the limited space. When referring to students, the data is from the FGDs; staff, individual interviews. In the remainder of the paper, the enactment of the MOI is first presented, followed by the discussion of the practice and of the equity concerns emerging from it.

3. Findings

The practice at the case schools identified three models of MOI, that is, 'English-must', 'dual-medium' and 'Nepali-medium[2]'. These models of 'practised MOIs' have emerged out of the diverse educational, social, and linguistic contexts of the communities where the schools are situated. We explain below the drivers of the EMI rise at the institutional level, language practice at the classroom level, and equity issues therein, in order.

3.1. Rise of EMI at the institutional level[3] (RQ 1)

3.1.1. Dual-medium education model

School A's implementation of dual-medium education, i.e., in English and in Nepali, was a planned response to the local government pressure to implement EMI as well as continuation of schools' service to a group of population that needs Nepali medium pedagogy. Following the municipality office's circulation of a notice to all public schools to promote EMI, School A operates English-medium in the morning shift and Nepali-medium in the afternoon. Although the dual MOI schooling practices were unclear in terms of the choice of specific medium given the students and teachers' fluid use of Nepali and English, the school's EMI obtained overwhelming support from the parents. Implementing parallel streams enabled the school to serve two disparate groups of the student population. The students proficient in English from relatively well-off families and those who were transferred from the private schools to this public school were enrolled in the EMI programme. The headteacher of School A said:

> We have run two mediums to enrol two types of students. We have got many applications from students who studied at private EMI schools up to grades 6/7. Now they wish to study in our schools, which is good news for us. But they and their parents want us to teach in English, and there is no restriction for us to run classes in English. That is why we are running the regular Nepali medium in the day, and we have run English medium in the morning.

The headteacher expressed his satisfaction and excitement that the school has received overwhelming support in implementing EMI from all community sectors. He mentioned that relinquishing the EMI stream would reduce student enrolment and threaten the reputation of his school. The school cannot stop educating in NMI either, as there are students with relatively low English proficiency in the community. He does not think that the local/community language, e.g., Bhojpuri, can be the school's MOI at the current state of explosive demand of EMI in public education. He observes:

> No one wants to educate children in Bhojpuri. The local government also plans to transform the Nepali public schools into English medium, thinking that it will improve the quality of education … I do not know which is good, but this is happening here, and I think this is the trend across Nepal.

Notably, for the headteacher and teachers, the practice of dual medium of instruction is transitional management in the school before its complete shift to EMI. This signals the evolving trend of transforming multilingual public schools into 'English-only' (monolingual) institutions, the achievement of which is likely to be unrealistic as far as the data in this study confirms. This aspiration

[1] We acknowledge that some overlaps are observed across activities presented in the Appendix. For instance, the explanation and clarification questions can also be asked during presentation. In that case, depending on the contextual nature of the questions, we have organized some of them in 'teacher-student interaction' category, and some others in the close of the lesson (See Choi & Leung, 2017, p. 591 for the method of analysing lesson flow.).

[2] This 'English-must' is a perception-based notion. Nepali has established itself as the hegemonic language and therefore, schools do not need to present it as a 'must', while presently the schools aim to promote EMI, as a 'must'.

[3] We did not discuss the Nepali medium, as it is beyond the remit of this paper.

seems an immediate goal for School A (and School C also), but a distant one for School B as the latter is not well-prepared in terms of staff confidence and management of resources.

3.1.2. English-must model

In School C, the 'English-must' orientation largely shaped the language practice. The school did not receive any directive on language policy from the municipal office, but the municipality allowed schools to make decisions on their MOI policy (either English or Nepali). In the school, although classroom practice showed peripheral use of other language (e.g., Nepali), the school in general was guided by the ideology of 'English-only' and was trying to impose this forcefully over teachers and students, which led us to term this practice as "English-must'. Classroom observation showed that the teachers and students developed multimodal language practice maximising the use of English than other languages.

The ideology was obvious from classroom displays as well where the learning materials (such as posters, pictures, tables) were fully written in English. In response to the query "Why do you think these displays have only English?", a student during a FGD rightly said, *"It is an English medium school, so we must include only English"*. All the participants in this study revealed this ideological construction. A teacher from School C observed:

> Although we do not exactly know how much the EMI changed our students' English language proficiency, we have seen improved academic performance of our students measured in the high-stakes examinations such as SEE (Secondary Education Examination) and SLC (School Leaving Certificate) examination.

Their attribution of improved students' achievement in high-stake exams to EMI has driven their continued preference to implement EMI. Although the two high-stake tests, i.e., SEE and SLC examination can be taken either in Nepali or in English medium, a prevalent perceived notion that 'writing answers in English will result in a better score' continues to influence stakeholders' beliefs. Even the teachers from School B who do not implement EMI as Schools A and C perceive that teaching in English is a must for improving students' English proficiency and that might lead to achieving high grades in such exams.

Although mixed results regarding the relationship between English proficiency and academic success have been reported (e.g., Gajewski, 2019), the assessment system has caused an additional pressure on the adoption of EMI in schools. While the assessment system does not 'mandate' English as a medium of the exam, the misconception that writing in English would help them obtain better scores continues to influence people's perception. In an FGD, one student in school A said, *"If we write in English in the exam, I think we get better scores, as most of the students who scored better are from boarding schools that teach in EMI"*. For students and teachers, the 'English-must' practice in private schools remained a strong reference point, and partially formed their collective ideological force to promote EMI in public schools. Hence, these two models reported above are new forms of MOI practice in public schools.

3.2. Language practice at the classroom level (RQ 2)

As elaborated above, the emergence of the new form of MOI practice, i.e., either more English or more Nepali medium distinct from the said 'EMI' or 'NMI' in monolingual sense, revealed fluid boundaries between the EMI and NMI. At the classroom level, the teachers and students exercised their agency to reach the goals of learning both content and language, irrespective of the institutional policy. In the selected schools, translanguaging and multimodal pedagogical approaches were developed contextually for the purpose of scaffolding students' learning, based on members' pre-existing linguistic repertoires. Their translanguaging practice shows that their linguistic repertoires are so much meshed that boundaries between languages are blurred, and language use emerged as a natural tendency to use two or multiple languages at a time to accomplish a communicative function. As illustrated in the appended table, teachers utilize students' linguistic and non-linguistic repertoires in the classroom by shifting between multiple languages. They translanguaged when explaining difficult content and in synthesizing the lesson to ensure that all students comprehend the contents taught. Teachers also believed that this practice enhances the interaction between the world outside and what is taught in the classroom. That is, while all the three case schools are governed by monolingual policy ideologies (e.g., teach in one medium), the micro level actors (e.g., the teachers and students) created translanguaging space, to replicate students' lived experiences outside the school walls.

The Appendix summarises the language use scenario in classrooms of each school. We have presented the phases and activities in the first column, school specific language practice in the three columns in the middle, and typical examples as well as explanations (where relevant) of language use in the final column. The classroom activities have been organised as the start of the lesson, during the lesson and closure of the lesson. It also reveals that the teachers would largely stick to the schools' official language policy, i.e., following the schools' mandated MOI, at the start of the lesson, which shifted towards the flexible mode of language use, i.e., translanguaging, during the learning phase of instruction. Finally, while concluding the lessons, in most cases, the teachers returned to the officially mandated MOI such as English and Nepali.

However, during the lesson when the actual learning occurs, both teachers and students resorted to translanguaging. For example, in School A, while explaining the contents and facilitating students in pair/group work during the lessons, teachers used Nepali alongside of English in the EMI stream. Similar simultaneous use of Nepali and Maithili[4] was observed in School B in such activities. Such translanguaging was initiated sometimes by teachers and other times by students. For instance, during observation, students

[4] The use of Tharu (the native language of Tharu indigenous community) is minimal, perhaps considering students from other linguistic backgrounds and due to the lack of Tharu-proficient school staff.

responded in Nepali to teacher queries made in English, and the teachers followed students' choice of language. While such interpersonal codeswitching initiated by both parties is a general pattern (e.g., Choi & Leung, 2017), minor differences across teachers and classes were also observed, which confirms that translanguaging is a localised practice (e.g., Sahan et al., 2021). All in all, all schools, regardless of the claimed official monolingual (EMI-only or NMI-only) medium, bilingual practices with pedagogical translanguaging across two languages were generally observed.

3.3. Equity related tension and teachers' and students' coping strategies (RQ 3)

This study found that the school-level policies were not supportive of maintaining equity while implementing the official MOIs. That is, schools did not actively institute a support system to address the learning needs arising from their diverse linguistic and socio-cultural identities. This, in turn, negatively affected linguistically marginal students' participation in classroom interactions and extra-curricular activities. For instance, in a typical EMI class in School C, those students having a good level of English proficiency dominated classroom interactions, limiting the participation of other English-weak students. Although the teachers in all three school classrooms often repeated utterances in students' familiar languages to encourage the weak students, the participation of students proficient in the chosen medium dominated the pedagogic interactions.

What is more concerning is the fact that the enactment of the contextualised MOI practices has yet to provide equitable learning opportunities in the classrooms. This led to a misperceived projection that learning in EMI improves English proficiency and that ultimately leads to improved student participation and learning. Consequently, learning in other medium than English was perceived as a 'deficit' learning, as was experienced by the students. For instance, School A's practice of higher preference in engaging EMI-shift students in extracurricular activities such as oratory contests and school celebrations, compared to their NMI peers' illustrates institutionalized unequal practices towards students based on the selected MOI they are educated in. Some students studying in the NMI shift claimed they felt they were lagging behind the EMI-shift peers as the latter are more valued and engaged in school activities.

However, some students weaker in the selected language of school instruction tried to negotiate and create a non-threatening environment to use their ethnic languages, such as Maithili, Nepali and Bhojpuri, flexibly. Teachers responded favourably to such a move, by interacting with students in the home languages, if possible, as well as allowing these languages in classroom-level peer interaction such as in pair/group work. One student from School C during FGD notes the pedagogic purpose of this practice:

> Our school is English medium. We have used English textbooks in all subjects except Nepali. Our teachers and headteachers encourage us to use English inside and outside the classroom. However, in the class, we are allowed to use Nepali also. This practice helped us to understand the meaning in Nepali.

Despite the restrictive school-level macro language policy, the micro-level agents (such as teachers and students) developed their own practised policy. Although inequity in learning can also be caused by several other factors such as inadequate teaching/learning resources and teachers' linguistic competencies, the teacher-students negotiation and collaboration in enacting translanguaging addressed inequities caused by schools' language policies to some degree.

However, some aspects of inequity are also affected by factors outside the classroom, e.g., parental participation and exercise of their agency in school policies. While the literature shows the importance of parental participation in schooling on students' motivation and achievement (e.g., Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Shute et al., 2011), the data revealed that the schools' implementation of a particular MOI is associated with parental participation in the schooling. To illustrate, parents' participation in school meetings was higher in EMI public schools compared to NMI schools. As a result, in School A, though adopting two streams of EMI and NMI, school policies were largely attended and shaped by parents of the EMI stream, while in School B with the enacted NMI, the community monolingual in Maithili gave little feedback on school affairs and did not even attend the open meetings. The headteacher of School A observes:

> We have operated EMI and NMI shifts. We have found that the parents of students studying EMI shift come to every meeting we call; they take interest in school activities and inquire about their children's progress while attending parent-teacher meetings but parent participation in the NMI shift is not much exciting.

The headteacher from School B concurs:

> Most of the parents are not interested in school activities. When we call meetings, very few parents come to school. This generates difficulty in interacting with parents. Our parents are neither worried nor interested in schools' choice of the medium of instruction.

School A and School B were different in terms of their practised MOI, the context (urban vs rural), and socio-economic status (SES) of the community they are serving. The former is in a densely populated city, has enacted EMI (though partially) and serves the children of families from both middle and low SES. The latter serves the students from relatively low SES background. Although parental disengagement cannot be attributed solely to school's language choices, equal participation by parents representing all MOIs would have contributed to addressing needs of all students, and perhaps by creating and enacting more equitable language policies.

4. Discussion

In Nepal, the guiding linguistic framework for schooling is multilingualism. However, in many schools EMI primacy is observed,

and the reasons were sought (RQ1). One reason is local level government units' (e.g., the municipal offices) failure to reinforce multilingualism. For example, this study found that one municipality openly encouraged the EMI, while in the other two, the decision was left to individual schools. In both contexts, EMI rose as the official institutional MOI whether in part or full. The choice of EMI as the official language policy was largely driven by the perceived pressure, coming from desires and expectations of stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and students, whether they concern high scores in exams, or schools' student recruitment and survival.

The practised policy, however, was translanguaging (RQ 2). Teachers and students in their classrooms designed pedagogical strategies of 'translanguaging' to ease the teaching and learning of language and contents when either or both parties were not ready to adopt EMI. Indeed, scholars (e.g., Cenoz, 2017; Choi, 2017; García & Li, 2014) have claimed that translanguaging practices can offer extensive learning opportunities and help negotiate the social identities of individuals. Depending on the instructor, content materials, student readiness, and the school context, the emphasis shifted between English and content in respective lessons, which would make them resemble sometimes a CLIL lesson, other times an EAP lesson, which may be one source of the confusion with the terms to describe such lessons and differential understanding of the term EMI (e.g., Airey, 2016; Macaro, Tian & Chu, 2018). In all the school classrooms, the translanguaging practice remained a *de facto* methodology, though sometimes teachers were not informed what the strategy was called.

In relation to the identified equity issues (RQ 3), this translanguaging practice, repeatedly observed across all stages of classroom instruction in all case schools (see Appendix), partly addressed them. However, the issues are not fully resolved since the deficit ideologies have shaped schools' adoption of restrictive language policies. Fundamentally, language policies are structured by several forms of inequalities (Blommaert, 2010) that privilege some languages and marginalize others. Within this structural frame of inequality, the named languages are capitalised based on a particular context's social and cultural specificities (Early & Norton, 2014). The promotion of EMI in the selected public schools in multilingual social contexts of Nepal is an example of such capitalization and therefore the rise of the dominant language, viz English, in education. Some recent studies (e.g., Galloway et al., 2020; Xie & Curle, 2020) have highlighted some perceived benefits of EMI in terms of learning of contents, improvement of self-efficacy and motivation as well as access to a wide range of learning resources. In reference to these claims, the present study reveals, echoing a body of literature (e.g., Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Choi & Adamson, 2021; Hornberger, 2002), that while adopting EMI might benefit those who are proficient in English (as believed by some students and teachers in this study), the benefit is not for all. That is, an exclusive EMI policy can negatively affect students' learning, for those who do not fully command the language by discouraging these learners' active participation in co-construction of knowledge. This differential impact deserves due attention from the school leaders (i.e., head-teachers) and meso-level policy agencies (i.e., municipal offices). Scholars likewise need to make nuanced claims about the impact, by identifying who and when and under what circumstances learners benefit from the EMI policy.

Another emerging concern is the way students construct their identity in relation to the official MOI designation of their shifts and schools. It was noted that some students (e.g., in School A) developed an inferiority complex in relation to attending an NMI shift or school due to their perceived lack of proficiency in the language the society cherishes. This confirms previous studies' findings that the MOI is related to students' social identities (e.g., Choi, 2017). This study extends the discussion of inequity around MOI, by noting how sometimes the MOI policy is intertwined with actual, segregational practice of schools and the social context beyond the school. Sizable studies noted that the EMI practices may lead to language inequalities (Shohamy, 2006) and a sense of inferiority complex (Chang et al., 2017; Tsuneyoshi, 2005). This focal study shows how some activities that can be seen as prestigious are open only to EMI students, even within the same school, raising concerns about the role of school in creating biases and elevating the status of a chosen language.

Indeed, Ng (2014) shows that this kind of unequal treatment in schools based on the students' enrolment in a particular MOI shift did affect the communities' home language practice. He showed parents and youths in Singapore opted to align themselves with the English language instead of their mother tongues despite the state policy of multilingualism, influenced by such injustice. In Nepal's case, studies (e.g., Gautam, 2021; Poudel & Choi, 2021, 2022) have reported intergenerational shifts in language use at the community level, revealing an increasing trend among new generation youths using the dominant languages such as Nepali and English. Consequently, there is an unplanned tendency to minimize or even erase the local ethnic/indigenous languages from their daily practices.

This study makes additional contribution, by documenting multilingual translanguaging, in addition to bilingual translanguaging in a multilingual setting, extending findings from previous studies. For instance, Sah and Li (2020) reported unequal translanguaging that used only English and Nepali rather than the students' mother tongues. Teachers and students in this study flexibly used Nepali, English, and mother tongues (Maithili and Bhojpuri) in both NMI and EMI classrooms and beyond, based on the contextual need at the schools (see Appendix). In that, language use was particularly selected based on the nature of the content taught/learnt and the language proficiency of students and their teachers. The teachers and students in this study utilized translanguaging practice as an opportunity to negotiate the linguistic and content related barriers. This practice resonates earlier claims that translanguaging is a process of knowledge construction and learning (Li, 2018).

5. Conclusion and implications

This study reveals how EMI has risen in the multilingual schooling context of Nepal, and how has it been enacted within resource limitations in the public schools. Although explicit multilingual policies are in place to guide school systems, due to perceived benefits

that EMI will bring both at the individual and regional level, schools ended up choosing EMI. However, to navigate through resource limitations, teachers and students collectively developed their contextualised strategic procedures in enacting the EMI, translanguaging. The translanguaging, while showing multilingual practice, still revealed English and Nepali dominance, revealing very limited space provided to community languages. However, it can be sensed that the dominance of the two languages might be intentional, especially to align with the national language policy. Some ethnic languages have obtained the official language status in policy, but have not been used in practice. This practice not only capitalises the dominant languages in education, but also challenges the efforts to realise the well-intended goal of multilingual and mother tongue education in Nepal, subsequently circumscribing the national goal of providing equal learning opportunities for all children irrespective of their linguistic, socio-economic, and territorial specificities. The main consequence of such trend is that the learning conditions continue to remain inequitable, not addressing diverse learning experiences and background of students.

The classroom-based negotiation between school policies and teachers/students' lived experiences through their engagement in pedagogical translanguaging activities is just an instance of how individuals at the micro-level exercise their agency to develop strategies to deal with language-related barriers for learning and teaching, which their institutions are less aware of, and questions some municipalities' blind promotion of the EMI or conferment of an absolute autonomy to schools for the choice of MOI.

Hence, this study yields some critical implications both at the theoretical and practical levels. Theoretically, the findings point to the need to develop the policies from the bottom up, informed by the evidence of what teachers and students do with the policy. As we can see, school policies are also appropriated rather than simply being reproduced in the classroom, echoing the findings from policy enactment literature (e.g., Ball et al., 2012; Choi, 2018). While the main discourse in language policy studies is to lament the ignorance of the grassroots actors for disregarding the threat of prioritising EMI (and other powerful languages) often blaming the influence of neo-imperialism, the deliberate choices made by the individuals and local government led the researchers to reconsider the goal of critical language policy researchers. That is, how to narrow the gap between the practical discourse that sways stakeholders and the critical discourse that the academics purchase, and is it a time to conceive a new discourse that incorporates the desires of the language policy stakeholders. At the practice level, the educators and policymakers both at the individual and institutional levels need to understand this matter and address the potential equity and identity concerns that can arise from the school-level official MOI policy, and learn from the transformative strength of translanguaging in transforming instructional and assessment systems. That is, schools can consider enlisting multilingualism as their official policy, and thereby encourage students and teachers to create more fluid and dynamic language practice to engage all students in classroom interactions comfortably. This will empower students from marginal linguistic backgrounds (Choi, 2017). Such policy will not deteriorate the proficiency in the targeted languages.

Claiming so does not mean that we are trying to establish translanguaging as a signature strategy. Rather, we try to theorize that where multilingual capabilities of students and teachers are available, then translanguaging emerges naturally, and this emergence potentially facilitates effective learning in the classroom. Numerous studies have shown that multiple languages can be learnt/taught, establishing an interrelationship between learners' existing language features and the features of new languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Levine, 2011; May, 2014). Utilization of bi/multilingual individuals' translanguaging instinct not only facilitates their comprehension of content but also improves their effective communication (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023), build rapport between student and teachers, and enhance student engagement (Choi & Leung, 2017). The micro-level agents' initiative, i.e., teachers and students adopting this strategy as a process of navigating through linguistic barriers in the classroom, may have already started the foundation to transform conventionally structured policies and practices (García & Li, 2014). We may later even be able to see translanguaging as an official, alternative pedagogical strategy (e.g., Lewis et al., 2012; Tai & Li, 2020; Sah & Li, 2020).

Given the limited data within the classroom context of the three cases, to translate our findings into broader language policy contexts, future studies may work to develop a holistic picture by incorporating the interaction between the school MOI policy and home language practice which this study provides a glimpse into, in a more systematic way. The findings also point out to the need for a deeper understanding of how the minority language identities of students are affected and negotiated, and to what extent the translanguaging pedagogy within the pro-EMI orientation leverages the learners' language repertoires and impacts their academic achievements. Further research might take these wider perspectives in understanding the impacts of enacted EMI institutional policy and the classroom-level practices of translanguaging on student learning.

Author statement

Tae-Hee Choi: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing; Supervision; Project administration, Prem Poudel: Formal analysis; Investigation; Data Curation; Writing - Original Draft; Writing - Review & Editing; Project administration; Funding acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

Appendix. Phase-by-phase analysis of multimodal language use in typical lessons

Phases and Activities		School (MOI; Community Languages) E: English, N: Nepali			Remarks
		A (E ; trilingual in E, Hindi, Bhojpuri)	B (N; monolingual in Maithili)	C (E; multilingual in Tharus etc.	
Start of the lesson	Teacher greeting pupils	E	N/E*	E	'Good morning class', 'good afternoon', 'Hello everyone', 'Hello class', etc.
	Student responses	E	N/E	E	'Good morning, sir/miss. Welcome to our class'. 'धन्यवाद सर' [Thank you sir]
	Teacher responses	E	N/E	E	'Thank you, class, sit down', 'Thank you, बस'.**
During the lesson	Language written on the board	E	N/E	E	This is the stage where School B start to use more Nepali (official MOI) than English, though the practice differed across subjects/teachers.
	Teacher explanation	E (rare N)	N/Maithili	E/N	Content difficulty invited multiple languages in the classroom. E.g., some teachers used students' community language such as Maithili in School B while clarifying the content.
	Peer interaction	N (frequent E & Bhojpuri)	Maithili (occasional N)	N (occasional E)	Students preferred to use their most familiar language in peer interaction, rather than the officially designated MOI
	Teacher-student interaction	E	N/Maithili	E/N	Only English-proficient students spoke in Schools A and C, while the rest remained silent.
	Teacher question	E (sometimes N)	N (sometimes Maithili)	E (sometimes N)	Teachers used Nepali or ethnic languages in repeated questions. e.g., Tell me the formula of $(a+b)^2$ भनत, ए प्लस बि को स्कुआर के हुन्छ?
	Teachers' language during pair/group work	E/N/Bhojpuri	N/Maithili	N/E	Teachers shifted language based on the nature of the group, and the nature of interaction needed.
	Teaching /Learning materials	E	N	E	In EMI schools, all textbooks were in English, except other language subjects (e.g., Nepali). All the classroom displays were in English.
Closure of the lesson	Lesson summary	E	N	E (sometimes N)	At School C, the teacher code switched, while in others, they adopted the official MOI. 'So आज हामीले नेवारी संस्कृति र् यसको महत्वको बारेमा पढ़ेउ, [Today, we studied about Newar culture and its importance], Tomorrow, we will study about ….' (*Social studies teacher in School C*)
	Giving out the assignment	E	N	E	All assignments written on the board were in the official MOI
	Explanation of the assignment	E	N/Maithili	E/N	School A used the official MOI, while the rest adopted translanguaging. आजको होमोवोर्क बुझयियो? 'तुसब होमवोर्क बुझलयि कि नै बुझलयि?' (Nepali & Maithili) [Did you all understand today's homework?]

* This kind of switch between languages within a sentence occurred in all three case schools.

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