The use of language in classrooms in ethnolinguistic communities in Nepal

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Context

- **Multilingualism**
  - 123 languages have been reported as spoken in the country
  - Languages are distributed randomly
  - People of ethnolinguistic communities are multilingual in two or more languages

- **Nepali language**
  - Mother tongue of about a half of the country’s population
  - National official language and lingua franca
  - Default medium of instruction in community schools

- **Mother tongues of ethnolinguistic groups**
  - Dominant mother tongues
  - Non-dominant mother tongues

- **Language in education policy**
  - Schools and communities can choose the medium of instruction
Overview of MTB-MLE in Nepal

- Language communities asked for the policy recognizing the use of mother tongues in primary education as early as in the 1950s.
- Mother tongues have been recognized in education since 1990 and mother tongue medium of instruction has become an important component of education policy.
- Piloting of MTB-MLE was conducted in seven representative schools during 2006 to 2009.
- MTB-MLE program has been incorporated into regular school system.
- Different models of the program are being implemented depending on the ethnolinguistic composition in the schools.
- The program is expanded into both community schools and private schools.
- Nongovernment organizations are also supporting the program in a few schools.
New developments in MTB-MLE

- A new approach is emerging in the use of mother tongues in classrooms in ethnolinguistic communities.
- This development is a result of the compromise between various factors including learning needs of students, acquisition of additional languages, and availability of resources in the schools.
- Classroom communication is not strictly tied to the language policy of the school.
- Mother tongues are being used, to some extent, even in non-MLE classrooms in ethnolinguistic communities.
- More and more schools have chosen to use dominant mother tongues as subjects.
- Language switching between mother tongue and Nepali can be observed frequently in classrooms.
Languages in Rasuwa district

- Tamang: 0.67
- Nepali: 0.27
- Tibetan: 0.02
- Gurung: 0.01
- Others: 0.03
Languages in the community (Syafru)
Languages in the community (Haku)

- Nepali: 95.80%
- Maithili: 0.97%
- Tamang: 0.55%
- Newari: 0.18%
- Ghale: 1.66%
- Others: 0.83%

Ethnolinguistic background of students

MLE school

- Tamang: 0.2813
- Non-Tamang: 0.7187

Non-MLE school

- Tamang: 0.9873
- Non-Tamang: 0.0127
## Language background of teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language proficiency</th>
<th>MLE school</th>
<th>Non-MLE school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamang as a mother tongue</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamang as a second language</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not proficient in Tamang</td>
<td>1</td>
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Policy of language use in classroom

- **MLE school**
  - Mother tongue-only instruction in all subjects except language subjects like Nepali and English up to grade three
  - Gradual transition to Nepali and English from grade four

- **Non-MLE school**
  - Both English and Nepali have been recognized as medium of instruction
  - English is to be employed as medium of instruction in science, mathematics, and English subjects whereas Nepali is the formal language of instruction for other subjects
Use of languages in classroom

MLE classroom (G1)

Non-MLE classroom (G1)
Use of languages in different contexts in MLE classroom (Teacher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
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<tr>
<td>Topic introduction</td>
<td>MT + Nepali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept introduction</td>
<td>MT + Nepali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further explanation of concepts</td>
<td>MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal instruction</td>
<td>MT + Nepali</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing experience with teacher</td>
<td>MT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking questions for clarification</td>
<td>MT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving answers in formal session</td>
<td>Nepali*</td>
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Dynamics of language use in MLE classroom

- **Pedagogy**
  - Meaningful interaction between teacher and students
  - Emergence of new teaching methods and activities in classroom
  - Indigenous values and beliefs have been recognized as the part of curriculum

- **Language vitality**
  - Language transfer to the young generation
  - Expansion of the scope of language use
  - Development of writing system

- **Sociopolitical conditions**
  - Power and prestige value of minority languages
  - Inclusion and equality
  - Social harmony and peace building
General outcomes of the use of languages in classroom

- **MLE school**
  - Students speak with the teacher about the subject matter
  - Joyful learning environment
  - Greater participation of students in class activities
  - Better comprehension
  - More time for curriculum content
  - Early literacy

- **Non-MLE school**
  - Two way communication in the subject matter between students and teacher rarely takes place in classroom
  - Forceful learning
  - Mechanical communication
  - Class disruption more frequent
  - Focus on rote memorization
  - Less time for curriculum content
Learning materials and assessment

- Mother tongue textbooks developed at local level
- Nepali textbooks developed by the Curriculum Development Center
- English textbooks developed by the Curriculum Development Center and private publishers
- Optional subject - mother tongue curriculum and locally developed curriculum
- Oral translation of Nepali textbooks into Tamang
- Preference is given to oral use of mother tongue because of the non-availability of textbooks in the local variety
- Assessments are conducted in Nepali and English mediums
Problems in implementing MTB MLE

- Inconsistent models of MTB-MLE
- Non-availability of well-trained mother tongue teachers
- Lack of incentive and motivation for the teachers
- More focus on school management and development
- Lack of technical and financial support to ensure the effectiveness of the program
- Lack of will-power of the stakeholders including ethnolinguistic communities and education officials
- Distinct language varieties and lack of consensus on recognizing a single variety as standard language
Impacts of the use of mother tongue in classroom

- **Impact on education**
  - Improvement in the quality of learning
  - Greater participation of parents in school activities
  - Indigenous values and culture have been recognized into the curriculum

- **Sociopolitical impact**
  - Speaking the local language is no longer a subject of humiliation
  - MTB MLE education system has become a strong component of ethnic identity
  - It is also believed to create market opportunities for the members of ethnolinguistic communities through employment, publications and even government fund

- **Impact on languages**
  - Language preservation initiatives
  - Multilingualism
Thank you