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Power Dynamics of Medium-of-Instruction Policy Practices in Nepalese Schools

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ABSTRACT

Nepal's medium of instruction (MOI) policy offers at least four possibilities for schools, i.e., Nepali, English, Nepali-English or local language that best fits their contexts. Among them, Akalaa School, a community school located in Tanahun district of Gandaki Province, Nepal, strategically used dual medium (i.e., English and Nepali) education in the same school premises and grades, aiming to enhance equal and equitable quality education to students from both Nepali and English medium education backgrounds. Although the school had good intentions to use dual language medium education, it was still unclear whether equality and equity in education prevail in reality. Therefore, the study aimed to analyse how the practice of dual medium education policy has guaranteed equality and equity among students and teachers. However, critical ethnographic research conducted in Akalaa School revealed incongruities between the intent and the consequences of the policy practices, causing various positioning and tensions among students and teachers. From the time of admission in respective medium, students felt divided as the school administration, knowingly or unknowingly, categorized them as "English medium and Nepali medium", "English proficient and English non-proficient" and later as "villager and urbane," "better and poorer," and "success and failure", leading to imbalanced positioning and ordering. Parallel to this, it enforced tensions among teachers, creating hierarchies due to their English proficiency, resulting risks for their job continuation.

Keywords: Dual Language MOI; Community School; Nepali-English Medium Education; Policy Appropriation; Power Dynamics and Tensions

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1. Introduction

The choice of MOI in education is a critical issue in Nepal, especially concerning the access to equitable quality education and academic achievement of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Nepal's recent MOI policy offers multiple possibilities of its practices in school contexts: Nepali medium education, English medium education, dual (i.e., English plus Nepali) medium education or mother-tongue based education. To meet the local needs, schools can creatively use any MOI with good intent for the school's sustainability in terms of the number of students and for addressing every student's right to equal and equitable access to quality education. To illustrate this, Akalaa School, for example, decided to use dual (i.e., Nepali and English) medium education at the same grades and premises, aiming to increase student numbers and ensure equal and equitable access to quality education for students with diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds [1,2]. With good intention, the school strategically implemented English and Nepali medium education from 2004, however, the unanswered question is whether equality and equity were maintained. If yes, how has it been maintained, whether students and teachers experience equality and equity in access to quality education in the school environment? The tensions often manifest among teachers, yet causes and features are still unseen, and positionality and constructs of students due to the MOI of education they were receiving are deeply buried. Taking this question in mind, I conducted an ethnographic study of Akalaa school and explored incongruities between the aspirations of the school's policy appropriation and the lived experiences of students and teachers. The study found tensions and power intricacies among students and teachers due to the MOI of their education. Similarly, the use of English and Nepali education resulted in the construct of self and others, and positioning among students and teachers. The tensions intensively laid on 'othering' and 'positioning'. Applying the concept of 'Other' [3,4], this paper unravels multiple power intricacies that arose among students and tensions among teachers because of dual-language MOI, drawing illustrations from Akalaa School.

2. Literature and Theoretical Framework

Levinson et al. argue that policy is a practice of power and a complex set of socio-cultural practices, appealing to prioritize democratic and participatory parameters in policy formation and practices [5]. They emphasize the human dimension of policy, suggesting making the official policy one's own by tailoring it to fit the particular context. For them, this process of tailoring is policy 'appropriation', a creative and interpretive practice of authorized policy that circulates across multiple institutional contexts through various means. Levinson et al.'s concept, "policy as a sociocultural practice of power", LPP researchers, particularly Nancy Hornberger, introduced an ethnography of LPP in the context of Peru in 1988 [5]. It provided a nuanced understanding of complex processes, illuminating their complexities. Then, LPP was viewed as a complex multi-layered socio-cultural process and metaphorically like an "Onion" [6,7], highlighting the importance of analysing the relations between structure and agency, power dynamics in policy practices in local contexts. Numerous studies have been conducted applying an ethnographic approach in the field with different focuses, contributing to the enrichment of literature, expansion of the sites and methods [7–9]. Ricento and Hornberger underscored the teacher agency in classroom contexts, taking it as the heart of the LPP process [6], labelling the teacher as the key policy actor [7], the policy creator who holds power to create or resist top-down LPP [10,11]. Hornberger and others argue that language policies can create spaces for multilingual education and minority languages [12], and it is the teacher who can support linguistic diversity by incorporating indigenous languages or children's mother tongues into bilingual education.

Studies in multilingual contexts, especially in Nepal, show that local appropriation of national MOI policy often results in heightened tensions, inequality, and unfairness among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and children [13]. Phyak and Bui explored how neoliberal ideologies influence language policy and planning (LPP) in Nepal and Vietnam [14]. Poudel et al. analyze colonial and decolonial influences on Nepal's language policies [15], emphasizing the marginalization of ethnic languages. According to studies [16,17], neoliberalism affects indigenous language preservation, language education and tourism; nationalists' ideologies marginalize local languages [18,19], reinforcing the dominance of Nepali and English despite increased awareness of language rights in the multilingual context of Nepal [20,21]. Echoing advocacy for pluralistic LPP [22], Taylor critiques the impact of dominant language instruction on minority students [23]. In the same vein, Tin notes the underrepresentation of local ELT, diminishing, assessing linguistic diversity and endangerment [24,25]. Drawing on finding of Freire [26], Baral argues that English-medium instruction (EMI) suppresses creativity and exacerbates inequalities [27], while Khati examines the government's support for EMI teachers [28]. Research reveals tensions between centralized authority and local agency [1,2], disconnection between constitutional multilingualism and monolingual education practices [29], reinforcing inequalities and language hierarchies [13,30]. Sultana's study reveals that the pressure to adopt English Medium Instruction (EMI) without sufficient preparation causes instructors to become psychologically stressed and demotivated [31], which has an impact on education as a whole. Therefore, there is a dire need for a more balanced

LPP framework [32]. Davis and Phyak introduce Engaged Language Education Policy (ELEP) as a framework for fostering stakeholder dialogue to promote equitable language policies [33], to connect between Nepal's multilingual education policies and actual classroom practices [34], calling for epistemic justice in language policy research [35]. It reveals that growing research on Nepal's LPP underscores its complexity and calls for more equitable policies to counteract neoliberal influences and linguistic hierarchies.

Existing studies such as those by [1,2,29], nevertheless, critique the structural and ideological constraints of Nepal's LPP; they often overlook how teachers and students actively negotiate, appropriate, or defy policies in classroom settings. Research on neoliberalism, nationalism, and globalization tends to focus on macro-level influences [14,27,30], rarely addressing how these forces shape teacher-student interactions, particularly in EMI and multilingual classrooms. According to Khati [28], teachers often struggle with policy demands due to inadequate EMI training, whereas Sah and Li highlight students' hierarchical positioning based on English proficiency [13], revealing how marginalization of minority languages further deepens these inequalities [15,18,19]. The studies also reveal that the transition to English MOI disproportionately impacts students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds when they are taught in English. These children have trouble understanding and participating in English-medium classrooms, which results in below-standard academic achievement, leading to increased dropout rates [36]. Notwithstanding, the majority of these studies overlook the micro-level strategies—informal negotiation—that result in students' construct, positioning and teachers' hierarchy and tension. Addressing this gap requires ethnographic research to examine how policy appropriation shapes classroom power dynamics, teacher agency, and student learning experiences.

The power dynamics and tension among students and teachers were analysed using "other" as a strong conceptual backup. Scholars have talked about the origin of other in terms of geography [37], culture [38], religion [39], and language [40], characterizing it as 'the negative', 'the outsider', 'the stranger', 'the non-legitimate', 'the lesser', and 'the problem'. 'Otherness' poses a challenge to the logic embedded in policy, curriculum, assessment, and evaluation programs, contesting the belief that educational phenomena can be completely understood and improved upon. It embodies the construct of backwardness, wherein students are marginalized and subjected to power dynamics leading to social exclusion or abjection, relegating certain groups to the periphery of the social hierarchy [4]. Maclure's concept of 'education's other' encapsulates various challenging and often overlooked aspects of education [3], such as pain, conflict, failure, irrationality, judgement, frailty, frivolity, and singularity inherent in educational endeavours that are intrinsic to educational pursuits. It suggests that education involves not only conventional learning but also a multitude of complex and sometimes uncomfortable experiences and dynamics. In this regard, Madsen views the idea of 'otherness' as operating within entanglements and fractures between political goals and pedagogical practices [4], where students and teachers encounter experiences from concealed, taboo, and hidden aspects that challenge conventional conceptualizations of schooling and education.

Acknowledging these intricate natures of LPP as discussed above and drawing the insights from Maclure and Madsen [3,4], this study analyses how the practices of dual language MOI (i.e., English and Nepali) with good intent of providing equal and equitable access of quality education to every student having diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds simultaneously concealed imbalanced positioning and tensions among students and teachers, in case of Akalaa School.

3. Research Methods and Procedures

This research applied an ethnographic design with nine months of fieldwork, studying through multilayered policy processes. Out of the four principal objectives of PhD study, this paper focuses on how dual-language MOI shaped students' constructs towards themselves and others, leading to positioning and tensions among them. To address this question, Hornberger's 'ethnography of LPP' provided a strong methodological framework [41]. Hornberger's 'ethnography of LPP' was theoretically founded on the work of Levinson [5,14], which emphasizes the analysis of the social and cultural context in which actors operate and how this context shapes their interpretation and appropriation of policy. The "ethnography of LPP" offered a complete picture of local practices of MOI and the interaction between the power of national policy and local actors, shedding light on the experiences of teachers, the construct of self, and the consequences of dual-language MOI in education in Akalaa School. The priority of this research was to understand the particularities, especially time and context-specific information, and multiple experiences of individual respondents, incorporating different voices and accounting for issues in their everyday lives. Therefore, the generality of the findings is the main limitation of this study.

To accomplish this, Aanboo Khaireni Tanahun district was selected as the study site due to its diverse socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic divide where several languages were spoken besides Nepali. Despite being a geographically flat area situated at the junction of several

districts and on the route to others, it had become a bustling centre for business and education due to six institutional schools and two community schools offering education in English, Nepali, or both. This became the main pulling factor for migrants from diverse backgrounds over the past 50 years, which has noticeable impact on the linguistic and demographic composition of the community as well as of the schools located there. Among the six main secondary schools, Akalaa School (pseudonym) was selected for the study. Akalaa School was a community secondary school located near a bustling market area, but along an inner concrete road. The school had six buildings of various sizes and shapes, all situated around a larger playground area. The playground was enclosed by a concrete wall with two main entrances- at the front or the back of the school. The main U-shaped building was especially used for teaching, offices and the library. The school had implemented dual language medium (i.e., English and Nepali) education since 2004. Accordingly, primary education (i.e., Grades 1–5) was in English Medium, basic, and secondary level education (i.e., Grades 6–10) were offered in both Nepali and English. The majority of primary level students were from Janajati or Dalit backgrounds, whereas students at the basic to secondary level who were in English medium came from Aanboo Khaireni. and in Nepali medium were from remote villages on the periphery. To analyze the school in terms of language typology of the school based on classification [42], it fell under the 'Type 1(b)' category. It implies that students initially spoke Nepali upon entering Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED)/Grade 1 (G1), but also had a different heritage language that was no longer commonly used in the community. The school had a heterogeneous student population, the majority of whom were Nepali speakers, and others were Gurung/Magar/Newar language speakers.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews were the primary data collection techniques used in this study. Participant observation is a data collection technique where the researcher establishes ongoing relationships with participants and observes their daily activities within a natural environment [43–45]. During this study, an attempt was made to immerse ourselves in the school environments, particularly in the classroom activities and school premises, to observe every subtle activity following [46]. In-depth interviews and informal talks were also conducted with students and teachers, and the head teacher. The classroom activities and outside events were recorded through note-taking and audio recordings, playing the role of a participating observer in the activities. Making informants feel comfortable, notes were jotted down, and interesting events, behaviours, and expressions were recorded to ensure the accuracy of data. At the end of each day, the notes were rewritten in detail to capture all the unique contexts and situations of each event and observation. In-depth interviews were conducted as complements to observation. The interviews were conducted in the Nepali language and were held in a location of their choice. Some interviews were conducted in groups. To ensure consistency and accuracy, observation and interview guidelines were used as data collection tools. Electronic devices such as a laptop, camera, and audio/video recorder were used to record and store the data. Field notes were written in Nepali, and the camera was used to capture images of the transcriptions and school documents.

The data were thematically analyzed, maintaining research ethics. Oral consent was obtained with a promise of confidentiality. The anonymity was assured by using pseudonyms. Participants were not compelled to be involved in the study and their freedom for choosing interview venue, time, and language were highly valued.

4. Analysis

At the outset of analysis, it is important to discuss school context and expose what was the good intent of the Akalaa School authorities for appropriating national LPP policy to dual language (i.e., English and Nepali) medium education. Then, how the policy process in the school context created groups and positioning among students and teachers.

4.1. Intent of Dual Language MOI: Shifting 'School of The Poor' to 'School of All"

Once considered a leading community school in the district, Akalaa School, in the 1990s, witnessed a significant decrease in the number of students due to the establishment of English-medium institutional schools in its periphery. Local elites and parents were motivated to give their children English medium education, gradually ignoring Akalaa School and its development. It caused frustration among teachers and administrators. It not only reduced the number of students but also created hierarchy among schools in terms of MOI as well as the socioeconomic backgrounds of the students who continued their education in the school. The establishment of English-medium private schools enrolled a larger number of students who were able to afford higher fees. It created a critical situation for students from lower economic backgrounds, the majority of whom were from Janajatis and Dalit poor economic backgrounds. It resulted explicit divide among students: English medium private school 'a school of the well-off', and Akalaa School 'a school of the poor'. This context struck the head teacher, and he was thinking about how to solve this problem. He called a mass meeting of school stakeholders and put the agenda of using dual-language MOI in the school so that they could increase student numbers, return local elites' attention to his school, and ensure education for all, shifting the 'school of the

poor' into 'school of all' [1]. Accordingly, the school started with transitional bilingual education, where Nepali was the common language and English was the target language with good intent. However, subtle, unanticipated positioning could be observed from the beginning of the students' admission process.

4.2. Social and Academic Positioning through Dual Language MOI

Introduction of the English and Nepali MOI policy not only aimed to widen access but also unintentionally reshaped how students are socially and academically positioned within the school system. Language choice began to function as a marker of status, ability, and belonging, creating new forms of stratification among students. This section explores how these dynamics unfolded across various institutional practices and everyday interactions.

4.2.1. Grouping and Admission Practices

The students' admissions and grouping processes were the earliest language-based differentiation sites. The MOI policy provided a choice allowing for parallel streams: English and Nepali. However, in practice, this dual-stream system became a mechanism for sorting students based on perceived academic potential, socioeconomic background, and parental preference. The division began at the very point of entry and set the tone for students' future academic experiences and social identities within the school.

Grouping Through the Admission Process

The term 'grouping' refers to the concept of segregation, positioning and treating others. The separate admission process was the seed of grouping. After the decision to use English and Nepali medium education, Akalaa School opened admission for both medium education as the first pathway of the dual language MOI policy practices. The account office made two separate registration files: one for the Nepali medium and another for the English medium. Similar to Valentin's argument [47], the school theoretically provided equal opportunity for all students who would meet the minimum requirement and were interested in enrolling in either medium. However, it was not equitable for students with a Nepali or English medium education background. For Nepali medium students, it was not accessible, firstly, because they were reluctant to shift medium of education, feeling insecure in bridging the English language gap in the late hours of their school education. Secondly, it was not easily equitable for them due to the relatively higher fee structure of English medium education and reciprocally their lower socioeconomic status. When I asked Nepali medium students the reason for not enrolling in English medium, one student said,

I am from a remote village…there was/is no boarding school. So, I studied in the Nepali medium in our village school up to grade eight. After I came to the bazaar, I couldn't study in English medium directly. I thought, "If I am admitted to an English medium, I cannot do well". That's why…. (Interview)

This excerpt reveals that students with a Nepali medium education background stepped back from admitting to English medium education, although the school theoretically provided equal opportunity, and they knew that English medium education had high social as well as academic value in their lives. They felt insecure about maintaining English-medium education due to their low exposure to English. In contrast, English medium students were reluctant to admit to Nepali medium education because they knew that their family had greater value in present days, and their family had invested more money and time in English medium education, and they felt pride to complete school-level education in English medium. In this regard, one student shared,

People are dying to improve their English for their bright future. I have got this opportunity, so why should I go backwards? My parents want me to progress in future by improving my English proficiency, not confining me to getting a Nepali medium education. (Interview)

Such phenomena caused two groups of students: Nepali medium students and English medium students, reinforcing two hierarchical positions: English non-proficient and English proficient, implying two ranks in terms of social value: 'lower' and 'upper', respectively. Besides this, students from either medium were further positioned in terms of merit list-based sections: students with better merits were grouped into section A and accordingly to section E in logical order implying section A is better than section B, section B is better than C and continuously up to section E, positioning section A as the best and section E as the poorest groups of students. Additionally, the school policy on subject choice also extended the gaps.

Positioning Through MOI-Based Subject Choice

Six compulsory and two optional subjects, i.e., 'optional I' and 'optional II', were provisioned in curricula (especially for Grades 9-10). Optional subjects in this context refer to the subjects that could be chosen either by the school or by the students. The optional subjects were of two categories: 'Optional I' and 'Optional II'. Among them, 'Optional I' was for students' choice; whereas, 'Optional II' was for the school's choice. However, from the lists of subjects developed by the Curriculum Development Centre, the school selected 'Economics Education' and 'Optional Mathematics' for the 'Optional I' and 'Health Education', 'Business and Account' and 'Education' for 'Optional II', leaving students no room to choose. Out of two subjects selected for 'Optional I', 'Optional Mathematics' was made mandatory for all students from English medium and some

Nepali medium students, whom they thought were better in Mathematics; whereas, all other Nepali medium students had to study 'Economics'. Similarly, among the three subjects selected for 'Optional II', 'Health Education' was made mandatory for English medium students; whereas 'Business and Account' was made mandatory for students from Nepali medium who were regarded as better in Mathematics. Finally, 'Education' was regulated for those who were perceived as poorer.

Here, no matter whether students were interested to learn a particular subject, whether they were capable of learning a particular subject, they were forced to study subjects of the school's choice. From the administration's perspective, it might be equitable for students of different abilities and manageable to run the school; nevertheless, from students' perspective, it covertly violated their rights. Such section division and subject choice policies fetched further complexities in the school, creating further cleavage between students. The following excerpt of the school head teacher shows his construct of otherness,

English medium students are relatively better. So, they likely study Medicine, Engineering and Nursing. "Health Education" in school will support them in future. But, almost all of the Nepali medium students are our resources for Grade Eleven: Faculty of Management and Faculty of Education" in our school. Furthermore, it is the strategy to make weaker students pass the board exam easily. (From field note)

Head teacher's excerpt reveals the school's ideology within section division and subject choice, i.e., to sustain +2 (i.e., grades 11 and 12) program and to ease administration, especially, to manage teachers and classrooms. Nevertheless, such restricted criteria of subject choice for English and Nepali medium students enforced two conflicting constructs that further deepened the cleavage between them. Firstly, the school authorities, including teachers, anticipated that English medium students were 'English proficient' and more talented, so they would likely study Engineering and Medicine. Their second prediction regarding Nepali medium students was that they were 'English non-proficient' and relatively untalented, so they would likely be admitted to the Faculty of Management and Faculty of Education, respectively. Another underlying logic of school administration and teachers behind restricting students from choosing their optional subjects was to ease weak students to pass the board exam.

Students' voices regarding subject choice disclose that the school was not doing justice to them. By restricting them from choosing an optional subject of their interest, the school administration was violating their rights. They expressed their bitter experience of such a tendency of the school. The following excerpt of an English medium student unpacks how they felt while they were completely prohibited from choosing the optional subject of their interest and level of proficiency to study.

We cannot choose what we are interested in. School forces us to study Health Education and Optional Mathematics. But Nepali medium students can choose "Account" or "Education". Those who are better at studying can choose 'Account', and those who are weaker can choose 'Education'. (Interview)

Besides students, teachers also had a similar experience regarding the school policy of subject choice. The following excerpt of a teacher who was teaching in English medium and also a guardian of an English medium student represents such facts.

My brother is in Grade Nine, studying 'Optional Mathematics' and 'Health Education' as optional I and optional II, respectively. He wants to study 'Commerce'. Therefore, studying 'Account' in school could be a plus point for his future career… It is very tough to pass the entrance exam for studying Medicine in Nepal. …it is not fair to restrict these students by imposing that X should take this and Y should take that in terms of the medium of education they are admitted. (Interview transcript, 13)

Such divisions not only reinforced the positions of students as "better" and "poorer" in terms of MOI, but also circuitously filtered them in terms of their residency, ethnicity, family and educational backgrounds, resulting in two very different categories: villager and urbane.

4.2.2. Language, Identity, and Social Constructs

Beyond institutional processes, the dual language MOI policy fostered specific discourses around student identity, echoing broader social hierarchies.

Constructs of the Villager and the Urbane

Borrowing the concept of Pigg [48], in this context, the term 'villager' is a social category of students in terms of place who have certain habits (i.e., shy), likely different goals, motivations, and languages (i.e., mother tongue other than Nepali, or Nepali, or mother tongue influenced by Nepali accent) and beliefs. These students are perceived as bound by traditional custom and blinded by tradition, whose ignorance is spoken of with pity, compassion, or decision…and perceived as backwards, as alien. Juxtaposition of this concept of [48], the meaning of 'urbane' is also a social category of students through place, i.e., from urban area who have adopted dominant culture and dominant language which are regarded as means of modernization, rather detach from original custom, have come across and experienced mixed traditions, more empowered, and assimilated. Such constructs were explicitly developed in Akalaa School. When I conducted a small-scale survey in the Nepali medium classrooms and interviewed some students, the majority of students were from indigenous ethnic backgrounds: dominantly from Gurung, some from Magar, some from marginalized groups, Dalits and a few were from Brahmans and Kshatriyas. Almost all of them were from remote villages, few were

from peripheral villages having relatively low economic backgrounds. The families of the majority of those students relied on Nepalese traditional agriculture, some were children of daily weigh workers, and some were children of lower-ranked employees. Being brought up in a relatively larger family with several siblings, some of them shared their complicated childhood experiences.

Almost all of the students from the Nepali medium group started their education from school in/or near their village. Because of the intricate footpath, the distance from school to home meant they had to spend more time on the way. The majority of these students were from less educated family backgrounds, unable to differentiate what is quality education, what is not. If someone were to ignore it, they would do so due to their low economic background. Their family backgrounds were not favourable enough to meet the school standards, nor was their school environment supportive enough to provide quality education to the national standards. Their first schools were of comparatively low quality due to ignorant parents, irregular and inefficient teachers. The low number of teachers and students was another factor that loosened the quality standards of the schools.

The majority of the Nepali medium students of Akalaa School were the graduates of Nepali medium schools from peripheral villages. Therefore, it was found that the first year of their school transfer remained alienating and strange for them, and they remained silent: receiving the information and knowledge of the new environment, encountering the new challenges from teachers, administrators, friends, school environments, school policy, and daily school activities. They came from schools with few students, where they could get more care both from the teachers and parents; therefore, they could be closer to the teachers. But they could not get equal attention in Akalaa School from teachers and administrators like in the previous school because of the larger number of students, lack of rapport with teachers and peers. Therefore, they tended to remain quiet, closely observing others' behaviour and activities, without attempting to participate actively. Thus, their first year was over in the process of "adjustment."

…Such behaviour of students supports to frame construct of administrators, teachers, and even of students that Nepali medium students are shy, passive, poorer, dull and backwards. The following excerpt of a teacher reveals the fact how a child from a remote place became muted while struggling for adjustment in a new environment, although he, later on, came to the mainstream:

Last year, one student from a Janajati background from a school in a remote village came in grade six. In the first class, I asked his name, but he didn't speak. I asked again, "Please tell me your name." But he didn't say anything; instead, his eyes were full of tears. I asked him, "Where are you from?" But he didn't reply. Then I thought that he had a problem with speaking and asked other students, "Does he speak with you?" They replied, "No, Miss. He does not speak with us, either." He remained silent, and it was very difficult to teach him the whole year…. But, to my surprise, next year he started speaking in the classroom. Presently, he not only talks but is also forward in every activity. … (From Interview transcript 13 pdf- 574:38)

The above excerpt illustrates that the students needed to re-acquire local ways of life as a process of adjustment, which is central to developing a perception of safety and a sense of belonging. At the beginning, the boy remained reticent and muted, manifesting passivity, but internally, he was not. Instead, he was actively belonging in the new environment. He started coming to the front line of active students in the class after he felt at ease, developing a sense of belonging. In the same line, the principal shared:

Those who are from remote villages do not want to come out, even if they are talented. They are too shy, normally they do not ask even if they do not know about something. They have unnecessary fear…. Such behaviours have many impacts on their progress.

It reveals that bearing a trait of 'villager' [48], students from remote villages remained reticent, muted and reluctant to participate in the classroom interaction. In case they dared to do so, they were harassed by teachers and peers' laughter at for wordings and accents, nearly muting them from classroom interaction. The following excerpt demonstrates this fact:

During the classroom interaction, they speak Khas language (i.e., Nepali) with a flavour of Gurung accent and subject-verb conjugation … they stand up from their seats and say *"Maile to Janeno, sir"* [emphasis added] (meaning: I do not understand, sir) with the flavour of Gurung accent…Listening to such utterances, the rest of the students laugh at them. When they produce such utterances in my classroom, sometimes I also tease them, saying, *"Hey! You are going to your village."* [Emphasis added]. It frequently happens in the classroom, almost making them dump. (From interview transcript 13)

This expert illustrates that their silence and reticence in and out of the classrooms not only solidified the construct of 'villager' but also made the entire school environment 'foreign' for them, leading to the crisis of belonging. Early months of new sessions, teachers encourage them to participate in the classroom activities, but when they see no progress, they become frustrated. Subsequently, they almost stop encouraging them even to take part in co-/extra-curricular activities, labelling them as passive, shy, latent and weaker than those from English medium. When such behaviours continue, it leads to teachers' ignorance towards them, resulting in their spiritual absence from school activities, regardless of their physical presence. It solidifies the teachers, peers and administrators' construct of the 'villager' towards them.

On the contrary, students from the English medium

were dominantly from Brahmans and Kshatriyas, some were from Newar elites, and a few were from more privileged Gurung/Magar families. Although their previous villages were somewhere in remote places, they studied in English medium from their childhood, and most of them were from a small family background. Remittance was the principal source of income for most of the families, and some were from two-career families (where both parents had jobs). The geographical proximity of residency, family background, and school environment was very supportive of English medium students in the adjustment to the new environment. It helped them strengthen the feeling of belonging and a homely environment in the school, irrespective of, they were transferred from other institutional schools. For them, the classroom was a miniature society where they were brought up. The value of English and the community discourse for English language proficiency supported them in earning confidence, being more active participants in activities, in the classroom, doing homework, and so forth. Such behaviours automatically strengthened their educational performance compared to Nepali medium students. Such very opposite behaviours of students from English and Nepali medium classes, ultimately shaped the construct among principal, teachers and students in the school that English medium students were better, active, and more talented compared to Nepali medium students, showing the trait of the 'urbane'.

The Concepts of 'Better and Poorer'; 'Successful and Failure'

As discussed above, English medium students in Akalaa School were perceived as the active, better, more talented and, most notably, English proficient. They were highly favoured compared to Nepali medium students. The school authorities considered them as the pride of the school, anticipating that they were the only students who secured the first division with distinction and the first division in the SLC examination (a nationally standardized test in school education, now it is named as SEE). Its value was attached to the prestige of the school in society and the national educational world. They believed that even if English medium students who were poorer in the classroom would likely pass the SLC exam, securing higher marks compared to Nepali medium students. The following excerpt of the principal reveals this fact:

Comparatively, English medium students are better than Nepali medium students. … SLC result is the touchstone for quality assurance of our school. A thin expectation is that one or two students from the Nepali medium might secure better results. More failed students are from the Nepali medium. For this year, we estimate that about fourteen to fifteen students will secure first division with distinction, who are all from English medium, and even poorer students from English medium pass the exam compared to Nepali medium students.

It shows that the school authorities had taken English medium students as the symbol of 'successes and the source of school reputation, whereas Nepali medium students were perceived as a cause of 'failure', directly creating the hierarchy of students. Here, the concept of the better is based solely on the result obtained in the SLC examination in terms of both quantity and quality. This construct was not only in the school authorities, but also in teachers. The following extract of a teacher demonstrates it: "*From average level English medium students likely secure at least 65% to 70%, while better students from Nepali medium likely secure approximately 10% less...*" [Emphasis added]. The confidence level of English medium students was higher than that of those who were from the Nepali medium. Because of such confidence, they normally do better in the examination. They would likely obtain high marks, pass the examination, and consequently, they were categorized as "successful." The following excerpt of the principal reveals this fact:

Except for one or two exceptional cases, generally, those who are studying via the English medium are more confident than those who are from the Nepali medium. If we compare, regardless they are studying via English medium, those Gurung students who are from a mixed society are like children of Brahmans/Kshatriyas in terms of their confidence level, activities, and concepts.

These concepts of school authorities and teachers entailed complexities in policy practices, especially in the case of equal and equitable input that all students get in the classrooms. In this regard, a subject teacher said, "…. let us teach English medium sections using collaborative technique, not to teach in this way to Nepali medium sections because they are weak." (From Field Note: 40)

It reveals that concepts of 'better' and 'poorer' of the subject teacher towards English medium and Nepali medium students caused inequality and inequity in terms of the quality and quantity of input they get from the teacher. Besides these, the concepts of 'better' and 'poorer' reinforced the self-positioning of students. Nepali medium students shared that English medium students were more talented, who often showed superiority in front of them. The following excerpt of Nepali medium students shows this fact:

Up to now, English medium students are more talented and they deserve the first, second and third ranks. We can't compete with them. We cannot be better than them in study and performance. So, they look down on us. They feel that Nepali medium students are weaker and of a lower level.

Nepali medium students not only placed themselves in a "lower position" but also wanted to maintain distance from English medium students, feeling themselves inferior. Their concepts of better and poorer were further proliferated by examination scores they often obtained. The bias constructs of better and poorer were explicitly revealed

in subject teachers' discriminatory scoring, deepening the cleavage between English and Nepali medium students.

4.2.3. Academic Stratification and Participation

Academic stratification often emerged through the positioning of students based on their scores, which shaped their perceived competence and access to learning opportunities. This hierarchical positioning led to imbalanced participation in extra and co-curricular activities, where high scorers were favoured while others remained marginalized.

Positioning Through Scoring

… I am the first boy and trying my best, but never obtained a better score in Environment and Population, Education and Social Studies than the first, second and third ranked students of English-medium education. I am frustrated, realizing that the examiners hate the Nepali language. I shared it with a teacher, but he said, "It is interesting to check the answers written in English…" I read many books along with the textbook of each subject, listen to teachers' lectures attentively and incorporate all the good ideas in my writing. But I always get lower marks than some top-ranked students from the English medium. (Experience shared by a Nepali medium student)

This excerpt reveals the lived experience of one of the top Nepali medium students regarding the marks he usually obtained in almost all of the exams he took in Akalaa School. He was critical and questioned, but not heard, leading to frustration. Such segregation was confirmed when the checked answer papers in Social Studies were detected. The papers were sent-up-SLC test. Four representative papers: two were in English medium and two were in Nepali medium, were taken, and it was found that the answers written in Nepali medium were more exemplified, evidence-based, compared to answers written in English medium, but obtained a lower score.

The paper written in Nepali medium included different examples showing the relationships between peace and development well by illustrating the severe damages of two Cities in Japan due to the bomb blast during World War II, whereas the paper in English medium was without such justifiable examples. However, the examiner provided higher (i.e., 3.5) marks for answers written in English, but he assigned lower (i.e., 3) marks for answers written in Nepali medium.

Such scoring strategies reveal that the pre-determined concept of the teachers towards a particular language as a medium led to inequality and injustice to the students. In manifestation, it seems that the prejudices remained due to the attitude towards languages; however, it implicitly created a lower positioning of students from socioeconomically and geographically as well as ethnically marginalized backgrounds. The social studies teacher who teaches in the Nepali medium and is also a member of the scrutiny board of the SLC exam shared his experience in this regard:

Our hands do not raise to assign more marks to papers written in Nepali, no matter how much and how well they are written. …. English medium students get more marks for the same answer..… Papers in the English medium are neat and clean. When we see them, we deduce that they must have written well and assign maximum marks. In case of papers written in the Nepali medium, we don't do so. It is not only done in the SLC, but also in the school-level examinations. (From field note)

It unravels the construct of different stakeholders that had deepened the cleavage of inequality and injustice between English-medium and Nepali-medium students. Nepali medium students were perceived as the villagers, backwards, passive, dull and weak. It was due to a preoccupied concept which teachers inherently borrowed from the broader social framework, and also to some extent supported by the behaviours and activities students showed during the first/and or a couple of years of their adjustment.

Appropriation in the policy chiefly constructed categories of students as the upper and the lower. Such categories created a new order of students, even in the scoring of the exam papers. The low proficiency of examiners and the social value of English became the means of such discrimination. Such discrimination, in turn, strengthened the construct that English medium students were better, more talented and Nepali medium students were weaker.

Besides the discrimination in scoring, there are some contradictory views among school authorities, teachers and students regarding the participation of students in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, too.

Imbalanced Participation in Extra/Co-Curricular Activities

During the first year of admission in Akalaa School, students from feeder schools remained passive, supporting the common construct of school authorities and teachers that these students were shy, poor and villagers (as described in the previous section). They did not speak more, did not want to take part in the classroom activities, nor were they interested in taking part in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. Such behaviours helped to solidify concepts of school authorities and teachers that Nepali medium students do not take part in extra/co-curricular activities. The following excerpt from a teacher illustrates this concept:

This Friday we have a program…For this, we have to make the names of participants by Thursday. We go to all sections to collect the participants' names… However, no students from Nepali medium classrooms show their interest and respond, regardless of their ability. They do not normally participate in extra/co-curricular activities and other programs. Contrary to this, the majority of English-medium students show their interest in participating. Most

often, it is difficult for us to select their names. As a result, Nepali medium students are being backwards because of themselves, not because of teachers and nobody else.

It reflects the teacher's perception towards Nepali medium students, blaming them for not showing interest in such activities. In this regard, Nepali medium students shared different experiences that neither extra/co-curricular activities were conducted focusing on Nepali medium students, nor were they informed what programs were going to be organized in the school. In this line, a Nepali medium student said, "Yeah! Such extra/co-curricular activities are not normally conducted for Nepali medium students. Most of the time, we are not informed what programs are going to be held in the school and when."

Some girls from the Nepali medium also shared similar experiences-

When we were in grade nine, English medium students would take part in the dance program. We were also interested, but we were not informed what program was going to be held in the school. English-medium students would be informed about everything and were selected to take part; they were/are focused. Normally, they do not inform anything to Nepali medium students about the inter-school competitions.

It reveals that Nepali medium students' distraction in extra-curricular activities gradually created deficient categories in the school, which not only strengthened teachers', administrators', and English medium students' deficiency constructs towards them but also coagulated their constructs against themselves.

Such positioning was not only seen among students but also observed among teachers during the practices of dual language MOI in the school.

4.3. Dual Language MOI and Positioning of Teachers

Just as the dual language MOI redefined students' experiences, it also reshaped the professional roles, positions, and self-perception of teachers. This section explores how language ideologies influence teacher positioning within the school, both structurally and symbolically.

4.3.1. Language Ideology and Professional Pressure

One of the most significant effects of the dual language MOI policy was the pressure on teachers with low English proficiency. The ideology equated English with modernity and academic success, creating hierarchies and job security. The teachers with low English proficiency had the pressure of either teaching in English medium or resigning from their job.

English or quit job: pressure on Nepali-medium teachers. When the school decided to use Nepali and

English medium education, it also developed an "English or Quit Job" policy. There was a demand for more English-proficient teachers to run the program smoothly. The school wanted to run programs with the existing human resources so that it did not have to bear more financial burden. However, almost all of the experienced teachers were permanent with low proficiency in English. In this context, the school authorities, with the support of parents or other community people, developed the "English or Quit Job" strategy for the welfare of the school. This strategy emerged with twin tensions among teachers; either be able to teach in English medium or quit the job. Those who did not dare to do so had to quit the job, and those who accepted to teach in English could continue the job. However, they had to face different problems resulting from their low proficiency in English. The following excerpt of DEO exposes one of the tensions:

This year, almost 250 teachers left their jobs. We asked them to quit their job because they could not upgrade them to teach in the English medium, so that we can recruit new generation teachers who are capable of teaching via the English medium.

It reveals that the lack of English proficiency of most of the teachers created tension, either leaving the job or accepting the challenge. Those who were not ready and upgraded were forced to quit the job by the DEO; Otherwise, they had to dare to teach in English medium. Such conditions created pressure on English-non-proficient teachers and led to their direct torture by the DEO authorities. The following excerpt shows it:

When we visit schools, we say to teachers, "If you can't teach in English, you have to learn from your children and try in the classroom…. English is a language, it will be difficult in the first year; from the following year, the confidence will increase. If you cannot do so, you have to quit the job." Some teachers have tried…

English-proficient teachers were valued not only by district-level authority but also by school stakeholders. It seemed that the security of a job was based on the level of proficiency in English. Not only this, the school authorities had the concept that those who were better in English would automatically be better in other subjects, too.

4.3.2. Constructing Teacher Competence Through English Proficiency

In addition to direct pressure, language ideologies shaped the ways how school authorities assessed teacher competence across disciplines. English was not only valued as a subject but also as a symbol for overall teaching quality.

Better in English; better in other subjects: construct of school authorities. Schools and DEO authorities not only forced the teachers either to teach in English or quit their job, but also inclined to appoint teachers whose English was better with the construct that "those teachers who are better in English, are better in teaching Nepali and

other subjects, too." The following excerpt of the principal of Akalaa School reflects this fact:

We do not recruit teachers for English medium and Nepali medium separately. …. The same teachers have to teach in English medium and Nepali medium. Those teachers who are better in the English language are also better in the Nepali language because Nepali is his/her mother tongue… There will be no problem. While recruiting, we emphasize their English proficiency and teaching performance, in addition to the minimum qualifications and requirements. We assume that those who are better in English can teach any subjects in the Nepali language, too.

This construct of the school authorities had, on the one hand, elevated the status of English-proficient teachers, and, on the other hand, completely diminished the status of teachers of the Nepali medium that was gained from long-term teaching via the Nepali medium. Such perception of school authorities created two positions of teachers: English-proficient and English-non-proficient. The former was regarded as the upper hierarchy, whereas the latter was regarded as the lower. They had the false assumption that English-proficient teachers were regarded as all-rounders who could teach all other subjects, including Nepali. The frustration of school authorities regarding the appointment of English-non-proficient teachers could be experienced from the following excerpt of the principal:

We have made pollution. Firstly, we have to change the set…In the past, we recruited more female teachers than male teachers to teach small children. But they did not change themselves. Presently, we can neither tell them to quit the job nor can we fire them. It is also not possible to keep and feed them because they cannot provide quality teaching. If I find anyone whose English is better, I will recruit them to replace those old-fashioned ones. But it should be done slowly, not radically…

The English language non-proficient teachers had been a burden for the school authorities; they were being unwanted day by day because they were not proficient in English medium teaching…it had created a dilemma in the institution; whether they were forced to quit the job themselves or were fired. The term "pollution" used by the principal in this context refers to the annoying levels of the English environment due to the lack of most of the teachers' rudimentary level of English proficiency in the school.

This construct of school authorities helped to elevate English-proficient teachers, while it caused English-non-proficient teachers to decline. This construct further entrenched the conflict not only between the authorities and teachers, but also among the two categories of teachers. The teachers had a construct of self and others.

4.3.3. Teachers' Constructs of Self and Other

Teachers developed the construct of "Self" and "Other" based on their English proficiency levels. They were dissatisfied with others and tense during policy practices. They seemed humiliated, passive, and ignored by the authorities due to their poor English, but perceived English-proficient teachers as active, valued by school authorities and colleagues. The following excerpt reveals such tensions and positioning:

Nowadays, we have primary-level teachers who are teaching in the English medium. One day, a teacher taught and went. My eyes fell onto a board in a primary-level classroom. For "Good Morning," she gave the Nepali translation, such as "Good" means "Ramro" and "morning" means "bihaana" separately (laughs), …that old-fashioned human resources …. now they are not capable of teaching in English… (Field note 35 pdf. 541:43)

The capability of teaching in English had been interrogated not only by the colleague who thought that they were more capable of teaching at the secondary level, but also revealed tension in the teachers when the school developed the "English or Quit the Job" ideology. This ideology of school authorities imposed the old-fashioned teachers either to teach in English regardless of their low proficiency or to quit the job. This issue particularly occurred at the primary level when Akalaa School completely shifted the medium of instruction from Nepali to English. Some teachers quit their jobs, and those who dared to teach in English experienced the problem of comprehending the texts and fluency while delivering the lesson. There seemed to be problems in the appropriate use of phrases and also a lack of sufficient vocabulary. As a result, they translated word by word, destroying the original meaning of the sentence/phrase as in the above example. While teaching "Greeting" in English to lower-level students, the teacher translated each word of "Good Morning" in a way that 'Good' means "Ramro" and "Morning" means "Bihaana" altogether "Ramro Bihaana" which does not provide the original meaning of 'Good Morning' in English, nor does it give a sense of greeting in Nepali. It was one of the many instances of teaching strategies used by most of the teachers which could not develop language proficiency, skills and concepts of the content; instead, it had a malfunction in students' learning and creativity development. Such teaching entailed interrogation of the level of competency of those teachers. It created two hierarchies of teachers: "English-proficient" and "English-non-proficient", regardless of their job position and status of permanency. The former was perceived as higher, and the latter was perceived as lower hierarchy. As per permanency, job position and appointment, Nepali-medium teachers tended to get more facilities and training compared to English-medium teachers of their corresponding levels, which escalated tension between them. The following excerpt of a

secondary-level English-medium teacher illustrates such tension:

Here are two Social Studies teachers who have long experience in teaching Social Studies in the Nepali medium. They have had a lot of training at different times, and nowadays they are in training. We sometimes share our experiences and problems. Normally, I share with them what I know, but I have never got any ideas from them. I get nothing … They are nearly illiterate in English and do not share anything in Nepali, either. (Field note 35)

It exposes that there was conflict between teachers who were teaching at the same level, but via two different media. In terms of national policy, permanent as well as government recruited teachers would get opportunities to participate in training, workshops and conferences organized by DEO and RC in comparison to locally appointed English-medium teachers. Due to low proficiency in English, old-fashioned teachers were positioned in a lower hierarchy not only by the authorities, but also by themselves. The following excerpt illustrates the tension and burden an Economics teacher felt while he was forced to teach Social Studies in English medium by the school administration, regardless of his low proficiency in English:

This afternoon, in grade nine, I could not write the correct spelling of the word "pedestrian", which means "walker"; instead, I wrote "pedestrait". I was confused whether the final letter was 't' or 'n'. Then, I took out my cell phone and searched for the word, which I would never have done before. Unfortunately, that didn't show for some time. When I didn't find the word there, then I was more confused and said students I am confused and wrote 'n'. (Field note, 35)

Such feelings of a teacher had a direct influence on their professional development and motivation to work. They seemed frustrated due to the devaluation of their teaching expertise in other subjects rather than in English. They were positioned as latent and poor. According to them, neither of them could lead a program organized in the school, nor were they allowed to show one. They also felt that their colleagues who were better in English were more active and were proud that they were good at English. As their English was valued by the school administrators and parents, they became more confident to do every activity conducted in the school. But those teachers whose English was not good gradually lost their confidence. A similar tension was shared by primary-level female teachers during informal conversation. The following extract reveals that their tension emerged due to the lack of English proficiency:

Nobody hears our voice… because of our low proficiency in English. Teachers, especially the principal, instantly say, "If you feel challenged to teach in the English medium, quit the job so that new, energetic teachers who are proficient in English can be recruited. It will be beneficial to all: the school, newcomers and you. (A primary-level female teacher)

On the one hand, teachers themselves repented on their low proficiency in English and placed themselves in lower-level categories as latent, backwards, and weak compared to English-proficient colleagues. On the other hand, such "emotional blackmail" of the school had further hurt them. Here, I use the term "emotional blackmail" to refer to the school administrators' words or acts of putting pressure on those teachers who were from a Nepali medium education background, and had been teaching via Nepali medium for more than a couple of decades in permanent tenure. It was for those who were not quite able to teach in English medium, either to be able to teach in English or quit the job, both they did not want to do. Almost all of the teachers whose English was poor had such experiences in the school. Because of such feelings, they hesitated to take part in activities, gradually lost confidence, and tended to escape from challenges. As a result, they would vanish from the other faces; they did not want to be involved in conversation with others, which further supported to consolidation of the construct of authorities towards them. Sometimes, the school authorities also felt guilty and were caught in a dilemma.

5. Discussion

Drawing on the study by Levinson et al. [5], policy is conceptualized as a practice of power that involves appropriation, a creative and interpretive process through which local actor shape policy in ways that fit their specific contexts. This perspective aligns with Ricento and Hornberger's metaphor of LPP as an "onion," underscoring the intricate interplay between structure and agency in policy implementation [6]. In the case of Akalaa School, this interplay is evident in the ways school administrators and teachers negotiated and appropriated the national MOI policy to dual language (i.e., English and Nepali) to address their institutional concerns.

The adoption of dual-language MOI, while designed to create equity, has led to unintended consequences, exacerbating social inequalities and tensions among stakeholders [13]. The increasing preference for English-medium instruction in community schools is perceived as an effort to compete with institutional schools, yet it marginalizes students from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds while disproportionately benefiting middle-class and elite students [18,36]. By establishing a dichotomy between English-proficient and non-proficient students, this policy appropriation inadvertently reinforced pre-existing hierarchies among students. Teachers, particularly those trained in the Nepali language, struggle with the shift to Dual language MOI,

resulting in pedagogical challenges, classroom conflicts, and reduced teaching effectiveness [31].

Akalaa School's policy of subject choice also played a crucial role in shaping students' academic trajectories. By mandating specific optional subjects for different MOI streams, the school administration effectively predetermined students' educational and career paths. This practice mirrors findings from Sah and Phyak [18,35], who argue that MOI policies often reflect and perpetuate systemic biases rather than providing truly equitable opportunities. The school administration's rationale—that English medium students were more likely to pursue prestigious careers in medicine and engineering, while Nepali medium students were expected to enter business or education—further reinforced social stratification. Students and teachers expressed dissatisfaction with these rigid policies, as seen in interview excerpts where students felt deprived of the opportunity to choose subjects, aligning with their interests and career aspirations. Teachers also acknowledged the limitations of the policy, recognizing that students' capabilities and aspirations were being overlooked. This aligns with Hornberger and Johnson's argument that teachers are key policy actors who can either enact or resist top-down policies [7]. At Akalaa School, teachers navigated these constraints by employing strategies such as code-switching to facilitate learning, similar to findings from Sultana on EMI implementation challenges [31].

The assumption that English-medium students are inherently better, more talented, and more likely to succeed in standardized national assessments, such as the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam (now Secondary Education Examination, SEE), underscores the institutional bias in educational discourse. The principal's statement reflects this deeply ingrained perception, as he explicitly associates the school's reputation with the performance of English-medium students. The belief that even the weaker students in English-medium sections would outperform Nepali-medium students in standardized assessments reveals a systemic preference for English as a linguistic capital [49]. This aligns with sociolinguistics theories that emphasize the role of language in social stratification, where linguistic dominance dictates educational and professional opportunities [50].

Teachers' informal discussions and instructional decisions further reinforce this divide. The reluctance to implement collaborative teaching strategies in Nepali-medium classrooms due to the perception of students being 'weak' suggests a clear inequity in pedagogical input. This bias is further exemplified by the view that English-medium students require minimal input to grasp content, whereas Nepali-medium students are deemed less capable and undeserving of the same level of instructional support. Such discriminatory practices resonate with Cummins's assertion that bilingual education policies often reinforce power hierarchies rather than providing equitable educational opportunities [51].

A critical consequence of this systemic bias is the self-perception of inferiority among Nepali-medium students. Their reflections on their academic performance and social positioning illustrate a process of internalized marginalization. They see themselves as inherently less capable and accept a lower status within the academic community, reinforcing notion of symbolic violence, where dominated groups unconsciously accept their subordinate position [52]. This self-positioning is further exacerbated by the explicit social behaviours of English-medium students, who project superiority and reinforce the divide.

Assessment and grading practices serve as another powerful tool in reinforcing the distinction between 'better' and 'poorer' students. Teachers' biases in scoring exams contribute to the systematic disadvantaging of Nepali-medium students, creating an academic environment where success is not determined solely by ability but by linguistic and institutional preference. The resulting 'bitter experiences' reported by students and teachers highlight how standardized assessment structures perpetuate educational inequalities [53].

Examining the scoring patterns reveals systemic discrimination against Nepali-medium students. The assumption that students writing in English are more competent, even when their answers lack depth and contextual examples, perpetuates inequities. Teachers and examiners, often under institutional pressure, reinforce this bias by awarding higher marks to English-medium students. Additionally, the selection criteria for examiners, favouring long-serving teachers with limited English proficiency, contribute to the problem, as these examiners may lack the confidence to assess English responses critically. Consequently, Nepali-medium students are positioned as 'the Other'—perceived as academically inferior and excluded from educational opportunities [3,4]. The privileging of English-medium education constructs Nepali-medium students as 'the lesser,' reinforcing their marginalization. The structured inequality in scoring and assessment practices sustains this dynamic, further deepening social divisions.

The lived experiences of students further illuminate the marginalization caused by MOI policies. As evidenced in Akalaa School, students from Nepali-medium backgrounds frequently encounter barriers to participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. Teachers and school authorities often perceive these students as passive, uninterested, or lacking the requisite skills for active engagement. However, student narratives reveal a different reality—one where they are systematically excluded from information about school programs and activities. The lack of proper communication and inclusion further reinforces their marginalization, creating a cycle where they

internalize deficit-based identities imposed upon them by teachers and peers.

The concept of "othering" provides a critical lens through which these power dynamics and exclusions can be analysed. Drawing on geographic "othering", cultural "othering", and linguistic "othering" [37,38,40], it is evident that students from Nepali-medium backgrounds are positioned as outsiders within the English-medium-dominated school environment. Maclure's concept of "education's other" and Madsen's exploration of fractures between political goals and pedagogical practices further elucidate how systemic inequities are embedded in educational structures [3,4]. These constructs manifest in the hierarchical differentiation between "active" and "passive" students, "urban" and "rural" backgrounds, and "elite" and "marginalized" learners, shaping students' self-perceptions and long-term educational trajectories.

Teachers' struggles in adapting to EMI in Akala School echo broader regional concerns. As Sah notes [18], many teachers in Nepal and South Asia lack the pedagogical expertise and linguistic proficiency necessary for effective EMI implementation.

At Akalaa School, the hierarchical positioning of English and Nepali MOI students created psychological barriers, fostering feelings of inadequacy among Nepali-medium students and reinforcing the dominant status of English-medium learners. These findings resonate with Sah's argument that EMI contributes to social exclusion [18], as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds struggle with linguistic competence and academic performance, leading to increased dropout rates [36].

Drawing from findings of Maclure and Madsen [3,4], the findings reveal how educational structures reinforce exclusionary binaries of success and failure. The principal's reflections on SLC examination outcomes illustrate how linguistic and cultural factors influence academic performance. The classification of students into categories of "success" and "failure" is deeply intertwined with linguistic hierarchies and socio-economic positioning, further marginalizing students from Nepali-medium instruction. The perception of Gurung girls as "shy" and disadvantaged in examination settings underscores the gendered dimensions of educational inequities, highlighting the intersections of language, gender, and power in LPP practices.

Moreover, the result demonstrates how spatial and social contexts shape students' academic trajectories. English-medium students, often from mixed and urbanised communities, exhibited higher confidence levels, facilitating their success in examination settings. This reinforces the notion that MOI is not merely a linguistic choice but a deeply embedded socio-political construct that influences students' educational experiences and outcomes.

The findings of this study highlight the significant friction and tension created by the transition from Nepali medium to English medium instruction (MOI) in schools. The discourse of "English or Quit Job," frequently circulated by educational authorities, illustrates the coercive nature of the policy implementation and its impact on teachers who lack English proficiency. The construct of hierarchical positioning among teachers based on their English proficiency underscores the socio-cultural and professional implications of such policy shifts. The pressures exerted by authorities have led to job insecurity, emotional distress, and professional dilemmas for Nepali medium teachers.

Levinson et al. conceptualize policy as a socio-cultural practice of power, shaped by hierarchical relationships and local appropriations [5]. The forced resignation of teachers who could not teach in the English medium exemplifies top-down policy enforcement without adequate provisions for teacher training or professional development. This phenomenon echoes the concerns raised by Ricento and Hornberger [6], who argue that language policy implementation must consider teacher agency rather than merely imposing structural changes. In this case, teachers were positioned as passive recipients rather than active participants in policy appropriation, leading to heightened professional insecurities.

The study underscores the emergence of two hierarchical categories among teachers: English-proficient and English-non-proficient. The former group is positioned as superior, capable of teaching not only English but also other subjects, while the latter group is perceived as outdated and ineffective. This assumption mirrors findings from Sah and Li [13], who argue that the local adoption of EMI policies often reinforces existing social hierarchies rather than promoting equitable educational outcomes. The belief that proficiency equates to overall teaching competence disregards the pedagogical expertise and subject knowledge that Nepali medium teachers possess. Consequently, experienced but English-limited teachers are devalued, further exacerbating professional tensions and reducing morale.

The coercion imposed through EMI adoption places immense psychological stress on teachers. As revealed in the narratives, teachers experienced humiliation, self-doubt, and fear of job loss, leading to diminished confidence and professional disengagement. Sultana argues that EMI implementation without adequate teacher preparation leads to increased anxiety and diminished teaching effectiveness [31]. This study corroborates these findings, as teachers forced to teach in English struggled with fluency, comprehension, and appropriate instructional strategies. The example of a teacher incorrectly translating "Good Morning" into Nepali highlights the practical challenges faced in classrooms, negatively impacting student learning and reinforcing self-doubt among teachers.

Research indicates that EMI policies disproportionately benefit urban and elite students while

depriving those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds [18,32]. The study findings align with this argument, as the preference for English-proficient teachers suggests a broader social construct that privileges English over Nepali. The lack of adequate training opportunities for Nepali medium teachers exacerbates this divide, as they receive fewer professional development resources compared to their English-proficient counterparts.

Table 1 shows key tensions and positionings among students and teachers

Table 1. Key tensions and positionings among students and teachers.

Students	Social and Academic Positioning		
	Grouping and Admission Practices	Language, Identity, and Social Constructs	Academic Stratification and Participation
Teachers	Language Ideology and Professional Pressure	Teacher competence is constructed through English proficiency	Develop constructs of self and other

6. Conclusions

This study provides an ethnographic account of how Language Policy and Planning (LPP) is enacted at the local level, revealing the tensions and contradictions that emerge when national policies are implemented in multilingual educational contexts. The case of Akalaa School highlights how the dual-language medium of instruction (MOI), despite its intended goal of fostering inclusivity, has inadvertently contributed to student segregation, social stratification, and restricted academic mobility. Rather than bridging linguistic and socio-economic divides, the policy has reinforced existing disparities, privileging English-medium students while marginalizing their Nepali-medium counterparts.

One of the central findings of this study is the role of teacher agency in policy appropriation. As Hornberger and Johnson suggest [7], teachers are not passive implementers of top-down policies but active negotiators and, at times, resistors of policy mandates. However, in Akalaa School, their agency remains constrained by systemic pressures that uphold English as the dominant linguistic capital. The labelling of Nepali-medium students as "shy" and "passive" illustrates how micro-level enactments of policy can reproduce broader social hierarchies, reinforcing perceptions of linguistic and cultural inferiority. These findings align with the conceptualization of LPP as a socio-cultural practice of power [5], where policy implementation is shaped by local structures, institutional ideologies, and individual agency.

The study also brings attention to the socio-emotional dimensions of EMI adoption. The struggles of Nepali-medium students—marked by linguistic barriers, classroom exclusion, and identity re-negotiation—demonstrate how policy decisions impact student experiences beyond academic performance. As Maclure and Madsen argue [3,4], education is inherently a space of contradictions, where inclusionary policies can generate unintended exclusions. The categorization of students as "villagers" or "urbane," as discussed by Pigg [48], reflects the deep-seated social biases that shape educational trajectories and access to opportunities.

These findings underscore the need for more flexible and context-sensitive LPP approaches that prioritize equity, linguistic inclusivity, and teacher agency. Rather than enforcing rigid EMI mandates, policies should allow for localized adaptations that recognize the diverse linguistic realities of classrooms. As Mohanty et al. suggest [11], bottom-up policy approaches that integrate teacher perspectives can lead to more effective and sustainable educational reforms. This requires not only participatory decision-making in language policy but also greater investment in teacher training, resource allocation, and translanguaging strategies that support meaningful bilingual education. The specific steps 1. Promoting a localized and flexible MOI model that allows schools to appropriate policy based on their specific contexts. Policies should support hybrid models as translanguaging or bilingual instruction, rather than imposing a central policy that supports the linguistic resources of all students. 2. Empowering teachers through participatory policy-making and professional development. Involving teachers in LPP design, providing them with ongoing training on multilingual pedagogy can enhance their capacity to practice policies in ways that reflect classroom realities and promote equity. 3. Addressing systemic and ideological biases. By creating school-wide awareness programs that challenge deficit views of local languages and students from marginalized backgrounds. Building inclusive school cultures requires deliberate efforts to dismantle the labels and assumptions that shape student positioning.

Moving forward, future research should explore the long-term implications of grassroots policy appropriation on teacher identity, instructional practices, and student positioning. Additionally, empirical studies on translanguaging in EMI classrooms could provide valuable insights into how language policies can be implemented in ways that genuinely promote inclusivity. By situating EMI within broader discussions of power, identity, and social justice, this study calls for a re-evaluation of language policies that prioritize linguistic equity and educational access for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds.

Ultimately, while EMI policies are often framed as instruments for global competitiveness, their uneven implementation in multilingual and socioeconomically diverse settings raises critical concerns about access, equity, and educational justice. Policymakers and educators must collaboratively develop context-sensitive approaches that align policy intentions with classroom realities, ensuring that language functions as a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion. Only through such inclusive and equity-driven reforms can education fulfil its transformative potential, fostering social mobility and meaningful learning opportunities for all students.

Author Contributions

Researched and developed the manuscript, H.M.S.; supervised research work and reviewed, edited, added some necessary parts and upgraded the article quality, B.M.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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