

**Expansion and Growth of English as a Language of Instruction in Nepal's
School Education**

Towards Pre-Conflict Reproduction or Post-Conflict Transformation

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*Master's thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation – SVF-3901
June 2015*



ABSTRACT

Despite growing understanding and recognition of the need to offer education in the mother tongue or in a familiar language, there is a growing trend to adopt a foreign language (more particularly English) as a language of instruction in the name of gaining access to quality and prestige. In Nepal, language of instruction (English vs Nepali) has been one of the major factors that distinguish private schools from the state schools. In recent years, however, there is a new trend among government schools to switch to English as a language of instruction. In this context, the current study sought to critically examine the role of English as a language of instruction in Nepal's education and how it can affect the quality of teaching and learning.

This study is the result of a qualitative field research conducted in three cities in Nepal (viz. Kathmandu, Pokhara and Surkhet) in June 2014. The study includes the voices of practicing teachers that are supplemented by the researcher's observation notes and interactions with gatekeepers and local contacts. Drawing on from the theories of educational transformation as well as language and empowerment, the study aimed at finding out the classroom realities and how teaching/learning has been affected by the use of English as opposed to a familiar language (Nepali). Although Nepal's English medium schools have been able to secure good examination results for their students, the results of the study indicate that adoption of English as a language of instruction has not only limited students' creativity, but has also hindered implementation of student centered classroom teaching. Lack of teachers' proficiency and sub-standard text materials have further compounded the problem thereby seriously limiting classroom interaction, and dialogue. The conclusion of this study is that the current trend of growth of budget English medium schools and expansion of English as a language of instruction to government schools does not address the need to educational reform and end the two-tier inequality so as to contribute to a post-conflict transformation.

Key words: transformation, reproduction, quality, budget schools, government schools, education, and Nepal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of the cooperation of many people. The most valuable contributors to this work are the respondents- teachers from three different cities in Nepal. I would like to acknowledge the input from those teachers. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor Vidar Vambheim for his constant encouragement, understanding and feedback. I will never forget the insightful learning experience which is due to the course leaders, staff, and my fellow students at the Center for Peace Studies.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(I)NGO= (International) Non-Government Organization

CA= Constituent Assembly

CPA=Comprehensive Peace Accord

ELOI= English as a Language of Instruction

EMS=English Medium School

FGD=Focus Group Discussion

GON=Government of Nepal

LOI=Language of Instruction

NLOI =Nepali as a Language of instruction

NMS=Nepali Medium Schools

NNESP= Nepal National Education System Plan

SLC=School Leaving Certificate

SSRP=School Sector Reform Plan

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Nepal has undergone numerous political changes (See Hoftun et. al, 1999; Whelpton, 2005). Excepting the latest change resulting from a decade long war between the state and the Maoists, all of the earlier changes are credited to relatively peaceful popular political movements or royal coups (ibid.). While the latest war and the consequent street protest abolished the long standing monarchy in 2007, the protesting political forces along with Maoists- those led the armed struggle- made a political commitment in the form of Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) to end all forms of inequalities through a democratically elected Constituent Assembly (CA) (Bhatta, 2012). However, the first CA elected in 2009 failed to draft a constitution mainly due to the political competition and struggle for power between/among political parties. Consequently, the reelected CA in 2013 also has not been able to make a significant progress towards the mission of constitution drafting, owing to the lack of political consensus and competition for power. The political power struggle, thus, has shadowed other sectors of society, such as education, that have direct implication for empowerment, change and development (Pherali et al, 2011).

As Galtung (1991) argues, ensuring long-term peace is not only about ending the direct violence. It should address the root causes of conflict. The root causes of conflict, such as cultural and structural violence, are institutionalized not only in the political power structure, but also in different social institutions such as education, law, economy and so on. In the context of Nepal, the political changes and transformations so far have largely been limited to more frequent changes in political power (governments) without any significant improvements in the common people's lives. Ensuring post-conflict peace, therefore, is not only about ending the violence in the form of war and replacing one government by the other. It should, however, be about adopting transformative agenda for ending the cultural/structural violence inherent in all social institutions.

Although the institution of education has been understood as a powerful tool to continue dominance and repression (Bourdieu, 1990; Freire, 2000), initial peace and

conflict study took education sector merely as a victim of violence and war rather than having any causative effect to conflict and war. Nevertheless, since the turn of the century, there has been a growing understanding that it can also act as the casual factor for conflict (e.g. Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). Any post-conflict attempts to transform the society, therefore, needs to transform the educational practices so that they do not reproduce the social problems, structures and institutions that caused the conflict, but contribute towards social justice or an equitable society.

1.2. Modern Education in Nepal and Language of Instruction: A Reproductive Force

Since its introduction in 1853, Nepal's modern formal education has been a factor contributing to magnify the gap between the rulers and the ruled. While it started with a foreign curriculum, foreign teachers and English (foreign language) as a Language of Instruction (ELOI), access to this education was limited to the children of Rana rulers and elites (Sharma, 1990). Being influenced by the British India, the elite & rulers emphasized learning English and English proficiency got priority over Nepali language. The only university established during the Rana period adopted ELOI. As a result, those students educated in 'elite' English Medium Schools (EMS) stood out simply because of their fluency and proficiency over English (Whelpton, 2005). Despite Nepal not being directly colonized, the education system was influenced by the colonial power. Nepali rulers introduced the education implemented in a British colony (India). Evidently, the colonial powers implemented the education that would serve the interest of the colonial power (Brock-Utne, 2007; Watson, 2007) in the colonies. Due to emphasis given on proficiency over English, it became the marker of quality and success and an EMS served as a model for the commoners.

After the end of the Rana rule in 1951 and political transformation in the country, the transformation in education meant that there were more schools opened and gradually more people got access to education (Bhatta, 2008). This means there was quantitative growth in educational set-ups and student enrollment in the decades after 1951. As in many developing countries, education was considered a key element important for development (William, 2011). However, it was the continuation of same curriculum as introduced by the Ranas. As Wood (1964) highlights, although there was a growing demand for education on the general public and schools set up

all over the country, issues of educational goal setting, teacher development, Language of Instruction (LOI) etc. were all left behind due to competition for power among the political forces (ibid.). The Nepal National Education System Plan (NNESP) introduced in 1971 was an innovative attempt to shape Nepal's education with systematic statements of goals, objectives as well as attempts to bring about uniformity by making Nepali as a Language of Instruction (NLOI) in all schools. However, this plan could not be implemented as elites and high government officials did not want to send their children to Nepali Medium Schools (NMS) (Eagle, 2008; Whelpton, 2005). With continuation of EMSs for the children of those who can afford and NMSs for the children of the commoners, Nepal's two-tier system of education has continued till date.

The political change of 1990 saw the end to direct rule of the king and parliamentary democracy was introduced. The democratic government adopted liberal economic policy. As a result, private institutions even in the sectors that would offer basic services like health and education grew all over the country. EMSs (called Boarding Schools) and private hospitals (commonly called 'nursing homes') are no more limited to major cities. Although a number of elite EMSs have had exemplary infrastructure and have implemented modern (often following the western standard) curriculum adopting ELOI, the mushrooming private EMSs only follow ELOI. As a result, ELOI started to become the trademark of private schools in Nepal although majority of them do not have any better infrastructure compared to government NMSs (Caddel, 2007). Neither do they follow any innovative (or 'western') curriculum. These low-fees (budget) EMSs follow the government curriculum and often teach an English translation of government school textbooks.

In 1996, when the Maoist's initiated people's war, this discriminatory two-tier education system was blamed to be one of the causes for the social division, and also that they demanded all private EMSs to be closed down or nationalized (Caddel, 2007). Many schools and academic establishments became targets of conflicting forces (Davies, 2010; Caddel, 2007). This way, Nepal's modern education and two-tier education system has not only been the victim, but also a cause responsible for widening the gap in the society (Pherali, 2011). During Maoist War (1996-2007), private EMSs faced many threats and several were forced to shut down.

With the signing of CPA in 2007, there has been a relative peace in the country. As a result, private EMSs started to operate freely and their reach and extension since then has grown to remote areas as well. As these schools want to attract more students so as to ensure more profit, they focus on preparing students for the standard School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination that has been considered a major benchmark of quality education in Nepal.

The standard centralized SLC examination has been conducted in the similar format and norm since it was introduced in 1934 during the Rana period. Rather than measuring students' criticality and creativity, this exam dominantly demands students to write answers based on memory. This is evident from the close look at the collection of SLC question papers (Neema Publication, 2014) that most of the questions get repeated over years. In recent years, there is overwhelming success rate of private EMS students in SLC examination compared to that of government NMSs (Myrepublica Daily, 2014). As the success rate of government NMSs continues to decline compared to that of EMSs, there is a widespread criticism of government schools, more particularly, of the teachers of those schools that they fail to teach well. In this scenario where government NMSs and their teachers are blamed for offering 'poor quality' by not being able to ensure SLC examination success for majority students, in contrast to those private EMSs, government schools have had a sharp decline in the number of students in the last few years. This tendency has finally led the government schools to 'act' so that they can retain students. The way to 'act' for them has been to follow the private EMS model. Therefore, several government NMSs in the country have started adopting ELOI in the name of ensuring quality, and to retain the number of students. This trend is not due to the government level policy or direction at the top level, but due to the decision at local level (school management committee, head teachers or teachers).

1.3. Review of Research on Education and LOI in Nepal

In the last decade, there has been upsurge in the studies focusing on the decade long conflict in Nepal and its impact on education sector (Caddel, 2006, 2007; Pherali, 2011; Davies, 2010). Similarly, Carney & Bishta (2009), Carney (2003), Shields & Rappleye (2008b) have touched upon the issue of educational quality with

regards to equity and transformation of society. While the research interest has also grown into the area of LOI, more particularly in the context of mother tongue/multilingual education (e.g. Phyak, 2011; Taylor, 2010), I am not aware of any research that examines the quality of education as understood widely in Nepal's context. Several researchers (e.g. Thapa, 2012; Bhatta, 2008) take examination results, student enrollment and infrastructure as the measure of quality, but they do not challenge those conventional measures of quality.

As commonly observed in the educational context of many developing countries in Asia and Africa, teaching and learning of English has often been linked to economic prosperity, development and access to a rich body of knowledge available in English (Coleman, 2011). In Nepal's case, the goal for learning of English has been to gain access to a rich body of knowledge available in English (CDC, 2007). But, there is not any official policy or rational statement for ELOI. However, most EMSs claim the education they offer to be at an international level, competitive, modern and so on. On the other hand, the claim that English brings prosperity and development in the developing world has been questioned, and this rhetoric has been lacking concrete examples in its support (Hailemariam et al, 2011).

1.4. Review of Research on LOI Elsewhere

Like in Nepal, the spread of EMSs has made them accessible to urban working class and rural farming class families in northern India as Annamalai (2005) reports. As these schools have poor infrastructure and are affordable to lower income people as they charge a small amount of fee, they are also termed '*budget*' EMSs (Caddel, 2007). While this trend is taken as a desire to ensure upward social-economic mobility for the working class children, it has led to a focus on memorization at the expense of criticality, creativity and relevance to the problems being faced in the real life. In a similar study, Faust & Nagar (2001) show that developing proficiency in English contributes to upward social mobility by increasing chance to get employment. Contrastingly, they also show compellingly how that mobility has been achieved at the cost of alienation, loss of voice and self-expression (ibid: 2880). On the other hand, Annamalai (2005) links the problem to the lack of proficiency on the part of teachers because they cannot attract proficient teachers as they cannot offer them good salary. This lack of proficiency results into students' English that is considered

deviant and inferior to the standard nativized Indian variety that students learn in 'elite' EMSs. This deviation as he (ibid.) reports, has prevented the children of 'budget' EMSs schools from social status and economic benefits. Seth (1990 cited in Faust & Nagar, 2001:2882) sees the need to balance between the need to learn English for instrumental purposes, and also to offset its negative impact on the society and individual, and recommends a progressive language policy in Indian schools emphasizing "universal high quality training in English as a second language, while phasing out English medium education" (Fast & Nagar, 2001:2882).

Kyeyune (2003) presents a similar case of Uganda. Despite being an official language and LOI (even right from nursery level), students fail to gain communicative mastery over English where the sole aim is to pass the examination. This often results in lack of fluency in English. In the Ugandan context where there are several indigenous languages and none of them is dominant, or some may even lack developed literacy, it is tricky to find an alternative language that could serve as a LOI. Moreover, the multicultural nature of the classroom, where students come from diverse mother tongue background, makes it difficult to decide which language should serve as a LOI. The solution, therefore as Kyeyune (2003) recommends, is offering bilingual (mother tongue and English), and communication skills training to teachers, so that they can effectively initiate dialogue in the classrooms. In Nigerian multilingual context, which looks somewhat similar to Uganda, Wolf & Igboanusi (2006) make a case for continued use of English as a key to empowerment, since the complex multilingual background makes it difficult to decide the alternative to English. They see the possibility to inculcate criticality among students by using the nativized Nigerian variety of English, which is used in diverse social communications. While these cases are not enough to make a generalization, the use of English medium has been challenging. English has been a choice in absence of any other language that is shared by the society and students.

In Tanzania, there is a language other than English- Kiswahili- which is used extensively not only in the society, but also in the school premise outside the English medium classrooms (Brock-Utne, 2007). Brock-Utne (ibid.) reports the lack not only of creative understanding among students while taught in English, but also of general proficiency. However, her experiment of teaching students in Kiswahili results in

better understanding. English medium education in Tanzania therefore has not gone beyond the colonial legacy, where students are taught to memorize, or give answers the way the teacher wants. On the other hand, unlike the case of Nigeria and Uganda, as Tibategeza & du Plessis (2012) report, Tanzania has a common African language shared by students and teachers, which has been used in practice by successful teachers in the classroom. This means using a language that has wider usage in the society and that is also shared both by students and teachers, can result in better educational outcome.

Nepal's context is comparable to all the cases mentioned above. The difference is only that Nepal does not have a history of direct colonization, and also that Nepal has not established a nativized variety of English. Nepal's multilingual context is similar to most of the cases revisited and it is more comparable to Tanzanian context where there is a common familiar language. On the other hand, mother tongue education and multilingual education initiatives are a recent development and are at initial phase of implementation (Hough et. al., 2009). As the current study aims at examining teachers' reflections and experience of teaching and learning in different LOIs, and that none of them have had experience learning and teaching in any LOIs other than ELOI or NLOI, the current study focus on comparing and contrasting classroom realities between a *familiar*¹ language (Nepali) and a foreign language (English).

Looking at the cases discussed, the major problem in all those schools is the lack of efficient teachers, which becomes further problematic when they themselves lack sufficient mastery over the LOI. On the other hand, they lack the power and agency to critique, question, and supplement or replace the curriculum, and methodology

¹ Of the total 123 languages spoken in Nepal, Nepali is the mother tongue for 45% of the population whereas the second commonest language has only 12% speakers. Only 12 languages are spoken by more than 1% of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal, 2012). Nepali is the official language and is widely used in the media. It is not only the mother tongue for wider population, but also the commonest lingua franca. My use of the term *familiar* is borrowed from Brock-Utne (2007) who takes Swahili language to be familiar to the people of various language backgrounds in Tanzania.

prescribed to them. While giving access to quality English medium of instruction has been associated to upward social and economic mobility in some cases (for example in North India), we need further studies to see if it has been really so in other parts of the world. Common in all the cases is the lack of critical dialogue, which is at the heart of transformative education (Discussion of Transformative Education to follow in Chapter 4). Moreover, there is not any comparative study of the effects of learning English as a subject, vs. using it as a LOI in all the subjects.

1.5. Problem Statement

The discussion above identified two factors which have potentially affected the expansion for ELOI in Nepal. They are: i) SLC Result is attributed to school quality, ii) Students with EMS background are successful in SLC examination and, iii) the overwhelming success rate of private EMSs has led not only to their expansion and growth, but also has compelled Government NMSs to switch to ELOI. In the absence of clear instruction or policy from the top level, this trend has emerged from the bottom: from teachers, head teachers or parents. In this context, the main aim of the study is to identify teachers' opinions on the reasons to switch to ELOI, and how it would affect the overall quality of teaching and learning. In the context where ELOI has been taken as a model since the beginning of formal education (in 1934), the study also aims at discovering educational stakeholders' opinion on whether the increased access to ELOI would ensure social justice and equality, and would help to end the existing two-tier education system. Focusing on the perspectives of practicing teachers on their experience in using ELOI, as opposed to the more familiar NLOI, it will highlight on the potential role of ELOI in transforming or reproducing the long standing two-tier system, and the unequal educational output between private schools and public schools in the country.

While the interim constitution of Nepal from 2007 has recognized the value of mother tongue education, and made provision for the same at least at the primary level, the trend (expansion of EMSs and shifting of LOI to English) contradicts that provision. In this context it also aims at shading light on why schools, parents and even students prefer ELOI to Nepali or mother tongue education. Transformation of society and education requires critical examination of existing practices rather than simply adopting what we have inherited from the past. While the post conflict political

commitment aims at ending all forms of inequalities, the continuation of long standing education practices may turn counterproductive. As already discussed, ELOI is widely considered to be of quality, and many parents prefer to send their children to EMSs if they could. Problematizing this belief, and exploring the realities behind this belief, is necessary if education is to contribute to real transformation.

Understanding that teachers are a key to this transformation, the study mainly aims to unravel practicing teachers' understanding of quality of teaching/learning, and how they identify the role of English in enhancing that quality. Bringing practicing teachers' perspective and experiences with regard to teaching in English medium, compared to teaching in Nepali medium, it shows how the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom has been affected. While learning English as a subject is beyond question and not under the scope of current study, the study only aims at problematizing the use of ELOI in non-English speaking settings.

1.6. Research Questions

On the background set so far, the main aim of the study is to present a ground reality of Nepal's school education with regard to LOI. Moreover, it tries to identify causes behind the growth and expansion of EMSs in the country. The major aim of the study is to see if this trend contributes to transforming Nepal's education so as to ensure educational quality and equity.

To be able to answer the broad study goal, the following supplementary questions have been set, to which the study seeks to find answers.

- How do teachers compare their teaching/learning experience in NLOI to ELOI? (The question does *not* refer language teaching, but to medium of instruction *in other subjects than English and Nepali*.)
- How has the increased access to ELOI affected quality of classroom teaching/learning?
- How can this trend address the issue of unequal two-tier education system?
- Is the trend indicating transformation or reproduction of the unequal educational tradition in the country?

1.7. Putting Myself into the Study

The proposed study is the result of my own personal professional background in the education sector in Nepal. While I was educated in a state-run NMS as a student, my professional association as a teacher, educator and educational leader both in Nepali as well as EMSs offered me an opportunity to see for myself the teaching/learning activities going on in the classroom. While I had started my career as a teacher in the early 1990s, I also worked under the shadow of conflict during the ten years of bloodshed in the country. I myself became the victim of violence when my official residence as a principal of an EMS run by an international humanitarian organization was bombed. While I had always been curious on the issue of offering equitable quality education to all the children of the country regardless of their background, my experience teaching English and advocating ELOI led me to introspect whether ELOI was really linked to quality education.

I reflected on my own background as a student and what I have been doing as a teacher. I did not have the privilege to go to an EMS, as my family could not afford that. I knew a few of my neighbors who went to such schools in cities and I also sometimes dreamt of joining such schools. I was fascinated by the idea of being able to talk in English. After passing SLC, I decided to join Education College where I would specialize in teaching English. This would not only offer me the opportunity to learn and study in English, but also to become a teacher of English, teaching many other students in the country. After two years of intermediate education, I was qualified to be an English teacher and started my career as an English subject teacher. Later, I joined EMSs where I would not teach only English, but also other subjects such as Social Studies, in ELOI. However, I have never felt fully comfortable in teaching other subjects in English medium. My students would also find it difficult to learn. Teaching in EMS and using Nepali inside the classroom was often seen as a taboo. Often I would find it too difficult to explain and make students understand in English. On the other hand, despite the claim that many EMSs would adopt interactive learner centered teaching/learning activities, this was not a reality in most of the schools where I have taught since 1993.

However, it has been a fact that only very few students with EMS background would fail in SLC examination, whereas a large portion of government school students

would fail every year. As the trend continues even today, more government schools are concerned not only to ensure that more students pass the SLC examinations, but also to retain the minimum required student population in their school. This has now led ever more NMSs to switch over to ELOI. While many see this shift in LOI as a positive sign that it would result into more students passing the SLC examination, it is in contrast to my own experience as a teacher. My experience in teaching in NMS was evident to the fact that those classrooms were more lively and interactive than those in the EMS. Even then, there is a widespread welcome to ELOI in schools. Therefore, it is my personal interest to critically examine the issue of quality as attached to ELOI. With my own personal experience as a teacher, in addition to my attempt to bring classroom teachers experience and understanding of ELOI into the discussion, I want to question the quality of ELOI in Nepal.

1.8. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The next chapter substantiates the issues raised in this chapter, offering a glimpse over the educational reform being undertaken in Nepal in the light of its potential to improve quality and transform the measure of quality in school in Nepal. Chapter 3 outlines methodological procedures for the study and reflection on the use of methods discussed. Chapter 4 offers theoretical framework for the analysis. In the consequent chapter (Chapter 5), I present and analyze the results. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the key findings, followed by remarks and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2. EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND LOI

This chapter begins with the discussion on theories of reform and reconstruction that form the integral part of post-conflict reform and development. Then it gives a critical outlook to the Nepal's School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) to show how the LOI issue is very low in the agenda. In the following section, it goes on to the discussion of how LOI policy is linked to the issues of educational quality, empowerment, social justice and hence to the agenda of reform.

2.1. Post-Conflict Reform in Education

Bush & Saltarelli's (2000) seminal work highlighted that education can have two faces. The negative face contributes towards fuelling conflict whereas the positive face helps towards its mitigation. Novelli & Lopez Cardozo (2008) think that the role played by the educational actors, systems and processes can either mitigate or fuel conflict. A realistic reform policy recommendation therefore should address the complexities in the roles of educational actors, systems and processes through a critical analysis (ibid.). Therefore, they call for a critical research agenda in education. In doing so, they draw on from international relation theorist Robert Cox (1996), who categorizes development and reform theories into two types, viz. i) problem solving, and ii) critical. According to Cox (ibid.), a problem-solving approach looks at solving the particular urgent problem while accepting the established norm or status quo. It is focused towards offering workable solutions so that already established system functions smoother. A critical approach, on the other hand, tries to locate the problem and understand it within a larger whole, as a component and connected part of the whole. Rather than system maintenance bias, it allows for possibilities to imagining alternatives to the status quo.

As Freire (2000) claims no education is neutral. It either facilitates conformity to the existing system, or becomes the practice of freedom by dealing with the present from a critical and creative angle, so that people can transform their world. However, reform measures in post-conflict contexts generally turn to "restoring the pre-conflict equilibrium" (Davis, 2004:182). While education only, perhaps, cannot remove the root causes of conflict, it should at least offer a new direction in educational practices, so that it does not reproduce the same causes of conflict. However, countries with a recent history of conflict have to depend on international aid that comes from foreign

governments or (I)NGOs, in order to offer immediate relief to the people. While ideological reconstruction should come from within, the aid agencies tend to support normalization by rebuilding the destroyed system (Novelli & Lopez Cardozo, 2008). Moreover, those working in the reform and development field take a utilitarian approach to achieve problem solving, rather than going deeper into complex analytical processes. Therefore most of the reform projects running with external support fall under the problem solving approach. It is so also because bureaucracy and ministry authorities, which are still inherited in the past, prefer continuation of the past system to provide a sense of stability (Rappleye & Shields, 2008a).

Choosing an already established educational system as its base for reform demonstrates the verification of the belief in the value of ideas and respect for a social tradition of inequality (Mitchell, 1976: 170). The debate, therefore, lies in either to reconstruct (continue with) the pre-conflict system of education, offering a short-term solution, or to move ahead towards recreation. While a problem-solving approach can work in the short-term, the new situation should be taken as an opportunity to transform the past system which might itself have been the root cause of conflict. Although solving the immediate problems is necessary, the transition should also be taken as an opportunity to develop critical approaches. Moreover, problem-solving approaches should be informed by the critical approaches so that they pave the way for a transformative educational agenda (Novelli & Lopez Cardozo, 2008).

Now I turn to a brief review of the ongoing reform plan in Nepal's school level education that was introduced post-conflict.

2.2. Nepal's School Sector Reform Plan 2009: A Problem Solving Approach

As discussed above, reform measures should be informed by critical analysis. Critical analysis of educational practices in post-conflict setting should mainly consider the issues of access, equity, quality and curriculum. The Nepal government formulated and implemented School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) with the support from multilateral donor agencies and governments in 2009. On the surface, the plan goals (Government of Nepal (GON), 2009) indicate that the plan is taking a critical approach rather than a problem solving approach as the goals emphasize the issue

of access, equity, and quality. However, it does not envisage restructuring of school system, and also does not address the issues of contents, or the linguistic and pedagogic issues in schools. Neither does it cover the private EMSs that have become part and parcel of school education in Nepal. Similarly, the issue of curriculum is not touched upon. It means the plan is not informed by critical analysis of existing educational practices, which is acknowledged in the mid-term evaluation of SSRP that the achievements have been “fragmented and piecemeal” with regard to access and equity, whereas the quality issue is unaddressed, as there has been no monitoring of teaching and learning practices in the classroom (GON, 2012:XIII). While SSRP is being implemented, there have been an unprecedented decline in the number of students in government-aided schools and some schools are in the verge of closure (for example: Kantipur Daily news, 2015 January 16). The government is considering school merger and some schools are switching to ELOI in order to retain students. On the other hand, EMSs are mushrooming and attracting students who would otherwise join government schools. As long as SSRP or any reform plan does not address this issue, they are bound to failure.

The main shortcomings of the SSRP are that it takes a narrow concept of quality. Quality is viewed in terms of the scores in standard examinations. By focusing on ‘quality’ based on students’ cognitive achievement/product, education has ignored the fact that it should act as a vehicle to social justice and nation building (Carney, 2003). This tendency continues to dominate the debate on the quality of education even in the present context of political transition in the country. As Carney observes, this situation has contributed to “the prospect of respite from what they themselves view as oppressive social traditions and expectations” (Carney, 2003:97). Reliance on enrollment rates and pass-percentage in the SLC examination has also had a negative impact, since continuation of donor support for SSRP’s continuation partly depends on these criteria. For example, Pherali et. al. (2011:9) note the tendency to manipulate enrollment records in papers and cheating carried out in SLC examination on a systematic basis.

While the plan focuses on improving the examination results, more particularly results on the SLC examination, it does not aim at restructuring the examination

system itself. Moreover, the plan does not include private education institutions. Although there is a mention of LOI, it is limited to the primary level and in favor of mother tongue education. However, it is silent about ELOI that is prevalent in many EMSs right from nursery level. The plan fails to address the core division between private and government-aided schools, an issue that is mainly due to LOI. Without paying any attention to the aspects of measurement of student achievement and curriculum (GON, 2012), SSRP is thus detached from the issues of reform of/in the educational sector.

The following section highlights the need to critically analyze and take on board the LOI policy and practice. It also presents a rationale for addressing the LOI issue in a critical reform plan.

2.3. LOI in Schools: A Neglected Agenda

As rightly stated by Tollefson & Tsui (2009:292), the discussion of LOI is linked both to pedagogy and politics. While the pedagogic aspect relates to students subject learning, language learning and school performance, the political aspect concerns the shaping of relationships of power. From a pedagogic perspective, LOI affects the quality of teaching and learning and consequent achievement. Politically, it is “a key means of power (re) distribution and social (re) construction”. Therefore inclusion of LOI should be an “integral part of educational policy and efficacy” (Tsui & Tollefson, 2009:2).

As discussed in the earlier section, ELOI in Nepal was imposed by the Rana-rulers that were faithful to the colonial rulers in India. The goal was clear: The rulers wanted their children to learn English, so they would look different (so ‘superior’), join the elite of society, have access to power, wealth and status, and ultimately act as auxiliary to the colonizers (ibid.:3). Although the country has seen several political changes since then, the superiority associated with ELOI remains the same. While some can view expansion of ELOI as growing access to what was conventionally seen as a ‘luxury’ used by the upper or middle class elites, the new distinction between the ‘elite EMSs’ and the ‘budget’ EMSs means that educational facilities are still stratified as per the social stratifications. As Annamalai (2005) observes in

neighboring India, the expansion of English medium 'budget' private schools to suburban and rural areas can be linked to the desire of the poor and marginalized community to follow the middle class model, which in itself is a reproductive behavior rather than a transformative one.

There is yet another global force that links English to modernization, urbanization, employment and economic opportunities. While there is not any concrete evidence that English has been supportive of development or modernization (Hailemariam et.al., 2011), this rhetoric has been widely used to promote learning/teaching of English and in expansion of ELOI, particularly in the developing world (Coleman, 2011; Skinner & Holland, 1996; Rahman, 2007).

When Nepal's educational quality has conventionally been linked to students' success on standard SLC examination, overemphasis on examination results has neglected the quality of teaching and learning in classroom. In the name of improving 'quality', there have been many changes implemented in technical aspects of examination such as: emphasizing objective testing items over subjective items, changing percentile marking provision to grading scale, and so on. However, there is less attention paid to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, as admitted in the mid-term evaluation of SSRP (GON, 2012). Other than rewording in the curriculum and replacing some text-contents, there has not been any curricular innovation, although there was a serious attempt to do so in 1971. In recent decades, a lot has been invested in teacher training and development, but its impact has been minimal when the conventional examination result oriented teaching activities dominate teaching/learning.

As Carney (2003) observes, quality in Nepal is viewed in a narrow sense, which is also evident in objectives and implementation of SSRP. Therefore, there is a need to emphasize quality focusing on what happens inside the classroom. Skinner & Holland (1996) identify the need of education to help students to critically examine their condition, particularly in the context where there are long-standing social inequalities.

From a pedagogic perspective, there is a stark need for turning attention to classroom and to critically examine what happens inside the school, so as to measure quality. As long as students “are not able to understand and use the language to learn, to support each other and to be supported, then quality learning will not take place” (MacGuines, 1999 cited in Coyle, 2007:553). Similarly, Cenoz et. al (2013:256) contend that the language used in the classroom affects students motivation and self-esteem. This effect can be negative when language is not acquired fully and subject matter is novel/complex.

Adequate understanding of “the complex interplay of politics and pedagogy” contends Tsui & Tollefson (2009: 293), educational researchers need to “incorporate a classroom (and playground) perspective as well as broader social historical perspective”. Expanding use of ELOI in Nepal’s government schools may result in higher SLC success rate, and this may ultimately help to break down the divide between the two-tier education systems. However, it will not address the issue of quality (Pherali et. al. 2011:14), and also not improve classroom dynamics, as found necessary by Tsui & Tollefson (2009).

The present study attempts to take a classroom perspective and critical analysis of the teaching/learning activities. By looking at the quality of teaching/learning through the use of ELOI, this research aims at offering a new insight for transformation of school education in Nepal.

2.4. Summary

This chapter aimed at presenting an overview of post-conflict educational reform practices, and how they contribute towards maintaining status quo. It also revisited the ongoing SSRP in Nepal. Evidently, the LOI issue has not been addressed in the SSRP. Then it went on to discuss the need to address the LOI issue, how LOI relates to the process of learning, and why a more constructive reform plan has to take this issue into consideration. The next chapter will present the methodological framework for the study before I return to the theoretical issues concerning language and education as well as language and empowerment in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological outline for the study. It starts with the background of the study area along-with the methods used to gain data and selection of the informants. Then, I present the process of data collection. Finally, I present my own role as researcher, and how it could have influenced the process and outcome of the fieldwork.

3.1. Study Field

After determining the focus for study and the methods for data collection (which I will discuss later), I had to decide the location for my study. Three cities of Nepal viz. Kathmandu, Pokhara and Surkhet were chosen as the study area. Kathmandu is the capital city and has been a center of administration and economy of the country since the establishment of modern Nepal. Pokhara is located in a valley in western Nepal. Due to the easy access to Kathmandu, this city has also grown as a center of tourism and education. Surkhet, on the other hand lies in the Mid-Western Nepal, which is been the area most influenced by a decade long civil war. While Kathmandu saw the first EMS in the country, Pokhara was the first city to see the establishment of EMS outside the capital. Surkhet, on the other hand, is representative of the growth and expansion of EMSs in the recent years, more particularly after the political change of 1990.

Due to extreme centralization of administration and services, Kathmandu has been the center of attraction for people looking for higher education or employment. While it is home to a majority of the well to do, it is also where destitute villagers migrate to (Pigg, 1992). Kathmandu has more private schools (1200) than public schools (300) (The Kathmandu Post, 2014 March). In Kathmandu, there are several elite EMSs. It is also where we can find budget EMS in the nooks and corners of streets. Most of these private schools run in rented properties (most of them are buildings built for residential purpose) and do not have sufficient playgrounds or facilities of library or laboratory.

Pokhara is also known as the second capital city of Nepal. A valley in the western hills, Pokhara was the first city to experience expansion and growth of EMSs out of Kathmandu. Surkhet is also a valley in mid-west Nepal. This part of the country was

most affected by a decade long war. Surkhet is an example of a newly urbanized city that saw the establishment and expansion of private EMSs post 1990. Other than elite or budget EMSs and government aided NMSs, there are some EMSs in all these cities that are run by international organizations or missions.

3.2. Selection of Fieldwork Technique

Improvement of educational practice can be aided with the help of research that facilitates “reflection, criticism and more informed view of the educational process” (Hitchcock & Huges, 1993:12). One of the major goals of the current research being reflection, it takes on board the perception and experience of classroom teachers and their critical evaluation of the educational practice of which they are the most influential elements. Bidya Nath Koirala, a renowned Nepalese professor of education, highlights the need to turn to teachers for enhancing quality and improvement (BBC Nepali Service, 2014), as they have been important forces in political mobilization and political change in the country. This way, there has been a lot of discussion in the research literature on “the shift of focus to classrooms, staffrooms and office of the schools” (Hitchcock & Huges, 1995: 25). In terms of methodology of research, this shift has been marked by the use of qualitative research tools in education (ibid.).

Most of the previous studies that address the issue of quality and equity in education in Nepal have focused at analyzing policy, thereby bringing a macro level expert perspective (For example, Carney, 2003; Carney et. al, 2007; Shields & Rappleye, 2008a; Pherali et. al, 2011). There are also a few studies that are based on quantitative data analysis (Watkins et. al, 1991). While some studies focusing on the impact of war on Nepal’s education (e.g. Pherali, 2011, Caddel, 2006) have highlighted the perspective from the practicing teachers and grass-root stakeholders, the research literature concerning the issue of educational quality and transformation lacks the perspectives and voices of teachers.

The current study also aims at identifying teachers’ perspective on the recent change/phenomenon that has taken place in the name of enhancing quality. As Vaughn et. al (1996:24) notes, understanding an educational issue from everyday

knowledge and perception of specific respondent groups is best carried out through a phenomenological approach as it offers greater depth and insight.

In the sub-section to follow, I discuss the methods used to collect data followed by the fieldwork issues of access, informant selection and implementation of methods proposed.

3.3. Selection of Data Collection Techniques: A Multi-Method Approach

Perceptions and reflection are a complex phenomenon. Identification and analysis of such complex phenomenon requires complex and diverse methodological perspectives. Therefore, qualitative studies aimed at understanding such complex phenomenon rely on triangulation. Miles and Huberman (1994) present 5 different ways of triangulation. The current study uses multiple data sources - practicing teachers, educational officials, and head teachers- and multiple methods -Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Informal meetings with individuals (head teachers, educational officials) and observation notes taken during the fieldwork. While the multiple methods and sources used to data collection were not necessarily meant to confirm or reject the result from each other, they were meant to offer a more comprehensive view into the LOI practice and its impact (Meijer et. al, 2002). In the following section, we will discuss how those methods were designed and implemented in the field.

3.3.1. Focus Group Discussion

While selecting method, it is important that the methods selected are directly relevant to the goal of the study. As already stated, the current research takes a phenomenological approach, where the goal is to understand the existing trend from everyday knowledge of those directly involved. To gain perspective and reflection of practicing teachers, it would require interaction with the teachers. The qualitative research literature describes personal in-depth interviews, group interviews or focus group interviews as methods when perceptions, experiences and beliefs are to be analyzed (Bryman, 2012; Vaughn et. al.: 1996). According to Stewart & Shamdasani (2014:42), focus groups are useful in explanatory research (for example, in designing and identifying alternatives for survey research) or testing hypothesis. Similarly, they can also be used as a confirmatory tool. Lederman (1990:118) summarizes five key

assumptions a focus group interview rests on as: 1) people are the valuable source of the information, including information about themselves, 2) people can report about themselves and they can articulate their own feelings and experiences, 3) people need help in 'mining' the information 4) group dynamics can be used to surface genuine information, and 5) the interview of the group is superior to the interview of an individual. While these assumptions are not unique to focus groups only, the assumption that it creates group dynamics that can foster honesty rather than socially desirable response (ibid.) makes focus group technique more advantageous. Moreover, a group provides synergy resulting in more than the sum of what individuals could create. Similarly, focus groups also offer rich data in a short period of time.

Gilflores & Alonso (1995) use focus group technique to explore teachers' perspectives on an educational change in Spanish context. Lederman (2009) exploits focus group technique to measure effectiveness of educational programs. The focus group method, that was relatively underused method in educational research until a couple of decades ago (Gilflores & Alonso, 1995), is now being increasingly exploited by educational researchers in exploratory research to identify perspectives, perceptions and experiences of practicing teachers (Lederman, 1990).

While the current study uses focus group interview as a major technique for data collection, it is supplemented by classroom observations, and interactions with head teachers, educational officials and teacher educators. As the classroom observation and interactions prior to FGDs helped the researcher to find prompts for the FGDs, they also offered supplementary data.

3.3.1.1. Field Visit and Informant Recruitment

While the commonest way of selecting participants for focus group interviewing has been convenient sampling, Stewart & Shamdasini (2014:60) emphasize the need for the group to be representative of a larger population. The current study was conducted in three different places and the sample included teachers teaching at different levels and teaching different subjects. Despite my attempt to gain gender balance in the sample, the number of female participants was lower than the males, and one of the groups did not have a single female informant. Relying on convenient

sampling as discussed by Hesse-Biber & Levy (2011), those who were available, have experience and knowledge of the setting and willing to serve as the informant were recruited. Considering the topic of research, the criteria for the informants to be contacted for recruitment were set as;

- i) The informants should be teachers who have experience in teaching in both Nepali as well as in English medium.
or
Teachers who, although they did not have experience in teaching in two different LOI, have had experience of learning (as a student) in a LOI different from the LOI they use as teachers.
- ii) They have teaching experience of minimum of five years.

A FGD is conducted around an issue/issues that all the participants have experience on, so that the participants can engage in a dynamic and extended discussion. As suggested by Vaughn et. al. (1996:56), it is very important that appropriate informants are selected so that the accuracy and usefulness of the information is ensured. Participants in a focus group should be selected “because they have something in common with each other and something in which the researcher is interested in” (Parker & Treeter,2006: 24). While researchers recommend a focus group to be homogenous, Gilflores & Lorenzo (1995:89) recommend some heterogeneity so as not to produce a redundant discussion. Wilson (1997:216) reflects his own experience conducting focus group interview in education and finds that the ideal size for focus group is between 6-8 participants, while groups of 12 or more offered least useful data. For the purpose of this study 3 focus groups with participants between 8 and 10 was planned.

I relied on my personal contacts (education officers, teacher educators) and acquaintances to access the gatekeepers (head teachers) and ultimately gate access to schools and potential informants. While gatekeepers would be approached for permission to visit the school and classrooms as well for access to teachers, they had no control over individual teachers’ decision to serve at the informant or not. In the section to follow, I describe how the focus group interviews were planned and implemented.

3.3.1.2. Interview Guide

An interview guide is necessary for focus group interview to provide direction for the discussion, but not to get objective answers (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014: 68/69). Morgan (1996) considers the focus groups to be “self-managed groups” where the researcher/moderator has the role of introducing the topic, and when the group seems to deviate or run out of ideas, reminding or introducing a new topic (Lichtman, 2010:153). Lederman (1990) offers a more concrete framework for a focus group guide. The guide for the current study was developed summarizing the issues to be discussed. Although not rigid and restrictive, it included the sequential agenda and plan for the topics to be covered. I drew on and followed on from Lederman’s suggestion on how to make an interview guide which included:

- (1) an introduction which provides the purpose, ground rules and parameters;
- (2) an ice breaker or warm up set of questions;
- (3) a series of questions designed to elicit all of the necessary information on the issues to be addressed;
- and (4) a summary or closing section (Lederman, 1990:122).

The first focus group was taken as a pilot that helped me to refine the guide and conduct the focus group more effectively.

3.3.1.3. Piloting Focus Group

It is not only the appropriate size of focus group that yields useful and accurate data; it is also the appropriate respondents. It is however difficult to identify appropriate respondents. Therefore, it was necessary and useful to carry out the first focus group interview as a pilot (Vaughn et. al, 1996).

Accordingly, the first (pilot) focus group was conducted among the teachers of an EMS in Pokhara. Although the teachers did not have experience in teaching two different mediums of instruction, all the participants have had NMS background. So they were able to link their learning experience to their current experience of teaching. After the focus group interview that lasted an hour, participants were asked for feedback. The moderator/researcher’s reflection on the process of the focus group also offered useful insights on technical as well as organizational aspects concerning the recruitment and conduction of focus groups. On the basis of reflection

and feedback, I was able to get following insights that I took on board the following FGDs.

- 1) The recording equipment was not effective, so I bought a new effective recorder.
- 2) As the discussion would mainly be based on classroom teaching, the moderator did not have concrete prompts (evidence from classroom). As a result, there were moments when the discussion would stop. The moderator would be prepared to fill up with prompts and evidences so as to make sure the discussion does not break. So I decided to visit schools, talk to teachers, and observe their lessons that would both complement the data and also provide prompts.
- 3) Some teachers found it little bit uneasy to express themselves freely because there was a member of senior management team (who volunteered to participate as a teacher) present in the discussion. It was important that the participants felt safe, so I decided not to include Department Heads or members of senior management team in the following discussions.

Moreover, it was also an opportunity to reflect my own role as a moderator. Realizing that I needed to find something to fill the gap when the discussion breaks, I took some enlarged copies of text materials that I thought would be challenging due to the complex language used. Also, I realized the need to interrupt the discussion so as to reorient it to the focus of the discussion.

3.3.1.4. The FGDs

In each city where I conducted the focus group, I spent a week. First, I came in touch with head-teachers of 5-6 schools through my personal acquaintance or through my contacts (most of them were English teachers) and got permission for the visits. While the major aim of school visits was to recruit informants for the focus group interview, I also used the opportunity to observe classroom/playground activities and to have informal interactions with head-teachers.

My week's work started on Sundays (Sunday is the first day of the week in Nepal). In each city, I spent first 5 days (Sunday to Thursday) to visit schools and find teachers who volunteered to be observed briefly (10-15 minutes) during their classroom

teaching. These teachers were also among those recruited for FGD, which took place on Friday afternoons. As my plan, I recruited 10 participants in each focus group. However, not all the teachers that volunteered to be observed or agreed to take part turned up for the FGDs. In one of the cities, only six participants turned up. The other groups had nine and ten members respectively. The FGDs lasted from one to two hours.

Along with the FGDs that were recorded, I also collected notes of my observation and made report of the informal discussions that took place during my fieldwork.

3.3.2. Observation Notes

While FGDs served as the main method for data collection, I used my field visit to observe and note down the relationship behaviors and situation faced both by the teachers and learners. My observation was in the form of field notes that served as nonjudgmental descriptions of what was observed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:98). While I also took notes of participant non-verbal behavior during the FGDs, I carried out non-participant observation of classrooms and school premises. These observations serve to complement the data collected from the FGDs.

3.3.3. Gatekeeper/Contact Person Communication

While the main focus of the field visits was to recruit the informants for FGDs, I relied on contact persons and gatekeepers for accessing the potential informants. As all of my contacts were either teacher trainers or education officials, they were also someone familiar to the issue under discussion. The gatekeepers (head teachers) were also those knowledgeable on the issue. While it was not my plan to interview or collect their opinion on the issue, my contact with them resulted on their reaction or opinion on the subject under study. With their approval and consent, I have used what they had to say as supplementation to focus group data. While all those contacts were postgraduate in English education, two of them are university teachers cum teacher trainers (Pokhara and Surkhet) and one-education ministry official (Kathmandu). As all these three people were present during the FGDs in respective cities and helped me with logistics, I would ask their comments post FGDs. I asked for their consent to use their comment as data for my study that they happily agreed.

3.4. Reflections from the Fieldwork

It is not possible or even necessary, to do away with the researcher's role. It is natural that the ideas, interpretation and plan are filtered through the eyes, mind and point of view of the researcher. Therefore the role of the researcher is critical (Litchman, 2010:140). There has been a lot of theory on the role of the researcher in the field of qualitative research, especially when the study involves observation, field research or ethnography (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Griffith, 1998; Mercer, 2007). The membership role of the researcher does not only influence the access, recruitment and the type of data, it has also impact on the way data is analyzed (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The issues of personal bias, research ethics and safety are also linked to the background and role of the researcher. Therefore, I feel it important to reflect upon how my membership role helped or posed challenges in collecting the data.

3.4.1. Insider/Outsider: Dual Identity

An insider researcher shares identity, language and experiential base (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) with the participants. As discussed in the first chapter of this study, my interest on the subject being studied grew out of my own long experience working as a teacher in both EMS as well as NMS settings. Having educated in the education system, which has essentially remained the same since I graduated and also having had experience teaching in the cities where I collected data from, I could be identified much closer to the insider end along the scale on an insider/outsider continuum. Similarly, I share the similar linguistic as well as cultural background as many of the teachers. Moreover, I could exploit the network of my former colleagues and acquaintances in the respective cities to contact and recruit my informants. This way my insider identity put me in a comfortable position to be able to convince teachers to be the respondents.

However, my insider identity also posed challenges to me. As had worked in an EMS run by an international humanitarian organization in the past and having lived in Europe for some years, some people thought that I was doing fieldwork as a highly paid employee of some international organization. Although I could convince them of my real purpose that I was carrying out an independent study as part of my study, I had to work harder than I expected. As Sikes (2006) observes, insider researchers in

the setting of developing world can also be seen as someone who have certain responsibilities and power. As someone educated in a western university, I was considered an outsider to the community of informants (teachers) at times. This power relationship was obvious when some teachers said in informal conversations to me that I was able to get out of the vicious cycle of the teaching profession and that my research would give me a good European degree. Some of them even said that they would happily cooperate to my research work although this would in fact mean nothing to change the educational practice and policy.

As Hamid (2010) rightly puts it, the insider/outsider identity is more complex than it is assumed. Although I claim myself to be an insider, as I could draw on from the local social knowledge and cultural norms and behave appropriately in the society and culture of the participants, my identity of a researcher from a western university put me in an outsider position. Subedi (2006) refers to the academic superiority associated with western education and exhibits how local researchers with western university background that have resided out of country for some years are viewed as different from the locals because of the use of body language, and way of presentation. I was also viewed as a researcher with 'power and privilege' in contrast to those 'underprivileged' locals as evident in one of the remarks; "Sir, you speak very good English, you have seen the world and are now an international person, not a 'frog in the pond' like us."² My insider identity was this way challenged and I was seen as someone who is no longer a teacher but someone that has risen from his position of a teacher to someone 'that could go abroad work and study'.

3.4.2. Language Issues

During the FGDs, the language of discussion was mostly Nepali. In some occasions, informants mixed code between Nepali and English. In each FGD, I asked them whether they would prefer the language of discussion to be Nepali or English. As a moderator, I used Nepali to introduce the study and its objectives. As I preferred to use Nepali in place of English, the informants also stuck with Nepali. As a familiar language for all the participants, Nepali was used through most of the FGDs. For the purpose of data presentation, I have translated the remarks into English. I showed

² Participant 5, Surkhet

my initial translation to a professional translator who made a few corrections to ensure that my translation was not distorting the meaning.

3.5. Summary

This chapter presented the methodological framework- study area, tools, techniques used for the research. It also presented the reflections from the field in terms of challenges and opportunities more particularly how the researchers background has had affected gaining the field data.

CHAPTER 4. THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

This chapter is aimed at presenting the theoretical basis for the analysis of the data in the section to follow. To present the basis, this looks into the theoretical orientations advocated by different scholars relating to the transformative education, and how language can possibly play an instrumental role in doing so. In the subsections to follow, it presents how the notion of quality is viewed in both reproductive as well as transformative sense. Next, there is a discussion of how selection of LOI in education can have empowering or subjugating effect.

4.1. Reproductive vs. Transformative Education

According to Freire (2000), a reproductive education takes the form of a 'banking model' of education where students are presented a model of 'healthy society' that they have to integrate or incorporate into. Controlling thinking and action, he (ibid: 77) argues that this form of education leads to adjustment to the existing order while inhibiting their creative power. To enhance creativity and criticality, which results in the "power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (ibid: 83), he proposes a form of education based on problem posing and dialogue. Critical dialogue, therefore, is at the heart of education if it has to empower the students so that they understand the relationship between themselves and their immediate world.

Nepal is characterized by political instability even after successful people's struggles. It is now established that democratic stability depends on ending the inequalities at economic, racial and gender levels, and if we want to secure a better society for generations we need to provide children with skills, knowledge and authority (Hayati, 2010). Doing so is possible only when the elements of "critique, dialogue, empowerment and transformation" are included into a critical and emancipatory educational pedagogy (ibid: 80).

From a Freirean perspective, the expansion of ELOI in Nepal might be a hindrance for both the teachers and students to take part in meaningful critical dialogue. While Freire advocates giving voice to the voiceless (passive receivers) so that they can take part in meaningful and critical dialogue, the growing practice in Nepalese schools to use English even in primary schools might act towards silencing the

students. This means using a foreign language as a LOI qualifies an educational practice to be attracted to the category of a reproductive social force.

Similarly, Giroux (1997) also sees the existing neoliberal practices to be against democratic values. In this practice, schools are isolated from their immediate society and lack the link between what students learn in the classroom and the environment they function outside the classroom. This way schools fail “to engage the politics of voice and representation-the forms of narrative and dialogue-around which students make sense of their lives and schools” (Giroux, 1997:120). Therefore, he calls for schools to be taken as sites of possibility or the “places where students can be educated to take their places in society from a position of empowerment rather than from the position of ideological and economic subordination” (ibid.).

While Freire (2000) sees the major problem to be the lack of authenticity in education, a mechanistic transmitter role of teacher, and passive recipient role of the students, Giroux (1997) elaborates on how wider forms of political, social, economic and ideological domination and subordination are “invested in the language, texts, and the social practices in the schools as well as in the experiences of the teachers and students themselves” (ibid: 130). Touching upon the issue of language, he shows the senselessness of the languages used in schools, which are responsible for actively silencing the students. Moreover, teachers teaching in a language other than their familiar language most often lack appropriate form and command of language that would transfer into critical understanding. On the other hand, this practice neglects the value of language that students use outside the classroom, playground and their community. Using a language other than a familiar language acts as transmitting information, and carrying formulaic conversation.

Drawing on Freire’s concept of transformative pedagogy and Bakhtin’s concept of voice, Giroux (1997) presents a model of emancipatory pedagogy where the goal is to take the notions of struggle, student voice and critical dialogue. Critical pedagogy has to begin with a dialectical celebration of the languages of critique and possibility. Critique here refers to questioning the dominant culture as represented in the textbooks and curriculum, whereas possibility refers to what is necessary and

possible to change. The most important element at work to construct the experience and subjectivity (agency), Giroux (1997:134) adds,

“is language: language intersects with power just as particular linguistic forms structure and legitimate ideologies of specific groups. Language is intimately related to power, and it constitutes the way that teachers and students define, mediate, and understand their relation to each other and the larger society”.

Promotion of dialogue as the condition of social action is the demand of transformative practice. In traditional educational settings, students' voices that question or are in conflict with the voice of the authority (including teacher) are taken as disruptive behaviors or often in Nepal's case as discipline problem. Using unfamiliar language in the class, both the teacher and the students lack their voice. While most of the teachers have linguistic deficiency to question, critique and even skills to modify or supplement the package handed over to them, as shown in a study by Kyeyune (2010) in Ugandan context, students are silenced and forced to memorize and accept whatever is passed on to them. This is where the teachers lack the voice of themselves; they are far from mediating the voices of students in their classroom.

In the context where there is a long history of subjugation and oppression, the reproduction of social order is taken for granted. Therefore, even those oppressed are involved in “reproducing the social order without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so” (Mills, 2008:84). The choice and demand for EMSs in Nepal's context can be linked to this lack of awareness among parents and even among teachers, who are simply implementing the materials available to them.

As authority in the classroom, teachers have potential to transform the learning opportunities for students so that they can impart skills to the students to become “critical actors and social agents” (Giroux, 1997). A teacher “being critical encourages the educator to examine education as an interactive process between the present and the future of his society. And, being closest to the grassroots, he is a practical think tank who guides others including policy makers, textbook writers, examiners, and students” (Dheram, 2007:5). However, this potentiality can be impeded when the language of instruction is not familiar to the teachers. In a country where there is lack

of proficient English subject teachers, assuming that all the subject teachers can exploit a tool of foreign language to enhance critical dialogue in the classroom and wider stakeholder community, can be an unrealistic demand.

Conventional education- and more particularly neoliberal trend of education, claims Van Heertum (2010:215) “plays a critical role in spreading cynicism, reinforcing hegemonic ideals, reproducing current power relations and cutting off the channels for resistance and dissent.” Neoliberal form of education that is prevalent in the modern times is extricating political from education, thereby redefining its goals in purely instrumental, economic terms (ibid.216). He offers three ways to tackle the cynicism: i) by opening student’s minds to the surrounding world and ways to change it, ii) providing empowering civic education and inspiration for political engagement, and iii) providing them with critical multiple literacy. Use of a foreign language as LOI can thus be linked to reinforcement of hegemonic ideas. Similarly, a strong link can be made between the ways Van Heertum (ibid.) recommends and the use of language. While the content and material mediated by a foreign language can bring elements irrelevant to the context, it may also prevent students from being critical in their academic practice.

4.2. Languages and Empowerment

Bakhtin (1983) sees language to be directly linked to the idea of voice. Rather than simply presenting ‘information’, schools are to be taken as places where forms and norms of meaning are imposed, or constructed with mediation of language.

Language is used both to instruct and to produce subjectivities. Privileging one language or the other thus is directly linked to empowering students/teachers with voice or silencing them. Using a language where both the teacher and the students lack proficient communicative mastery, expansion of ELOI can thus lead to rejecting the students’ voices.

Bourdieu (1990) uses the term *magisterial language* to refer to the language used by teacher to distance himself from the students. “Language can ultimately cease to be an instrument of communication and serve instead as an instrument of incantation whose principal function is to attest and impose the pedagogic authority of the communication and content communicated” (ibid: 110), which ultimately leads to

communication failure by building a relationship of complicity and misunderstanding. In traditional educational practice the blame for this misunderstanding is transferred to students despite the fact that the use of language itself is alienating to them. Students, on the other hand, are left with the choices of “duplication or acceptance of exclusion” (ibid. 199).

For Foucault (1980), subjugating the knowledge and culture represented and negotiated by the language used in the surrounding, choice of another language in schools systematically signifies the inadequacy and disqualification of the former. If we have to empower societies, he sees the need for those subjugated knowledges to be reemerged through criticism. Without criticism the modes of thoughts presented can go unchallenged and unconsidered. Children should therefore be allowed to share their experiences and conversations and listen to others so as to renew and build their understanding (Jardine, 2005). Use of an unfamiliar language this way qualifies to further subjugation of local knowledges.

4.3. English Medium Education in non-English World: Opportunity or Threat?

As discussed above, using a language unfamiliar to the students can have negative consequences and may lack transformative potential. However, the discussion above should not be understood as an opposition to learning a foreign language at all. It is true in the age of globalization that the demand and need for learning English has been linked to economic and intellectual upward mobility (Faust & Nagar, 2001). At the same time, it has also been linked to cultural and emotional disempowerment in many countries (Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 2004). Moreover, it has also been blamed to be responsible for linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) and imperialism (Philippon, 2009). Despite different charges against the global spread of English, there seems a general understanding on the ‘lingua franca’ value of English and that a language needs to serve the purpose of wider international communication. As English has already been a language of wider communication, learning this language definitely has positive consequences (Freidrich, 2007). However, we need to make a distinction between learning a language and learning to be critical or creative using a language. When English is used to learn the subjects other than English in schools, we need to examine the rationale behind such use. If

learning English is the goal, we should ask if this learning is being done at the cost of students' poor mastery over the content areas.

Although Nepal's history of EMS begins with the history of modern education, it was limited to the elite rulers and upper middle class families (Giri, 2010). However, the mushrooming and access of such education to the wider population, including working and farming class people, has been relatively a new phenomenon in Nepal. Globally there are several other countries where English has been used as a LOI for a long time despite it being unfamiliar to the people. Most of those countries have a history of colonialism where education was imported from colonial powers. The goal in those contexts was not to impart criticality, but to prepare clerks and interpreters that serve the interests of the colonial power (Brock-Utne, 2007; Watson, 2007). As Watson (2007) reports, most of these countries' education, even today, resembles the system left behind by the colonial powers. Although English is a means of official communication and have even been nativized as Indian variety, Nigerian variety or Singaporean variety, the debate concerning the use of English as a medium of education, is ongoing and in most cases there are more challenges than opportunities reported.

4.4. Summary

This chapter presented theories concerning education and transformation and also linked LOI issue to the agenda of transformation. Identifying some characteristic features of a reproductive trend in education, it offered an analytical guide to examine the educational practice. Additionally, it showed how language is intricately related to the concept of empowerment and voice and linked it to education. It also briefly revisited how spread of English is viewed by the researchers, and highlighted the need to learn English (language) which is not same as learning in English.

CHAPTER 5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on presenting the data collected from the fieldwork through FGDs. Observation notes and data from informal discussions also complement the data from FGDs. The chapter first presents the background of the participants of FGDs in terms of their education, experience and schooling background. Then, it taps on the informants’ reflections, opinions and perceptions concerning how the LOI has affected their learning as well as teaching. Moreover, it seeks to identify the factors that have guided the choice of LOI and its effect on classroom teaching and learning activities. With the realization that teachers have a potential to influencing society (Dheram, 2007), this chapter presents the perception of teachers (informants) on the potential of ELOI to transform or reproduce the school education.

5.1. Informant Background

Interpretations of the findings from a FGD are directly linked to a thorough description of the informants (Vaughn et. al, 1996:99). While the procedure for subject selection, including their recruitment and sampling were discussed in the methodology section, I present the background of the informants in terms of their educational level, experience as teacher and whether they have had experience learning in English or Nepali medium as students. The interpretation of what they express during the FGD cannot be taken independently of their personal history and background.

The FGDs were planned and conducted in such a way that the first part included introduction of the participants where they would introduce themselves and give vital information on their educational level, years of experience as a teacher (either in English or a Nepali medium school), and their own high-school background (either they attended a government Nepali medium or an EMS) and the subject they teach. On that basis I present the informants’ background in the following table. It is inclusive of the multiple focus group participants.

Categories	Number (total 25)
1. Gender	
Male	18
Female	7

2. Educational Level		
Bachelor	14	
Masters	10	
Doctorate	1	
3. Years of Teaching Experience	Below 5 years	over 5 years
Nepali Medium	3	6
English medium	11	5
4. Background as student		
Nepali medium	15	
English medium	4	
Both (part Nepali/part English)	6	

Other than the FGDs, I have had opportunity to speak to head teachers, officer of the ministry of education (in Kathmandu) and university teachers at the Faculty of Education (Pokhara and Surkhet).

Prejudice and pre-conception on the part of the researchers and analysis of their own practice- teaching learning activities in this context- can be an obstacle to objectivity and lead to bias (Wellington, 1996; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). While I, as a researcher, do not claim that the interpretation of the data are free from my personal bias and also that I might be influenced by my own experience as a teacher, I have tried to put my personal subjectivity in order to observe and reflect on the process in FGD itself. Moreover, the focus group data is supplemented by my observation of classrooms and school premises, individual interaction school principals, experts and educational officials.

When it comes to what happens in the classroom and how effective the classroom teaching learning has been, teachers are those who are directly involved in the classroom activities with the students. The main objectives of the present study is to identify teachers' reflection and experience on how LOI has affected their classroom teaching and how they would compare teaching in ELOI to NLOI. In doing so, they have reflected not only to their experience as a teacher, but also recalled on their experience as students.

I have categorized the FGD data into different themes as I found them recurring during the discussions as relevant to the objectives of the study. I have used an intuitive approach following Smaling (1987 cited in Meijer et. al, 2002:146) to relate data collected from FGD, observation and informational talks. The major aim of using observation and information talk data is to complement the FGD data. In the sections to come, I present the data as classified under different themes.

5.2. Teachers' Own Learning Experience

In this sub-section, I present the learning experience of the informants and how they compare this to their current position and the learning situation of their students at the moment.

5.2.1. Effort and Investment

One of the themes that emerged through the discussion was that the participants have realized some difference on the efforts and investment they used to make as students, compared to the students they teach today. Majority of the participants who have had NMS background reflected that they were much more hardworking than the students today. For example an English teacher of a private EMS in Kathmandu reflects,

“I was educated in a NMS. We learnt English as a subject and the teachers would translate every word in Nepali. Even then we could develop our English proficiency through investment of time and effort. So it is not necessary to teach all subjects in English medium to be proficient in English. But, my students do not work as hard as we did when we were students.”³

He further added that it was only those who worked hard that were able to get through the examination. However, it is almost all of his students, regardless of who worked hard or not get good results in the examinations. Private EMSs are this way seen as “student passing machines”⁴ unlike the NMSs. Another informant who is also a private EMS teacher adds;

³ Participant 2, Kathmandu

⁴ Participant 3, Pokhara

“We used to work hard on our own through our personal realization, but these days we work hard to make our students learn. We teach them 12 hours a day and it is our responsibility that students learn at any cost.”⁵

The idea of investment of time and effort is noteworthy here. The informant refers to independent study and self-realization on the need to learn to be important for a lasting learning result. According to them, learners had more responsibility to learn in government NMS setting. This means only those students with motivation to learn or the family background favorable for learning would learn. In contrast to this, today's EMS setting has put much pressure on teacher and that responsibility for student learning is largely entrusted to teachers. As a result, students are forced to learn and memorize- the easiest way for teachers to fulfill their responsibility to ensure student learning.

5.2.2. Education for Learning English and Passing Exams

Rather than consulting the curriculum to familiarize themselves with the goals and objectives, informants said that they mainly rely on the textbooks or examination specification grid⁶. This means exam requirements and textbook materials guide teachers' teaching. Unlike their experience as students, students today are put in “exam preparation camps”⁷ where they practice “tougher questions than they are likely to be asked in the exams”⁸.

⁵ Participant 5, Kathmandu

⁶ “Our school does not provide us curriculum reference, what we have to do is to teach prescribed textbooks thoroughly”(Participant 4, Pokhara)

“I make sure my students get used to the type of questions asked in the question, so I rely much on examination grid” (Participant 6, Kathmandu)

⁷ “We put grade 8 and grade 10 students in exam preparation camp for the whole year. They spend 12 hours in school and practice District Level and SLC model questions” (Participant 3, Pokhara)

⁸ “We take SLC like examinations every week giving tougher questions than normally asked in the exams. As students score relatively lower marks, we can put extra pressure for them to practice ‘tough’ questions. This makes it easier for them in real examination.” (Participant 6, Kathmandu)

The spread of EMS all over the country has changed the meaning of education for common people. An informant feels that there is too much focus on the results and education has been for

“ learning English and passing the exams, but not for life. I was educated in a government NMS and I do not regret for being a product of government school. I am performing well in my profession. My English is not poorer than many others who went to EMSs. I think that I have better analytical skill when it comes to matter of politics, society and country.”⁹

Another informant with an EMS student background speaks about what his teachers would do and how he follows the similar approach,

“When I was a student, my teachers would write important questions on board and I would copy down answers on our notebook and learn them by heart. As most of exam questions were from among them, I was able to secure good marks in the exam. Today I am a teacher. In trainings, our trainers always talk about new ways of teaching learning and they also say we should change the old ways (as our teacher would do). There are new textbooks and the teacher books also talk about new methods and techniques of teaching. But at the end of the day, we have to prepare our students for the same kind of examination as when we were students. So, I find the way I was taught to be the best, and most of the time, I follow their approach”¹⁰.

It is insightful to note that an informant above finds him successful and proud of his NMS background. Although he did not clearly say whether his teacher or the classroom environment positively challenged him to invest and make efforts for independent learning, creating a learning environment where students are encouraged to carry out independent learning activities beyond the classroom/school premise can lead to ‘learning for life’. Despite the fact that teachers today have education and training to turn to students centered learning where there is engagement, dialogue and interaction, they have still not gone beyond a mechanistic transmitter role. This, as Freire (2000) states, is a marker of reproductive educational practice.

⁹ Participant 5, Kathmandu

¹⁰ Participant 10, Surkhet

5.2.3. English: No More a Privilege

Participants referred to lack of easy access and availability of EMSs when they were students. One of the informants identifies himself as one among “unlucky and poor Nepalis who could not go to an EMS. Had I been to an EMS, I would definitely have a different and a better career”¹¹. But for today’s children, he thinks, “it is no more a matter of luck because even village children go to EMSs these days and I do not think it will give them advantage over others because everybody speaks English”¹².

As reported by Faust & Nagar (2001) in Indian context, the claim that learning of English leads to upward social mobility remains no longer valid as per this informant. The prevalent belief and understanding- EMS serve the rich and elite families (Giri, 2010) are also falsified by the informants.

As the participant background table above shows, there were a few participants who have had experience studying in EMS themselves. Although they indicated their English medium background to have been a major factor for them to get opportunity to be employed as teachers, they do not really think there is much difference between the two types of schools. The only difference for them was the parents’ concern. As a participant says;

“When we were at school, our parents often visited school and asked if we had been performing well. They would also complain if we were not busy doing homework. This way our teachers had to assign a lot of writing homework and they would have difficult time correcting each student’s homework every day. But there is not as much load of homework to students as we used to have.”¹³

Parents’ lack of response and concern towards their children’s learning is reported to be one of the major problems in government NMSs in Nepal. It is a good sign that parents visit private EMS to get update on the progress of their children. Although it is difficult to say adoption of ELOI alone would bring parents to government schools, the fact that these schools have started to charge nominal fees is also seen as a way to attract parents concern. One of the school head teachers I met in one of the study

¹¹ Participant 5, Pokhara

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Participant 9, Surkhet

sites expressed a similar view. However, his experience within a couple of years adopting ELOI has not been very encouraging. He says;

“Adoption of ELOI was to make parents more concerned of the education of their children. We thought parents would visit school and interact with teachers on the progress of their children regularly because they would have extra investment in buying new uniform, textbooks and payment of minimal fees. While that did not happen, some parents became angry at us because we could not arrange for their children to cheat during the last SLC exam”¹⁴.

Pherali et al (2011) pointed out the tendency to systematic cheating arrangements during the exams made by schools/ head teachers. While the statement of the head teacher above is not in admittance of such involvement, the indication that parents also want their children to pass at any cost might have encouraged such a tendency.

5.3. Teaching: For Subject Matter or for Language?

Brock-Utne (2015) finds strong evidence in favor of learning in a familiar language compared to learning in a foreign language when it comes to better learning outcomes. She also claims that subject learning and understanding has been compromised by the adoption of ELOI in schools in Tanzania and South Africa. It has also been one of the aims of the study to see if there has been any compromise in students’ understanding of the subject matter while adopting ELOI in the context under study.

5.3.1. Breaking the ELOI Rule for Enhanced Understanding

The feature of many EMSs in Nepal is that they have not only used English as a LOI, but apply ‘English zone’ rule in their premises, including playground. While informants in the current study also admitted that the administration has imposed that policy, some participants have found ways to break the English zone. A social studies teacher says;

“The premise of my school is ‘English Speaking zone’. I use Nepali when teaching some chapters in social studies. The principal does not like it but I frankly tell him that I cannot make students understand if I use English only”¹⁵.

¹⁴ A head teacher from Pokhara, July 15, 2015

¹⁵ Participant 8, Kathmandu

In another case, a mathematics teacher of a private EMS says,

“Neither I nor my students feel satisfied after explaining formulas and concepts of mathematics in English. When the principal is around, I switch to English and my students are also aware of this. But, I use Nepali in the classroom although our text materials are in English and our school is ‘strictly’ an EMS. This way my students easily understand the concepts and I also feel satisfied at the end of the lesson”¹⁶.

Some private school teachers reported to have had some freedom in terms of classroom language and did not report English zone being strictly imposed as in the following example,

“I use Nepali when abstract concepts are to be clarified. I also allow students to use Nepali when I assign them with group work. Here the goal is for the students to reach a conclusion following an interactive task. As long as they are in the task, I do not pay attention to what language they are using”¹⁷.

The above examples can be viewed from two ways: i) teachers’ lack of proficiency over classroom communicative English as noted by Annamalai (2005) in neighboring India and Kyeyune (2010) in Uganda, or ii) their voluntary choice of a familiar language thinking it would help students understanding. The lack of proficiency issue is taken up in one of the sub-sections to follow in the current chapter. Informants’ expressions make it clear that their choice of Nepali is meant to enhance better subject-matter understanding.

5.3.2 Strictly ELOI in the Classroom: Reliance on Memorization

However, not all the participants have broken the ‘English only’ rule. When they cannot do so, they rely on giving readymade answers for students to memorize. For example a science teacher in Pokhara says, “I cannot give 100% in my class when using English, only 5-10% students that understand what I say or write. Rest 90% only copy down from what I write on the board”¹⁸ Another mathematics teacher states, “Each year, when I find my students securing poor marks or even failing in

¹⁶ Participant 2, Surkhet

¹⁷ Participant 3, Surkhet

¹⁸ Participant 3, Kathmandu

math, I feel like they would have scored better marks if I have used Nepali in place of English”¹⁹.

As it appeared in the case of private EMSs, total dependence in ELOI has a limiting effect on students’ understanding and teachers’ efficiency. Despite this, the EMSs where these teachers teach, have maintained good results in SLC examinations.

5.3.3. English Medium Textbooks: NLOI in the Classroom

The case of government schoolteachers that have switched to ELOI is a little different in the sense that they have relative freedom to use Nepali in classroom teaching. During the discussions, none of the participants reported any administrative pressure or imposition that would prevent or limit the use of Nepali language. Like the teacher in the following remark, the informants did not explicitly say that they lack enough English language skills to teach the student but nodded on agreement to what one of the participant puts as,

“As a teacher, I am not self-satisfied when using English to explain certain concept or idea. Similarly, students also do not understand as much they would understand when I explain in Nepali”²⁰.

The saying of a participant in another focus group complements to the above expression when he says, “It is a reality that I cannot teach as artistically in English as I can in Nepali and also students become more motivated while I teach in Nepali”²¹.

As evident, the majority of informants said that they rely on Nepali when it comes to classroom language. Those who said they stick to ELOI reported that their strategy is to give necessary information to the students that students copy and memorize. Despite this reality and realization from the teachers, the question is why they switched to ELOI from NLOI. In the name of improving examination result for students and retaining the students in the schools, this move leaves students with no

¹⁹ Participant 1, Pokhara

²⁰ Participant 4, Surkhet

²¹ Participant 8, Kathmandu

other choice but duplication, and where language becomes not the instrument of communication, but of incantation (Bourdieu, 1990).

5.3.4. Limited Creativity

While co-curricular activities such as essay writing, oratory or debate competitions are features of school in Nepal; they are taken as the main means of enhancing students' creativity, public speaking skills and argumentation skills. Such activities are organized both in Nepali as well as English. However, as per the participants' observation, using English to carry out such activities has detrimental effect to students' creative expression.

One of the participants who co-ordinates such activities finds it difficult for children to come up with ideas and arguments on their own in contests such as oration or debate. Organizing such activities in English means that the teachers need to guide students, which would not be necessary if Nepali was the language of presentation on such contests²². Another teacher who also coordinates co-curricular activities in his private EMS, recalls of his recent experience as,

“Last week, we had an essay writing competition in our school. Because vast majority of students did not get the meaning of a key word on the given title of the essay, only a few students could write the essay. After the essays were submitted, several students came to me and asked what the word mean. Once I told the meaning of the word, they said they could have written the essay very well”²³.

5.3.5. Quiet Classroom: Discipline or Silencing?

In one of the focus group discussions in Pokhara, a participant claimed that students become more disciplined in the classroom while taught in English medium compared to Nepali medium²⁴. By discipline in the classroom, this teacher was referring to the

²² “When we organize extra-curricular activities such as oratory or debate, students require total guidance from us when the medium of expression is English. However, if the medium of expression was Nepali, they would not require any guidance Participant 3, Surkhet.”

²³ Participant 2, Pokhara

²⁴ “Students are more disciplined while teaching in English. They do not make noise and all the students listen to what the teacher says (Participant 2, Pokhara).”

lack of student noise and their attention to what the teacher says. Another participant challenges this idea of discipline and says,

“Silence in classroom does not mean there is discipline or we cannot say there is better teaching and learning. It is necessary for better learning that there is sufficient interaction and discussion in the classroom. When we use ELOI, learning through discussion and interaction is minimized”.²⁵

Silencing the students is taken by some teachers as in the earlier example as a way of disciplining. But for Bakhtin (1983) this is a way of silencing the students or disempowering them where they are not allowed to question the authority. Giroux (1997) also links the use of unfamiliar language to silencing the students. As claimed by Giroux (ibid.), the neoliberal educational practice has distanced education from the principles of democracy and freedom. Also evident in the expression of the informants of the current study, students are presented with information which they have to internalize rather than challenging it. Without distinguishing disruptive behavior from classroom noise, adoption of ELOI has contributed more towards rejecting voice to the students rather than empowering them.

Even though ELOI has been adopted in principle in many government schools, Nepali has been used. While it can be linked to the lack of required proficiency, use of NLOI can also be seen as teachers’ strategy to ensure better understanding. The main challenge in implementing ELOI is the language proficiency of teachers, according to a University teacher of English Education who was also present during one of the focus group discussion. He says,

“Children can only get content knowledge better when they have a level of mastery over the language. In our case, students and teachers are both challenged by the need to learn the language. While teachers themselves lack required proficiency, children have challenge both to learn the language and the content. This has made learning in English more difficult”²⁶.

Through the discussion, it was very difficult to determine if adoption of ELOI was to ensure better learning of English or to ensure better learning of subject matter.

²⁵ Participant 9, Kathmandu

²⁶ Participant 6, Kathmandu

However, it was evident that strict adherence to ELOI have had resulted in poorer understanding and more reliance on memorization. The reliance on memorization has potential for a positive outcome in terms of exam success, as the standard examination is largely based on memory.

Even in the age of democracy and freedom, education has been an instrument for political, social or ideological domination (Giroux, 1997). It has been evident in the discussion in this section on how text, school practice and interactions are controlled through the language different from students' familiar language (Bourdieu, 1990).

5.4. ELOI and Quality of Classroom Teaching/Learning

It has been told elsewhere that the prevailing notion of quality of education in Nepal is overly dependent on the success rate on standard examination. With the rise of 'Education for all' agenda, education quality has also been linked to factors such as school enrollment, dropout rate, and gender balance and so on, as is evident in the ongoing SSRP (2009). Defining the overall quality of education, and examining the educational practice against such a definition, is beyond the scope of this study. I mainly focus on the classroom dynamics and experience of the classroom teacher. Hence, the issue of quality in the present context is limited to the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Hayati (2010) identifies the need to offer knowledge, skills and authority to children that includes the elements of dialogue and criticism. Therefore, quality of teaching and learning can be defined in terms of student engagement, dialogue, problem posing and teachers' active role in appropriation, supplementation and negotiation of materials as well as teaching appropriate to the students' level and the society they come from. This notion is against the conventional teacher-student relationship, which is defined as the banking model (Freire, 2000).

In finding out the quality of teaching/learning, the participants were first asked how their typical class hour would pass and if they would create opportunities for student participation, dialogue or interaction. Later they were asked how adopting a language in place of the other (English and Nepali) would influence the classroom activities. While the participants claimed they have necessary skills in implementing student

centered teaching and engaging students in the learning, there emerged three different themes during the discussions.

5.4.1. Lack of Materials or Resources Hinder Student-Centered Teaching

Some participants blame the school administration that “does not want to or cannot spend on educational materials. Without necessary materials, it has been difficult to engage students in learning activities”²⁷. Some other teachers complained that they lacked library, computer lab or the Internet for the students to carry out group/pair based project works²⁸.

While the lack of materials and modern resources to learning are often attributed to government schools, the participants who complained the lack of materials and resources were the teachers of private ‘boarding’ schools. This means: To think that all ‘boarding’ schools have resources and facilities to enhance better students learning is wrong, at least in the case of ‘budget’ EMSs.

However, there were participants in every focus group discussion who said they have adopted student-centered approach in the classroom. Moreover, they countered the argument by other participants that lack of materials, and technology prevents them from getting students active and engaged in the classroom²⁹. While they were in agreement that the standard examination system would demand students to be trained in memorizing the answers, and that they would not be measured against tasks or group skills, they argued that there are lot of such possibilities to base the

²⁷ Participant 3, Kathmandu

²⁸ Participant 1,3,5 & 6 Pokhara

²⁹ “I take students on a field project where students are required to observe or talk to people, make notes and present their work to the class” (Participant 8, Pokhara

“I assign student into different groups. For group work, I offer them different topics to choose from and those interested on a topic on interest sit together and their discussion becomes lively as they are engaged in talking on something they like” (Participant 7, Surkhet)

“I do not look for expensive materials, I can use materials that are available around. For example, I use old newspapers where students read about events and problems and engage on discussion of how, why...” (Participant 3, Kathmandu)

assessment on such activities at levels that do not require students to sit in standard external examinations. One participant says,

“It is true that we focus on preparing students for district level (grade 8) or SLC (grade 10) examination. In our school, we train them in standard examination question models and we cannot focus on group work, project work or other student-centered tasks. But, we are free to design our examination and assessment system for other grade levels. Therefore, I assess my lower secondary students on the basis of their group participation, discussion and contribution in the group work”³⁰.

This example clearly shows that when teachers are in a position to control assessment, they have been able to involve and engage students in learning activities. However, it is not clear how using ELOI could ensure quality interaction and engagement in the classroom.

5.4.2. Hindrance from Parents and School Administration

Although some participants as reported earlier spoke about their relative freedom to design assessment and innovative use of low-cost/no-cost materials, other teachers speak about the lack of freedom in designing assessment and also blame the parents and school operators (in case of private boarding schools). They think that parents often put aside the pedagogic aspect of teaching/learning. They always want students' performance to be measured against percentile and position, and want to see their marks on paper and pencil tests, as is evident in the following expression.

“Our school introduced evaluation system that would measure student success against stated learning outcome (like ‘a child can/could do this and that’) in primary level. However, what all parents want to know is the percentage of marks obtained by their children in individual subject and the position of their children compared to other children in the classroom. Fearing that the newly introduced system may result in lower enrollment in the next academic year, our founder/principal is already talking about returning to the old system”³¹.

This way, the conventional notion of success based on paper and pencil tests, and comparing students against others in the classroom, has been a serious factor affecting quality of teaching and learning. Although a few participants reported using

³⁰ Participant 9, Kathmandu

³¹ Participant 4, Kathmandu

activities to introduce more student interaction and engagement, the majority of participants did not speak about challenging the conventional notions. In this sense, key aspects of education such as the assessment system and curriculum are beyond classroom teachers' control. This lack of control has ultimately affected the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The fact that parents themselves are against a potentially a progressive move confirms Freire's (2000) claim that those who have been oppressed accept the status-quo as the model and reject change in such unequal practices.

5.4.3. ELOI: A Silencing Force?

During my field visit, I also had the opportunity to observe a lesson briefly and the following is what I saw.

After the teacher has finished presenting the content of the lesson for the period, he divides students in groups and gives them tasks to be completed through interaction with friends based on the reading text. The students start moving chairs to form groups and talking to each other. This obviously makes the class noisier. Hearing the noise, the principal passing by the corridor stops to look in through the classroom-window as if he was not happy about it. As soon as the teacher in the classroom sees the principal peeping through the window, he reacts by reminding the students that they are allowed to talk only in English. Suddenly, the lively noisy classroom becomes silent. The students are seen murmuring in a low voice. After 10 minutes, the teacher asks the groups if they are ready with their presentations. Seeing enthusiasm in none of the groups to do so, he writes the solutions on the board and the students copy down on their notebooks.³²

The above observation makes it clear that the priority for the school administration is that classrooms become silent and that students learn without needing to make noise in the classroom. The idea that classroom should be silent was linked to the idea of discipline by some teachers as in the previous sub-section. As far as classroom approach and teaching methodology is concerned, the teachers' approach was definitely more students centered and interactive than conventional banking model. However, the conventional beliefs that silence is discipline, and 'English only' policy,

³² The researcher's classroom observation, Pokhara, June 2014

have posed serious challenge in the teachers' attempt to become more student-centered.

The adoption of ELOI in place of Nepali for some has resulted in teachers becoming hard workers and putting extra effort. For one of the informants, the main cause of students' failure in those schools had been lack to teachers' effort. "Although it is too early to say if ELOI would result in better result in SLC examination" he argues, "there have already been some good signs such as better classroom management and classroom decoration has made them more attractive for the students as in private schools"³³.

Another recurring theme that emerged through the discussions was the use of Nepali as a classroom language for interaction and group work and use of English for writing or note taking. One of the participants says,

"After switching to English medium, we are just using English textbooks in place of Nepali textbooks and we (both students and teachers) now write in English, but when it comes to explaining, interaction, group work or other classroom activities, we use Nepali. Carrying out classroom communication in English is difficult because both we and our students have problems in speaking English"³⁴.

Thus English has been used more as a literacy language than the classroom language in government schools. This has been the case with some private school teachers. However, some private school teachers have been powerful enough to influence school leadership so that they allow teaches to use Nepali as classroom language. Even in schools where Nepali is not allowed, some teachers use Nepali as classroom language as one of the participant states,

"I teach math and I mostly use Nepali as classroom language. Sometimes, when the principal or the member of the administration is around, I switch to English. But you know, he cannot always check what I am doing in the classroom. My students are also used to it"³⁵.

³³ Participant 4, Pokhara

³⁴ Participant 6, Surkhet

³⁵ Participant 7, Kathmandu

So far we took examples of the use of Nepali in classroom for interaction, explanation or activities involving students whereas English has been limited to the language on paper. However, there are also cases where Nepali is not being used. We now turn into how it has affected classroom activities in those schools according to the participants.

Since the adoption of ELOI, participants said that primary and pre-primary classrooms are more student oriented or child friendly because, “we have learnt how to decorate and make our classrooms attractive for children. We teach them through play method, singing, coloring and music. We do not use Nepali”³⁶. Another participant in the same discussion thinks,

“In lower grades, it is possible to teach in English because they do not need to learn abstract concepts and teaching concrete ideas is possible through demonstration and simple explanation. But when students reach lower secondary and secondary level, they not only need to learn abstract concepts and ideas but also need to prepare for the standard examination. Therefore, we have to rely on Nepali language for explanation. For exam preparation purpose on the other hand, they just need to memorize. So, using English or Nepali does not really make a difference. The fact that using English in examination gives them advantage over those using Nepali has forced government schools to switch to English medium”³⁷

Clearly, the above remark is the evidence that switching to English medium is not for improvement in classroom teaching, but for improving the result. Similarly, learning of content or subject has been limited due to lack of adequate language skills both with teachers and students.

5.5. Adoption of ELOI and its potential to Bridge the Two-Tier Gap

Although Nepal’s two-tier education system (Government NMS vs. Private EMS) is not the root cause of conflict, it had been one of the issues raised by the rebels during the insurgency (1996-2006). By ensuring success and opportunity for the children of those who can afford and limiting opportunity for those who cannot afford

³⁶ Participant 4 Kathmandu

³⁷ Participant 4, Pokhara

'private' education, Nepal's education system paved way for inequality and division in the society.

The expansion of 'budget' EMS as well as the adoption ELOI is seen as a measure towards the direction to fill the two-tier gap by some. For example, a principal of a budget EMS in Pokhara said,

"We have been able to offer quality English medium education to the children of the poor. It is wrong to say that EMSs are only for the rich people. Although government schools are declared free by the government, they have been collecting money from parents in different ways. So studying in our schools is not really more expensive than studying in government schools"³⁸.

Similarly, a head-teacher in a government school that has recently switched to English medium said,

"Our school has better physical infrastructure, bigger playground, and better paid teachers than in the schools like that (he was indicating to the private boarding school just 100 meters away). That school has produced excellent result in SLC for last 4 years in a row, but majority of our students have failed. We realized that if we also start teaching in English medium, we could perhaps secure better result for our students. Since we introduced ELOI two years ago, we have been able to maintain the student number and parents are also happier"³⁹.

During the FGDs, participants were invited to opine if this switching to ELOI would create ground so that the long-standing two-tier gap between the private-EMSS and government NMSs can be filled. There was a general agreement that this trend might affect 'budget' EMSs negatively. As majority government schools already have better infrastructure than 'budget' EMS, adoption of ELOI has already be an added attraction. Within a few years after the Government NMSs switched to ELOI, there have been several reports coming from some districts that some government schools have found it difficult to manage the pressure whereas it has been a matter of concern for 'budget' private schools (e.g. Annapurna Post, April 20, 2015; Imagekhabar Online, April 23, 2015).

³⁸ Principal 1, Pokhara

³⁹ Headteacher 1, Surkhet

However, there was skepticism among the participants if this trend would help to bridge the two-tier gap although it might prevent the expansion of 'budget' EMSs. As one of the participants says,

“Saying that the palace like school in Kathmandu and a 'hut' school in our village are offering the same education is not true. When government schools start teaching in English, it may affect the 'budget schools' in the surrounding and many parents may send their children to government schools. But both kinds of schools are not for the rich. As long as we cannot create the situation when 'elite' and 'budget' children go to the same school, the gap will not end”⁴⁰

A majority of the informants agreed to the above opinion in the FGDs. They also added that the 'elite' EMSs have sound infrastructure, well paid and qualified teachers and they teach more than just preparing students for examinations. One of the participants - a budget school teacher- further adds,

“While we put all our efforts so that our students get through the SLC examination, passing SLC is just one of the many things for 'elite' schools. They have western curriculum and western style, so they learn more than just learning to pass the SLC”⁴¹.

Despite the expansion of private EMSs and adoption of ELOI by the government school, it was clear from the participants' expression that those schools served for a social class that is either poor or lower middle section of the society. It is evident in the expression of a participant who is also a teacher in a private EMS, “the children of our founder principal are admitted in an 'elite' boarding school in Kathmandu. If he was convinced the school he runs is equally good, why would he admit his children there?”⁴² In the same focus group discussion the above statement was supplemented by another participant who says, “Our salary is equivalent to the amount around 15 students pay as fee, but a student in those schools pays more than the salary we get in our school”⁴³.

⁴⁰ Participant 5, Surkhet

⁴¹ Participant 6, Pokhara

⁴² Participant, 7 Surkhet

⁴³ Participant, 2 Surkhet

As Pherali et. al (2011) claim, the spread of ELOI can fill the gap between private EMSs and government schools when the latter switch to ELOI, but this will not ensure that the much needed improvement on educational quality is achieved. The participants also agreed to that the move to switch to ELOI can prevent the further expansion of budget EMSs; it will however not address the gap between long established elite EMSs.

5.6. Effect of ELOI on Educational Transformation

One of the major questions guiding the present study has been whether this new trend bears the potential to transform the education sector or not. It has been well established in the discourse of educational transformation that such transformation should start from the classroom and that the key agent for such transformation are the practicing teachers (Dheram, 2007). In the absence of any policy guideline or instruction from the ministry level, the latest trend where government NMSs have been switching to ELOI is largely the result of the initiation at local level by head teachers, teachers and local management committees. Therefore, this initiative can be seen as a positive sign towards changing the education sector. The present study, therefore, tried to find out the participants' perception on the potential impact of this trend to transform our teaching/learning so as to ensure quality, and success.

In doing so, the participants were asked how it has affected their classroom practice and if it has the potential to influence assessment system, curriculum and professional development activities. This section reports the perception and reflection of the participants as emerged through the discussions.

As mentioned in the introduction section of this thesis, many participants pointed to the fact that ELOI is a not a new introduction in Nepal's school education. As one of the participant puts it, "We are not doing anything new or different. It is just we are returning back to what was there when modern education was introduced in the country. But the good thing is that education in ELOI is now available to the poor people also"⁴⁴. Another participant in the same discussion points to the downside of ELOI now compared to that in the past saying,

⁴⁴ Participant, 1 Pokhara

“Ranas had recruited native English speaking teachers from England or ‘British India’ so they could teach English better than us. But we cannot be as proficient as those native teachers. As a result our students will neither be good in English nor in Nepali”⁴⁵.

Similar was the opinion of a participant in another discussion, who says,

“Those ‘elite’ EMSs pay very good salary. They have not only recruited best teachers in the country, they can also afford foreigner teachers. They train teachers in their own classroom. Although we also use EMOI, we can never compete with them and our students will not be as proficient as they are”⁴⁶.

Evidently, the access to ELOI is seen as a positive signal by some participants as it ensures access to poor and lower middle class. However, teachers’ admission that they could not be as proficient teachers so as to ensure students better proficiency in English is a serious challenge, although they are mostly knowledgeable in the subject matter.

Coming to the issue of how far ELOI has the potential to empower teachers by offering potential for influencing or even challenging the long-standing assessment system or manipulating the curriculum and text-books available to them. A participant who is also a teacher in a private EMS clearly points to fact that teachers in private schools are not in such position because they

“are sandwiched between our management and textbooks. We follow what the management says and transfer whatever is there in the textbooks. Our management decides on which text-books to be used and how and when the assessment is to be conducted”⁴⁷.

Similarly another teacher talks about how they are to give into the pressure from many sides that limit them from adopting student centeredness,

“I know that children can actively participate in teaching learning process through interaction, dialogue, role-play and discussion. But I should admit that it has not been

⁴⁵ Participant 7, Kathmandu

⁴⁶ Participant 4, Surkhet

⁴⁷ Participant 9, Surkhet

possible in my classroom. It is because we have pressure from many sides. We have voluminous textbooks, our principal wants us to use English only, and our parents want to see only good marks in their progress reports. We have learnt some skills in students centered teaching through trainings and seminars, but we have not really become students centered”⁴⁸.

Comparing to what the participants of the discussion that teach in private EMSs, the participants that are teachers in government schools reported some freedom in using the classroom language. The initiation to start ELOI was taken by the teachers teaching in government schools. While many teachers admitted that they had key role in adoption of ELOI in those schools, their motives were primarily targeted to retaining the minimum number of students in the schools as one of the participants says,

“To be honest, adoption of English medium is to secure our job. As parents started sending their children to EMSs, we were forced to do so. Otherwise, we would have a very few students in our school and some of us might get transfer to remote schools which we do not want”⁴⁹.

Some other teachers relied onto the rhetoric of ‘globalization’, internalization and so on and claimed it was for enhancing better learning of English rather than enhancing better overall learning, because “Those who have good English get more easily employed. Realization of this fact by the parents led them to prefer English medium instruction”⁵⁰. In society, “one that speaks English or mixes some English word while speaking Nepali is considered educated or civilized. Common people, therefore, want to secure this privilege for their children”⁵¹.

According to a participant who is a government schoolteacher, there has actually been no change in the way they teach. It is just that “English medium textbooks have

⁴⁸ Participant 5, Surkhet

⁴⁹ Participant 8, Surkhet

⁵⁰ Participant 6, Pokhara

⁵¹ Participant 2, Kathmandu

been introduced and children are now required to wear a tie and black shoes. This has given an impression that the school is now 'boarding' like"⁵².

Transformation of education is only possible when there is a realization that "education is for life, rather than only for result"⁵³. But as emerged through the discussions, the major matter of concern from parents has been to secure good marks in examination in whatever way possible. Another participant thinks that educational change and improvement does not come out of ELOI, but the determination to take risk and to recognize the value of criticality and creativity. He opines,

"We are not only teachers, we are also parents. It is a fact in this country that those who graduated from EMSs get better opportunities because they have excellent exams result. I know quality of classroom teaching can be better with NLOI, but I cannot send my children to those schools. Saying that NLOI offers better classroom learning is like an ideal that people find it difficult to live by. It is like a political leader advocating end to child labor in public, but keeping a child worker at his home. For now sending children to NMS is a matter of risk taking and we are not ready for that. As the market recognizes mark sheets, why should we bother thinking about criticality, creativity and social skills? If we want to transform our schools, we should start by educating our children in the schools we teach in."⁵⁴

5.7. On the Difference between Government and Private Schools

One of the assumptions in the present study has been that the major difference between government and private schools had been the LOI excepting those 'elite' EMSs. However, during the discussion some participants challenged this assumption,

"It is not only the LOI that is responsible for 'poor quality' of government schools, there are also components as teachers' capability, provision of training and physical resources including instructional materials"⁵⁵.

⁵² Participant 8, Surkhet

⁵³ Participant 3, Pokhara

⁵⁴ Participant 1, Kathmandu

⁵⁵ Participant 1, Surkhet

While participants were in agreement that LOI only is not the factor that differentiates government schools with private schools, a majority thought that teachers in government schools are more qualified than in 'budget' EMSs. According to an official in Education ministry, whom I had the opportunity to speak to during my fieldwork,

“Government has invested a lot in teacher training, and scholarships. Government schoolteachers in general have better salary and perks compared to majority private EMSs. Security of job and link to trade union are factors that have made schoolteachers less responsible to their immediate superiors. On the other hand private school teachers are working in worse conditions. Their job is not secure and they have to work hard and produce better result so as to maintain job security. Provided the government school teachers work equally responsibly compared to those private EMS teachers, they can give better quality and result”⁵⁶.

Similar is the view of one of a university teacher in Pokhara, who thinks;

“Government school teachers are more efficient as they are appointed through competitive exams and are not only good in subject matter. Moreover, they are not weaker in English proficiency than those teaching in private schools. Also, they have had more training opportunities”⁵⁷.

While government schoolteachers are not less qualified, and they have all potential to be more efficient classroom teachers compared to those teaching in EMSs, the problem according to a university teacher was that “they have not been responsible enough”⁵⁸. “Enhancing better sense of responsibility can be through self-realization or through the management’s control and supervision.”⁵⁹ Although the informants felt it was not the better sense of responsibility of private EMSs teachers that gave better result, it was their strict management that made them work hard. As a participant puts it,

⁵⁶ Ministry of Nepal official in a talk to the researcher, Kathmandu, July 17, 2014

⁵⁷ University teacher and a Teacher Trainer, Kathmandu, June 31

⁵⁸ Lecturer at Faculty of Education, Pokhara in an informal talk with the researcher, June 21, 2014

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

“It is the management of private schools that makes teachers responsible. Teachers in government schools are not equally responsible and they do not respect or follow their management, that’s why they have poor result in SLC examination”⁶⁰.

5.8. Lack of Language Proficiency

The fact that adoption of ELOI has had a limiting effect in classroom learning has been a recurring theme through the FGDs, although memorization has been enhanced, which has had positive consequence in students’ examination results. However, a majority of the informants did not explicitly talk about their level of proficiency over English. A participant in Pokhara- a teacher in an EMS- said “offering a few days/weeks English language proficiency training would not be helpful as I feel incompetent in classroom English despite more than a decade’s experience in an EMS”⁶¹. Despite not being explicit, this informant was hinting that the schools that switched to ELOI from NLOI lack teachers who have minimum proficiency over English. Similar views were echoed in my interaction with local contacts that are also teacher educators in the respective cities. A University English education teacher in Surkhet says; “Many subject teachers evidently lack language proficiency. To make it worse, English medium textbooks available in the market are also marred by errors and obscurities”⁶². This means when teachers are not proficient, they are not able to examine the appropriateness and accuracy of the materials presented in the textbooks. As a solution to this, he suggests English language proficiency training to be given to the teachers and an efficient mechanism to ensure the quality of textbooks. Another English language teacher trainer and a university teacher in Kathmandu thinks that making classrooms interactive and enhancing students creativity and criticality is possible, provided the language used by the teachers and that in the textbook is appropriate to the level of the students⁶³. She adds that the

⁶⁰ Participant 4, Kathmandu

⁶¹ Participant 9, Surkhet

⁶² Interaction with the researcher, Surkhet, July 4, 2014

⁶³ “We should not always think that English as a language of instruction kills creativity. It is also necessary to think if the language used by teachers and in the textbooks is appropriate to the level of the students. When teachers use ‘tough’ language in the classroom, it becomes difficult for students to understand. We should also think if the language input is comprehensible or not (Teacher Trainer and University teacher, Kathmandu).”

teachers' classroom language is often 'tough' and incomprehensible to the students. On asking what she meant by 'tough' language, she said that the language of teachers is at times complex (involving complex sentences and words) or erroneous, without proper structure at other times.

In the context where the challenge to retain students and improve standard examination results were identified as major forces that led to adoption of EMS, it is more targeted toward helping students to learn English better. As one of the participant observes, "If one has good English, s/he is considered intelligent and has better chances of getting employment in the future"⁶⁴. Although the rhetoric that English gives employment and prestige prevails, opinion that English is no longer a possession of limited number of people, as it is widely learnt and studied (See sub-section 5.2.3), contradicts the rhetoric. But as some participants believe ELOI is not the only way to improve students' English proficiency as put by a participant,

"Students from government school background are not poor in English because they did not study in English medium, but because they were not taught English properly. If English subject teachers are empowered well, English proficiency can be achieved even when English is learnt as a subject"⁶⁵.

5.9. Summary

This chapter aimed at presenting and analyzing the data collected through FGDs, observation and one-one interactions. Beginning with participant background, the chapter offered the data that were intuitively categorized under themes as recurred through the FGDs, and as per the objectives of the study. While most of the data input came from the FGDs, observation notes and interactions with the contacts and gatekeepers also substantiated the data.

⁶⁴ Participant 3, Kathmandu

⁶⁵ Participant 1, Kathmandu

CHAPTER 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the perceptions, experiences and classroom realities in Nepal's schools in three different cities, where a foreign language (English) has been adopted in place of familiar Nepali language as a LOI. The study has highlighted the potential of ELOI to improve quality of teaching/learning in the classroom, and how it has been linked to a prevalent notion of overall quality education in Nepal. Taking the perspective of practicing teachers, it also sought to identify whether the widespread adoption of ELOI and its consequent reach to common people has the potential to fill the long standing two-tier gap in Nepal's school education.

This thesis began with a descriptive analysis of Nepal's educational history and its link to conflict, so as to offer a contextual framework for the study. The next section offered a framework for the study by revisiting the ongoing SSRP (2009), and showing how it has failed to address the problematic two-tier school education system. It also established rationale for the need to examine the LOI issue as an integral part of the educational reform policy, as it has direct links to classroom teaching/learning. The next chapter presented a methodological framework in terms of tools, techniques, opportunities and challenges of the study. Subsequently, Chapter 4 outlined some theoretical grounding for the current study to highlight how LOI is intricately linked to the issues of empowerment and equality. On the backdrop of the chapters 1-4, Chapter 5 presented the data, its analysis and major discoveries.

This chapter aims at summarizing the major discoveries. It also presents the ground situation of Nepal and how ELOI should be part and parcel in the discussion of educational change and reform in the country. Furthermore, this chapter will suggest some areas for further research so as to establish LOI issue as an important area of research.

6.1. Summary of Findings

Despite the constitutional provision for a mother tongue based education up-to the primary level, EMSs have been expanding all over the country. At the same time, many NMSs are also switching to ELOI in the name of ensuring better success and 'quality' education. In the context where there is constitutional provision for Mother

tongue based education, at least up-to primary level, the increasing trend to send children to EMSs has seriously challenged the constitutional provision. This study aimed at critically examining the assumption that switching to ELOI enhances educational quality from classroom teachers' perspective. In doing so, the thesis sought to examine the assumption through: 1) teachers' lived experience of teaching/learning in ELOI compared to NLOI, 2) Adoption of ELOI and its potential to address issues of equality and access to quality education, and 3) potential of ELOI to transform the educational practice in the country.

In the following section, I present a summary of the findings against the stated objectives of the study.

6.1.1. How ELOI is distinct from NLOI: Lived Experiences

Success in learning is seen as dependent on one's investment and effort. As most of the participants in the current study think, they used to make much more efforts than students today in learning. It means students these days have, according to these teachers, have become less laborious than in the past, and less self-reliant when it comes to self-study and independent learning habits. Although the emphasis on examination result was prevalent in the past also, this has led to exclusively exam preparation focus at the expense of learning for life. With focus on ELOI, this trend has gained further ground and students are often given readymade answers that they have to memorize in the examination.

The overemphasis on prevalent examination based on memory also has resulted in the mismatch between what teachers learn during the trainings and what they do in the classroom. While the training programs focus on student centered teaching, most of the teachers reported that they stick to the style of their teachers and predecessor, as the examination requirements have not changed.

The rhetoric that English is link to prosperity, globalization or internationalization is prevalent (Coleman, 2011). While Nepal's formal education started with strong focus on learning of English in 1934, Nepal's story of underdevelopment, inequality and poverty continues to dominate the discourse of international development. The finding of the study suggests that ability to communicate in English only does not give

upward mobility for an individual today, although it could have been the case in the past.

6.1.2. Quality of Classroom Teaching and Learning

One of the issues addressed by the study was to see how classroom teaching/learning has been influenced by the adoption of ELOI, and if the language issue had an effect in classroom interaction and behavior. Although many teachers were not very clear on whether ELOI was adopted for better subject matter learning or better language learning, there was unanimous understanding that subject matter learning and understanding is more important and also that LOI should not be a barrier to such learning. Although adoption of ELOI has been evident in the textbook and uniform selection, there are examples where classroom teachers have felt uncomfortable or even helpless. As a way to cope with this situation, some teachers have relied on familiar language (Nepali) in the classroom to enhance understanding. At the same time, there are others who are not in a position to exercise freedom in the selection of LOI. These teachers have relied on offering readymade answers to the students, so as to better prepare them for the exams.

Despite the widespread belief that ELOI would ensure quality, this has more become a force to control teachers and students. While 'budget' EMSs attention is to maintain high student numbers and ensure better grades for students, innovations and attempts to change the evaluation systems also have been meaningless. Adoption of ELOI is said to make teachers hardworking, but it has also meant that they are disempowered and required to produce success in a rather traditional mechanical sense.

6.1.3. ELOI and Agenda of Educational Transformation

Literature in peace and conflict as well as in educational reform shows that education is not only a victim of conflicts. Education itself can be a *source of conflict*. Therefore, education reform should not only focus on rebuilding the damaged structures, or creating a safe environment for children to go to schools, but also should try to analyze how education had contributed to the conflict, and how that role played by education could be addressed. In the context of Nepal, the two-tier education system

is identified as one of the factors fuelling conflict. Obviously, post conflict educational reform should offer a guideline on how that can be addressed. One of the goals of this thesis has been to identify if adoption of ELOI can have a positive impact in that direction. Although it was found that adoption of ELOI has the potential to prevent the spread and expansion of budget EMSs, there was a general agreement among the informants that ELOI would not ensure quality, and also that the distinctions between elite EMS, budget EMS and state run schools prevails even if the ELOI model will be followed all over the country.

Other than the themes that are directly related to the objectives of the study, a few things emerged that challenge the assumption of this study. They are,

1. The difference between the government and private English medium schools is not only due to the difference in the LOI, but also in the management and resource/funding of these two different types of schools. On the one hand, 'elite' EMSs have been offering advanced curriculum, and with matching infrastructure and facilities, they have also been able to recruit and retain efficient teachers. 'Budget' EMSs on the other hand are not in a position to charge high fees from the students. Therefore, they are just offering ELOI based education and focus on preparing students for examinations. Most of them make their teachers work hard although their salary and perks are nominal. Government schoolteachers on the other hand have relative freedom, but they have not been able to utilize their position so as to influence the policy and practice.
2. Lack of language proficiency on the part of the teachers is identified as a factor that is complicating the problem. As identified by educational experts who also offered input for the current study, English language used by the teachers in the classroom as well as the language used in the majority of textbooks is either inappropriate (incomprehensible) or sub-standard. This means both the 'budget' EMSs, as well as government schools that have switched to ELOI, have ended in teaching students the English that is considered low standard and not as good as it is taught/learnt in the 'elite' EMSs.

6.2. Conclusion, Recommendations and Areas for Further research

The overall aim of the study was to find if the expanding ELOI practice in Nepal's school was a positive step towards transforming the educational practice, by enhancing quality of teaching/learning and contributing to empowerment and agency of students. Although it has been observed that the move was the result of initiative taken at local level by teachers, the overall conclusion of the study is that this practice is leading towards reproduction of the unequal pre-conflict educational structure and practice. As the current trend of government NMSs to switch to ELOI is largely due to the initiative taken by teachers or head teachers, this is targeted more towards securing jobs and retaining the required number of students in schools. While it has been evident that government schoolteachers are in a position of power and agency, they have not been able to utilize the position for transforming the education. Therefore, I see a need to raise awareness among teachers so that they can positively influence not only the classroom practice, but also on the education policy and the unscientific standard of the assessment system.

Returning to the issue of LOI, the study has made clear that ELOI compared to NLOI has a limiting effect on the students understanding and critical learning. Adopting ELOI has helped schools to regain faith from parents. It also has potential to improve standard examination results, but it has not contributed to, nor is it likely to contribute to transforming the classroom practice, so that students and teachers can engage in questioning, debating and discussing, despite its potential to prevent the budget EMSs.

Understanding that English is a necessary language, I agree to the recommendation that Seth (1990 cited in Faust & Nagar, 2001:2882) makes in the Indian context: To offer high quality English subject learning, and teach other subjects in a familiar language. The most familiar language for children is obviously their mother tongue. Nepal's multilingualism and multi-ethnicity is so diverse that there are more than a hundred indigenous languages. In the case where many of these languages lack scripts and efficient bilingual teachers, the present trend of favoring EMSs has added challenge to the system that is already struggling to offer mother tongue based (Eagle, 2008). While efforts to develop and expand mother tongue based education

should continue at least up to primary level, use of a familiar language (Nepali) should continue.

In the context where there is a constitutional provision that children have a right to mother tongue education up-to primary level, and efforts to develop curriculum and teachers are ongoing, this trend has challenged those efforts.

The issue of LOI is now one of the established fields of research and debate. However, it is more limited to policy level debates in the context of Nepal (e.g. Weinberg, 2013; Giri, 2011; Phyak, 2011). The current study complements to the debate from a different perspective. It highlights the need to turn to schools and to the classrooms to see how the LOI issue is not only linked to policy level politics, but also to pedagogy (Tsui & Tollefson, 2009). Rather than imposing a language that marginalizes and hinders learning, it is essential that an LOI is taken as “an enabling tool that has to facilitate rather than hinder learning. This facilitation is not only in learning the subject content, but also in reflecting on facts and views, and constructing a new view of the world” (Kyeyune, 2003: 175).

Post Script

As I write the concluding remarks for this thesis (first week of May 2015), Nepal has faced another catastrophe- a 7.8 Richter scale magnitude earthquake on 25 April 2015. Many schools have been demolished, many teachers and students have been victimized, and there is an immediate need to rebuild and restore schools. While this crisis is sure to leave a big scar, it has also brought a window of hope for the future: We can incorporate the issues of transformation in the much-needed physical restoration when we are receiving overwhelming support from the world community.

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