

# Influence of Mother Tongue on English Language Learning in the EFL Context of Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the influence of the mother tongue on English language learning in EFL classrooms in the Nepalese context. The study adopts a qualitative approach, gathering data through literature reviews and the author's own teaching experiences and empirical observations in various English classes. The findings reveal that while mother tongue influence on target language learning is inevitable, excessive reliance on the mother tongue in EFL teaching can hinder students' learning outcomes. The study emphasizes that all languages share certain similarities, which can be leveraged as tools for teaching English effectively. It suggests that a judicious use of the mother tongue is the most effective approach in Nepalese EFL classrooms. Additionally, the article highlights the potential of e-learning, drilling activities, songs and videos, and contextual teaching methods as effective tools to minimize the influence of the mother tongue in English language learning.

**Keywords:** mother tongue, EFL, judicious, e-learning, drilling, context

## Introduction

As defined by the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) refers to English that is taught to individuals whose primary language is not English and who do not reside in a country where English is the dominant or official language (Cambridge, 2024).

Quimosing (2022) describes foreign language acquisition (FLA) as the process of learning a language that is neither the child's native tongue nor learned in an informal, naturalistic setting.

FLA typically occurs in formal educational environments, where the language is taught by an instructor in schools. This language is distinct from a second language (L2), as it is not acquired in a bilingual context and is sometimes referred to as an "alien" language (Quimosing, 2022). EFL, thus,

involves learning and using English as an additional language in non-English-speaking regions, often with limited exposure and practical use.

Nepal, known for its linguistic diversity, is home to a variety of ethnic groups, each with distinct languages. According to the 2021 Census (NHPC, 2021), Nepal's population includes 142 different castes and ethnic groups, many of whom speak their native language or mother tongue. The Census Report of 2021 also notes that Nepal has 124 indigenous languages (NHPC, 2021).

The Constitution of Nepal (2072) designates Nepali as the official language of the nation. However, given the country's diverse population, Nepali often functions as a lingua franca, bridging communication among different ethnic groups. English, though not an official language, is



widely taught in schools across the country and is influenced by both the native languages and Nepali.

As noted by [Khadka, \(2022\)](#) English language instruction has played a significant role in Nepal's educational system, serving as both a subject and a medium of instruction from preschool through university.

English has been present in Nepal for over 25 years, initially serving as a means of communication between the ruling class in Kathmandu and the British East India Company ([Poudel, 2021](#)).

[Eagle \(1999\)](#) further points out that the formal introduction of English language teaching (ELT) in Nepal began with the visit of Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana to Britain, where he sought English education for his children and relatives. This historical context necessitates an exploration of the development of ELT in Nepal, including relevant laws, initiatives, and challenges.

Many linguists, educators, and English language teachers agree that English is considered a foreign language in Nepal. As [Shrestha](#) notes, English is not an official language in Nepal, nor is it widely used for communication within the country ([Shrestha, 1983](#)). English is primarily taught as a subject and is not commonly used outside of educational contexts. However, in private schools, colleges, and institutions, English serves as a medium of instruction.

In the 1980s, Kachru's "World Englishes" theory classified English usage into three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. Nepal is positioned in the Expanding Circle, the third category, where English is used as a foreign language ([Al-Mutairi, 2020](#)). This categorization underscores the role of English as a foreign language in Nepal, used predominantly within educational settings rather than in everyday communication.

### The Term "Mother Tongue"

The term "mother tongue" refers to the language an individual acquires from birth, often associated with their native language, home

language, or first language, although these terms are not always synonymous. Linguists and educators commonly use the terms L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) to distinguish between the native language (mother tongue) and the foreign language being learned.

[Saeed \(2021\)](#) defines the mother tongue as the language spoken by a child's mother, which is used to establish social connections within the family.

Essentially, the language spoken since birth is considered a person's mother tongue. [Rajathurai Nishanthi](#) underscores the vital role the mother tongue plays in shaping an individual's thoughts, emotions, and cognitive development. She argues that learning to communicate in one's mother tongue is fundamental to a child's overall growth ([Nishanthi, 2020](#)). Integrating mother-tongue education into language policy can enhance educational outcomes. Neglecting the mother tongue in early education can be detrimental, hindering effective teaching and learning. At the very least, using the mother tongue in the early stages of education can improve both instructional quality and student comprehension.

[Yadav \(2014\)](#) further emphasizes that the mother tongue is essential for fostering intellectual, physical, and moral development, as well as shaping an individual's behavior, attitudes, and values. It is integral to one's sense of identity and cultural heritage. The mother tongue carries the history, values, and traditions of a specific community or region, serving as a connection to cultural roots. Individuals who maintain proficiency in their mother tongue are often more attuned to their cultural identity and heritage, fostering a strong sense of self. Furthermore, mastery of the mother tongue enables more effective communication within families and communities, allowing individuals to express themselves clearly, passionately, and accurately. This foundational communication skill is crucial for discussing complex ideas, emotions, and relationships. Additionally, proficiency in the mother tongue provides a strong basis for learning foreign or second languages.

## Language Acquisition vs. Language Learning

Two key concepts in the study of language are acquisition and learning, which are often used interchangeably but actually refer to distinct phases in the development of communication skills. Language acquisition is the natural, unconscious process of picking up a language, while language learning involves a more formal, structured approach to understanding it (Marzuki, 2012).

Krashen (1982) further describes acquisition as implicit, informal, and natural, akin to how toddlers acquire their first language. This process occurs subconsciously, through immersion in the language environment, without deliberate instruction or effort. Children typically acquire language through interaction with others, rather than through formal grammar lessons.

In contrast, language learning, as Krashen (1982) explains, is a conscious process of acquiring knowledge about a language, including its rules and structure. This is also referred to as explicit learning, where individuals study grammar rules and language structures, typically in a classroom setting. Learning a language requires intentional effort, focusing on the formal aspects of the language such as grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. It is through this structured approach that individuals develop their ability to communicate in the second language.

Typically, the mother tongue is acquired naturally, while a foreign language is learned after the first language has been established. If the two languages share similarities, the learning process may be more straightforward, as the similarities can facilitate understanding and retention.

## Problem Statement

In Nepal, English is primarily learned as a foreign language, with its use being largely confined to educational, official, and professional contexts. It is taught across various educational levels, from elementary schools to universities, but it does not function as a second language, as it is not widely spoken in daily interactions or in the

community at large. English education in Nepal is primarily academic, with limited opportunities for immersion in real-life conversational settings. This makes the process of learning English distinct from environments where English is spoken as a second language, such as in countries where English is a predominant or official language.

One of the key challenges in learning English in Nepal is the country's linguistic diversity. Nepal is home to more than 120 languages, with Nepali being the official language. English, while taught formally, is not the language of daily communication for the majority of the population. Instead, people speak their native languages, which are influenced by the ethnic and regional backgrounds of the different communities. As a result, students in Nepal come from various linguistic backgrounds, and their experiences with English learning are shaped by their native languages or mother tongues. These languages, often vastly different from English in terms of structure, phonetics, and vocabulary, have a significant influence on how students learn English.

The mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping a student's acquisition of English in several key areas, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and overall communication skills. The influence of the native language, particularly in terms of pronunciation and accent, is often the most noticeable. Students may struggle with English phonemes that do not exist in their native language, leading to mispronunciations. For example, in languages with fewer vowel sounds or different consonantal structures, learners may find it challenging to articulate English sounds that do not exist in their first language. This phonetic interference can lead to accent-heavy speech or mispronunciation, making comprehension difficult for native English speakers.

Similarly, vocabulary acquisition is influenced by the similarities and differences between English and the learner's native language. In some cases, students may find it easier to learn words that share similarities with their mother tongue, especially when there are cognates or loanwords between

the two languages. However, students may also experience difficulty with vocabulary that lacks direct equivalents in their native language, leading to gaps in comprehension or incorrect word usage. Furthermore, native language structures may interfere with the way students form sentences in English. For instance, in languages with different syntactic structures, students may apply the grammar rules of their mother tongue to English sentences, leading to errors such as incorrect word order or verb tense misuse.

The impact of the mother tongue extends beyond just grammar and pronunciation. It also affects how students approach learning and communication in English. Students who have a strong foundation in their mother tongue often use it as a reference point when learning English, especially when they encounter difficulties in understanding new concepts or vocabulary. While this can sometimes be helpful, excessive reliance on the mother tongue can impede the learning process, especially when it prevents students from thinking directly in English or developing fluency in the target language. For example, translation between the native language and English can slow down the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition, leading to reduced fluency and spontaneity in communication.

Given these challenges, it is important to explore strategies to mitigate the negative impact of the mother tongue on English learning in Nepal. One of the primary solutions is the judicious use of the mother tongue in English language instruction. Teachers can incorporate students' native languages strategically, using them to clarify complex concepts or bridge gaps in understanding when necessary. However, overreliance on the mother tongue should be avoided, as it can hinder the development of English proficiency. Teachers should aim to create an immersive environment where students are encouraged to engage with English as much as possible, while still acknowledging the value of the mother tongue as a support tool when needed.

Another important strategy is to focus on context-based learning. Teaching English in

meaningful contexts—through the use of real-life situations, visual aids, and interactive activities—can help students make connections between English and their lived experiences. By using the language in authentic contexts, students can learn vocabulary and grammar structures that are directly applicable to their everyday lives, thereby improving retention and making the learning process more engaging.

Technology and e-learning also offer valuable tools for enhancing English language learning in Nepal. Online platforms, language learning apps, and digital resources can provide students with additional exposure to English outside of the classroom, allowing them to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in diverse contexts. Interactive features like speech recognition, quizzes, and games can motivate students to engage with the language in a fun and low-pressure environment, reinforcing their language skills.

In addition to technology, drilling activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and language games can provide opportunities for students to practice English in a supportive setting. These activities encourage students to use English actively, thereby reducing their reliance on the mother tongue during communication. By emphasizing practical language use and promoting interaction among students, such activities foster both linguistic and social development in English.

Teacher training is another crucial aspect in addressing the challenges of mother tongue influence on English learning. Teachers should be equipped with strategies to manage the balance between using the mother tongue and promoting English immersion. Training teachers to recognize and address the specific linguistic challenges faced by students from different language backgrounds can make a significant difference in the effectiveness of language instruction.

The influence of the mother tongue on English language learning in Nepal is undeniable, but with the right strategies and approaches, this impact can be mitigated. The key lies in finding a balance between leveraging the mother tongue

as a supportive tool and promoting immersion in English. By integrating context-based learning, utilizing technology, engaging in interactive activities, and providing appropriate teacher training, the negative impacts of the mother tongue can be alleviated, leading to more effective and efficient English language learning outcomes in Nepal need a further digging research.

### Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine the significant impact of the mother tongue on learning English, identify strategies to mitigate its negative effects, and improve teaching and learning outcomes in the classroom. It also aims to highlight the crucial role of the mother tongue in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

### Methodology

This research employs a methodology that combines a comprehensive literature review with an empirical analysis of relevant documents to investigate the impact of the mother tongue on the acquisition of English as a foreign language. The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature, focusing on analyzing and describing the findings from various sources. A wide array of previous studies, scholarly articles, papers, and online materials was reviewed and examined to explore the diverse ways in which the mother tongue influences English language learning in classroom settings. The literature review provides a foundation for understanding the different effects of the mother tongue on learners' pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and overall language proficiency.

### Results and Discussion

Dellbio et al (2018) explains that when individuals think in their native language and communicate in English or another second language, this phenomenon is referred to as mother tongue influence. Mispronunciations in English often arise because the phonetic patterns of a person's mother tongue shape their pronunciation. Some educators argue against the inclusion of the

first language (L1) in teaching and learning English as a foreign language, suggesting that it impedes the acquisition of the foreign language.

Phindane (2020) highlights the contentious nature of using L1, noting that the role and extent of its use remain unclear. He further observes that English language instructors often expect learners to acquire the second language in the same way as native speakers, although studies indicate that L1 is frequently utilized in L2 or EFL classrooms. Teachers commonly use L1 to manage the classroom, provide individualized support, teach new vocabulary, clarify grammar, build rapport, and simplify lengthy assignment explanations. Therefore, a balanced approach—one that judiciously incorporates L1 to facilitate L2 learning, while adapting to the needs and proficiency levels of learners—may be an effective solution.

### Language Processing

The way humans process language has been a topic of extensive debate. Some linguists assert that language is a cognitive function, while others argue that it is learned like any other skill, such as typing or cycling, through habit formation or automatic processes. Various foundational theories have been proposed to explain the teaching, learning, and acquisition of language. These include behaviorism, interactionism, cognitive theory (rationalist theory), and mentalism (innatism). While behaviorism and mentalism are particularly relevant to first language acquisition, the other theories help explain how foreign languages are learned. It is important to recognize that these theories are not mutually exclusive. Although second language learning is closely tied to first language acquisition, the processes involved in both are often quite similar. The development of native languages plays a crucial role in learning foreign languages.

According to behaviorist theory, language acquisition occurs through imitation, rewards, and practice with human role models. Behaviorism posits that learning is a mechanical process



that evolves through repeated reinforcement of stimuli and responses, similar to habit formation (Abidin, 2009). J.B. Watson's behaviorist theory, which is rooted in psychological principles, emerged as a reaction to traditional grammar-based approaches to language learning. Leading figures such as Leonard Bloomfield, O. N. Mowrer, B. F. Skinner, and A.W. S. S. supported this framework. Behaviorism gained significant prominence in the early 20th century, especially in America, where it emphasized verbal behavior. Educational communities in the 1950s largely embraced behaviorism, viewing it as an effective model for language acquisition. Children, according to behaviorist theory, learn to speak by imitating and receiving incentives or rewards from role models, particularly parents (Naeem, 2022). Behaviorists argue that language learning is a conditioning process involving imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habituation—the key stages of language acquisition. While behaviorism has limitations, it remains clear that language development is fundamentally a verbal behavior processed through stimulus and response. Behaviorism has laid the foundation for language learning exercises, both spoken and written, by conceptualizing language as a system of stimuli and responses.

The mentalist learning theory, championed by Noam Chomsky, suggests that humans possess an inherent biological capacity for language acquisition, emphasizing the cognitive role in this process. Chomsky opposed the extreme behaviorism of B.F. Skinner, arguing that language learning is a cognitive endeavor that involves understanding and acquiring language through sensory experiences and thought processes. The theory posits that children are born with a universal grammar, a set of rules that aids in language acquisition once they are exposed to linguistic stimuli. Chomsky's transformational generative grammar (TGG) theory revolutionized linguistics by highlighting the mind's role in language creation. His theory suggests that the brain is equipped with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that facilitates learning any language encountered.

Through his influential works, including *Syntactic Structures* (1957), *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), and *Language and Mind* (1968), Chomsky's ideas have profoundly shaped cognitive science, especially in the study of language acquisition. The mentalist perspective asserts that the mind is not a blank slate but rather comes equipped with innate mechanisms for learning language, which match linguistic inputs with pre-existing mental grammar.

Mentalists argue that children are naturally predisposed to learn languages, while behaviorists claim that children start with a blank slate and language learning results from external environmental factors. Both perspectives offer valuable insights into language acquisition. In practice, consistent practice remains essential for achieving linguistic fluency. The behaviorist idea that "practice makes perfect" is particularly relevant in first language (L1) acquisition, where children naturally absorb language patterns from their environment. Similarly, the mentalist theory underscores the role of innate cognitive structures in second language (L2) acquisition. Despite limited exposure and practice, the mind's capacity for learning remains critical in acquiring any language, whether L1 or L2. Therefore, techniques such as imitation, repetition, and consistent practice are key methods in mastering both first and foreign languages.

### L1 Interference

When a learner's native language (L1) influences their ability to acquire a second language (L2), this phenomenon is known as L1 interference or language transfer. Such transfer can impact various aspects of language learning, including pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and even cultural understanding. Language transfer can produce positive, negative, or mixed effects. Positive transfer occurs when the structures or rules of L1 facilitate the learning of L2, while negative transfer happens when L1 interferes with or hinders the acquisition of L2.

In a study conducted by Yuniswati (2017), 586 grammatical and lexical errors were identified

in 78 student compositions, which were attributed to L1 interference. The grammatical errors included issues such as subject-verb agreement, incorrect article usage, verb omissions in sentences or clauses, errors with noun forms, pronouns, prepositions, word order, clause structure, tense errors, gerund usage, and passive voice forms. Lexical errors included literal translations, spelling mistakes, and poor word choices.

The significant impact of L1 on students' English learning, particularly in the formation of grammatical and lexical errors. These results provide insights that can guide both teachers and students in reducing such mistakes (Yuniswati, 2017).

Delbio et al. (2018) further explores how a learner's mother tongue influences their thinking and communication in English, leading to potential mispronunciations. She emphasizes the significant role of the native language in both communication and pronunciation, which may hinder the learner's fluency and accuracy in English (Delbio et al, 2018).

A study by Hussain (2023) examined the advantages and reasons for incorporating L1 in foreign language teaching. Survey responses from 54 students revealed that Arabic was the most commonly used L1, and the majority of students reported spending an average of 10.69 hours per week learning English. The study found a positive correlation between perceived language competency and cognate knowledge, although no significant correlation was found between L1-L2 interference and sentence structure issues. Hussain concluded that while the target language (TL) remains essential in foreign language instruction, the use of L1 should not be eliminated entirely; rather, L1 plays a supportive role in the learning process.

Most research suggests that the influence of a first language (L1) on a target language (TL), such as English, can yield both positive and negative effects on the learning process and overall language proficiency. The interaction

between L1 and L2 is complex, as L1 impacts not only communication strategies but also cultural understanding, cognitive development, and information exchange. Positive influences include cognitive growth, effective information transfer, and enhanced cultural awareness, while negative influences may arise from interference, limited exposure to the target language, and inadequate teacher training. L1 can affect various aspects of learning English, including writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and thinking. Strategies such as code-switching, increased exposure to the TL, immersion, and improved teacher training can help mitigate the negative effects of L1. By understanding the intricate relationship between L1 and L2, teachers and students can develop strategies to maximize the positive aspects of L1 influence while minimizing its negative impact.

In Nepal, English is regarded as a foreign language and is mainly taught in classrooms, which results in limited exposure to the language outside of formal education. As a result, Nepalese students face various challenges in mastering English, including difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and the functional use of the language. The distinct features of Nepalese students' native languages, combined with limited real-world exposure to English, pose challenges for effective language learning. These factors highlight the need for tailored strategies to address the specific challenges posed by L1 interference in the English learning process.

### Language Transfer

When learners of a new language apply the rules and conventions of their first language to their second, this phenomenon is known as language transfer, or cross-linguistic transfer. While these concepts can be applicable in certain situations, they can also lead to errors in others. Language transfer is important because it can provide valuable insights for students learning a new language. However, it also has its drawbacks, including the potential for mistakes. Language transfer occurs whether learners are aware of it or not. It can happen unconsciously, where linguistic

norms are instinctively understood, or consciously, where individuals try to apply the grammatical rules of their native language. There are two types of language transfer: positive and negative. Negative transfer occurs when someone tries to use a structure from their first language in their second language, resulting in errors. Conversely, positive transfer happens when knowledge from the first language helps a learner produce correct speech in the second language. In the past, the term "L1 interference" was commonly used to describe language transfer, often with a negative connotation. Nowadays, "language transfer" has largely replaced "L1 interference" (Tavares, 2017). The influence that one language, particularly the first language, has on another is referred to as language transfer (Thornbury, 2006). Transfer can occur at all levels, including discourse, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. While transfer can be advantageous, especially when the first and second languages share similarities, interference has often been viewed negatively.

### **Role of Mother tongue to learn foreign language**

The mother tongue plays a vital role in learning a foreign language, offering a cognitive framework, vocabulary links, and a boost in confidence. It also helps transfer skills such as reading and writing, and can affect pronunciation and grammar. However, differences between languages can create challenges, such as mispronunciations or syntax mistakes. Grasping the cultural context of the mother tongue can enhance understanding and appreciation. In structured language learning environments, the mother tongue can clarify complex concepts or meanings, but over-reliance on it may hinder immersion and lead to mistakes. Effective teaching in EFL classes, as noted by Yadav (2014) should use the first language wisely while considering the learners' mother tongue and cultural background. The best approach is to strike a balance between using the mother tongue and immersion to promote natural fluency.

In an EFL classroom, incorporating the mother tongue fosters a positive learning environment and boosts students' motivation to learn the language.

It creates a supportive atmosphere that enhances the teaching and learning process (Joshi, 2017). The mother tongue has a significant impact on foreign language acquisition, promoting cognitive growth, knowledge transfer, cultural awareness, and effective communication strategies. However, it can also disrupt language learning, resulting in errors in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Limited exposure and insufficient teacher training can further impede language acquisition. To counteract these negative effects, strategies like code-switching, immersion, teacher training, and exposure to native speakers can be utilized. By recognizing the intricate relationship between the mother tongue and foreign language learning, educators and learners can devise methods to enhance the positive aspects while reducing the drawbacks.

### **Influence of Nepali Language in English Language Acquisition/Learning**

Challenges in Learning English as a Foreign Language The study of Hanan Dhia Alsalihi revealed many challenges faced by EFL students in language learning. These barriers include, but are not limited to, discouragement from society, shyness, lack of motivation and class size and overcrowding issues (Alsalihi, 2020). The most prevalent challenges include pronunciation and accent, vocabulary acquisition, complex grammar, cultural disparities, and listening comprehension. They may also have difficulty in fluency of speech as well as writing skill and often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. According to the study undertaken in Nepal (Timsina, 2021), the EFL learners are faced with many challenges in the classroom context, the influence of parents, environment, language policy, curricula, textbooks, and policies of the government. In the same way, motivation, attitude, and being unfamiliar with good language learning strategies can also slow down their progress, confidence, and overall ability to study and retain the information they have learned.

The impact of the Nepali language on English language learning in the context of English as a



Foreign Language (EFL) in Nepal is considerable, influenced by various linguistic, cultural, and environmental factors.

### Phonological Influence

English language is very tough for Nepali students as they have to work hard on their pronunciation. Nepali-speaking learners may transfer Nepali phonological rules into English and as a result make pronunciation errors. The absence of clear sounds such as /v/ and /w/ can lead to pronunciation errors, such as saying "vine" for "wine." Likewise, /θ/ (as in "think") and /ð/ (as in "this") are sometimes missing, leading to substitutions, such as /t/ or /d/ (so "tin" for "thin"). The challenges that students and teachers face are severe because the phonological systems of the two languages, Nepali and English, are culturally and linguistically distinct. But [Kandel's \(2010\)](#) research shows that Nepali learners may have difficulty differentiating between sounds in English that do not occur in their mother tongue, such as /p/ and /ph/. The influence of L1 (in our case Nepali phonology) on the pronunciation of L2 (in our case English pronunciation) is also known as L1 interference. Because Nepali is syllable-timed and English is stress-timed, this can lead to loss of proper stress and rhythm in spoken English. /p/, /t/, /k/ sounds in English are aspirated but there is no any aspirated sounds in Nepali phonological system. Distinct sound features of Nepali language might influence learning of English sound system and pronunciation.

### Grammatical Influence

The mutual interaction between a language and a cultural system has great sociolinguistic connotations and indeed, the English language was powerfully influenced by the grammatical system of Nepalese. Nepali is a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) language, while English follows a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure. As a result, learners could build sentences such as: "He to the market went" instead of "He went to the market." Nepali also lacks articles like "a" and "the," so they might say "I saw car" instead of "I saw a car." Another

error that can occur due to differences in preposition usage is "He is in the bus" when it should be "He is on the bus." Return to the auxiliary verb aspect of tenses with a few examples from Nepali in order to illustrate the confusion that results. For example, learners might write "She go to school yesterday" rather than "She went to school yesterday."

### Lexical Transfer

Literal Translations face different problems in terms of semantics. Direct translation of Nepali phrases into English leads to cumbersome constructions in the case of Nepali Learners. For example: Nepali Mero man ramro chha translates to English My heart is good. But, the correct English is I feel good. The other type of issue occurs a lot is Code-Switching while the Nepali speaker speaks English. Nepali and English mixing is extremely common. Example: "Mero class start bhayo" more so in day-to-day conversation, which sometimes hinders preciseness and fluency in both languages.

### Cultural and Pragmatic Influence

Formality and Politeness in Nepali mainstream culture devote significant emphasis to politeness, which influences how sentences are constructed in English. For example, overly formal phrases such as "Would you please do this for me?" may sound a bit stilted in everyday English speech. The usage of idioms also creates confusion. Understanding Nepali idioms, expressions, and phrases is not easy for English speakers; direct translations can be misleading. For instance: Nepali: "Ghanta bajnu" (meaning something annoying or troublesome), translated to English as "The bell has rung", merely conveys the literal sound of a bell.

### Cognitive Factors

[Hosseini \(2022\)](#) identified four key factors influencing language planning and policy: teacher characteristics, environmental/social elements, and learners' individual characteristics, highlighting that the absence of these can lead to inflated EFL learning. Over-reliance on Nepali grammar and word meaning can be a roadblock to English learning. The students are used to Nepali type of thinking and vice versa, which makes

understanding the rules of English difficult. The problem is serious, and it doesn't allow students to learn. That is, trying to think in Nepali and then translating into English means thinking takes so long, and mistakes happen.

### Factors Affecting EFL Learning

#### *Sociolinguistic Context*

Nepali medium schools, particularly in under-resourced areas, are primarily using Nepali, with low-proficiency students in government-funded schools expressing greater need for Nepali than private English medium students (Khatri, 2011). Little access to English makes learning English ineffective. While in Nepal, English is primarily an academic or formal language—spoken mostly in universities, a few formal sectors, and as a second language in daily conversation—Nepali or some regional dialects are used in most conversations. This limits English with practical usage.

#### **What would be the way to minimize the influence of mother tongue in ELT classroom?**

The following recommendations would be fruitful to minimize the negative influence of mother tongue in ELT classroom.

1. To obtain the greatest English exposure in the classroom, using it as the medium of instruction, explanation, and dialogue, with independent usage by students.
2. Teaching vocabulary and grammar should be taught in meaningful contexts by using visuals, realia, and gestures to convey meaning; and without direct translation into the mother's tongue.
3. Carefully teach target English pronunciation and intonation with explicit direction, drilling and practice activities, and modeling correct pronunciation and intonation.
4. By using wholesome materials such as songs, stories, and videos and news articles, students learn real-life English, which they must learn to use outside the classroom.
5. Encourage learners to use real-life English through role-play, simulations, and argumentation, focusing on fluency and accuracy, but, above all, on meaning.
6. Encourage students to use English for themselves without the fear of making mistakes. Provide constructive feedback, praise effort rather than perfection, and foster an atmosphere conducive and motivating to learning.
7. Provide students exposure with independent E-practice through Language Learning apps and online resources.
8. Note the similarities between mother tongue and EFL and judiciously employ mother tongue.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, mother tongue influence in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is an inevitable and significant phenomenon. The first language, or mother tongue, plays a crucial role in helping students transition into the cognitive processes required for learning English. It often serves as a bridge that facilitates the understanding of new concepts and helps students express their thoughts in the target language. However, excessive reliance on the mother tongue can limit exposure to English, hindering the development of fluency and comprehension in the target language.

In Nepal, Nepali is predominantly spoken in schools, especially in rural or less accessible regions, where the use of the mother tongue is more prevalent. In government-funded schools, many students, particularly those with limited English proficiency, often resort to Nepali out of shyness or because they struggle to communicate complex ideas in English. While the mother tongue can offer comfort, it can also impede their English language acquisition. To address this challenge, strategies such as encouraging authentic oral practice, providing short and concise language instructions, and fostering an environment of teacher encouragement are essential in promoting the use of English in the classroom.

This study investigates the perspectives of English teachers on the role of the mother tongue

in the classroom, particularly for students with low English proficiency. Teachers generally believe that the strategic use of L1 is beneficial, as it aids students in comprehending complex ideas, thereby enhancing interaction and engagement in learning. However, they also recognize that excessive use of L1 reduces exposure to the target language, which could ultimately hinder language acquisition. Previous research supports the notion that while the mother tongue can be helpful, it should be used judiciously to prevent over-reliance and ensure sufficient immersion in the target language.

The study acknowledges several limitations, including the scarcity of research findings and the lack of direct data from learners' experiences. Despite these limitations, the findings could be valuable to Nepalese teachers and researchers examining the contentious issue of mother tongue use in English classrooms. The insights gained may contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the optimal balance between mother tongue use and English language exposure, offering practical recommendations for improving language teaching strategies in Nepal and similar contexts. The study underscores the need for a balanced approach that leverages the mother tongue as a supportive tool without diminishing the critical exposure to the target language necessary for proficiency.

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