

## The Proposed ELT Survey: Redefining Status and Role of English in Nepal

Govinda Raj Bhattarai\*  
Ganga Ram Gautam\*

### Abstract

*The present article is an attempt to highlight the need for a comprehensive ELT survey of Nepal which is being undertaken by Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA). It outlines the scope of the survey and its expected contribution towards redefining the status and position of the English language in the contemporary ELT scenario of new Nepal. The article draws information from sources such as discussions held with the ELT stakeholders at different times, seminars and archives including the ELT Survey of 1983/84.*

### Introduction

Linguistically speaking Nepal is considered one of the richest living laboratory which has stored more than one hundred living languages distributed along the ecological zones. They descend from four great language families viz. the Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Berman, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian. Also there are few unidentified language families. The linguists have claimed to have found as many as 120 languages however the latest census has recorded 92 (CBS, 2001). These languages are defined as national languages of the nation. Nepali has been widely used as a lingua franca and also the official language. Recently with the restoration of democracy, there is a growing concern and awareness towards the promotion and preservation of the indigenous languages though some of the languages are on the verge of extinction. With the introduction of the mother tongue education policy at primary level education, the government also has taken initiative towards the establishing and supporting mother tongue education through 14 indigenous languages in formal education (CDC). In this scenario, it is difficult to frame language policy when keep such linguistic diversity aside. Not only this, we have a long tradition of about 200 years of the introduction of English in Nepal. Until recently, it was considered as a foreign language with a limited role and purpose. Now in the global context it is striving to take a position of second language.

Nepal is providing education through six universities with about 1000 constituent and their affiliated colleges, some 1500 higher secondary schools and 42100 schools of which 7154 are privately run and the rest are publicly run. English occupies a prominent position in the

\* Dr Bhattarai is Professor of English at Tribhuvan University and President of NELTA.

\* Mr Gautam is Lecturer of English Education at Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal and Senior Vice President of NELTA.

total education system of Nepal (Awasthi, 2003). Almost all university education, tertiary educational colleges and privately run academic institutions use English for all academic purposes – teaching, evaluation and research. When this is compared with the government aided academic institutions, a bleak situation prevails mostly on account of English. Growing public craze towards the English language is seen in the growing attraction of parents and students towards privately run education institutions of the country, whether at the university level or the school level. At present education policy makers have to bridge the contrasting gap by establishing a meeting point.

In the last few decades, the position of English in the formal education curricula has been fluctuated. Sometimes, it was proposed that English language be introduced from grade four and at other times it was introduced at grade one. Likewise, the university education also faced similar type of dilemma as it failed to make Nepali the medium of instruction mandatory since the early 90s. Instead of being replaced with Nepali, it is being more dominant and almost exclusive as the medium of instruction in higher education.

All these decisions made in the past lacked research grounding and thorough analysis regarding the position of English in the national language planning mechanism. Most of the decisions were reached whimsically at the political level without really considering the ground realities and they lacked preparatory exercises before their implementation (Khaniya, 2007). The only historic guidelines in Nepalese ELT were the ELT Survey 1983/84. However, its recommendations were not materialized fully (Awasthi, 2007). Moreover, ELT scenario in the following years changed drastically resulting from the researches in the ELT pedagogy carried out worldwide. Thus, ELT in Nepal has still suffered from the lack of concrete direction and most of the problems are left unaddressed.

### **Need for a comprehensive ELT survey**

English is no longer limited to the classroom situation. It has now expanded its reach to various

fields such as human rights, democracy, development sector, media and governance. To put in Crystal's (1987) words, English is the main language of the books, newspapers, airports and air traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music and advertising. The spread of global cyber culture has spread the use of English even to the remote rural areas alike. Similarly, English has also played a link role in unifying the people living in diverse cultural and linguistic settings. Such roles were not perhaps envisaged in the last decades. Despite this wide and expanded use of English, there is a lack of authentic and valid document which can provide clear picture of the use of English in Nepal.

The country is experiencing a great transitional phase politically and socio-culturally. In the new Nepal the role of English is going to be more prominent and widespread in uniting people and strengthening national harmony. It also needs to be used more extensively to help people access the fruits of development and in consolidating the same.

The role of English in Nepal has not been visible in the policy documents. The decisions made from time to time are on an *ad hoc* basis they do not reflect any long-term vision and plan. Also, the position of English in the context of mother tongue education, mitigating the gap between public and private sector education and the medium of instruction at the higher education level need to be revisited, redefined and reassessed at the policy level to give clear policy directives.

English has now become synonymous to quality education. In order to be considered to be elite, knowledge of English is indispensable. In the perspective of classroom teaching, English plays significant role. In order to bring in quality, the teaching and learning of English has to be to the mark that it addresses the quality parameters both in terms of delivery, materials and classroom discourse. The key factors of the quality ELT such as curricula, textbooks, methodology, teachers, learners, assessment and the overall teaching learning situation should also be assessed and

strategies and measures to be adopted for their promotion need to be recommended.

It has been obvious that for the last 15 years, NELTA has been playing a key role in the promotion and enhancement of ELT in Nepal. It has been devoted to the professional development activities of English language teachers. Due to its professional commitment and its acceptance by the stakeholders nation-wide, it has earned high degree of professional credibility and trust. NELTA has co-partnered with government and non-government organisations such as Ministry of Education and Sports, British Council, US Embassy, international publishing houses and so on. In order to offer its professional contributions to the future of ELT in Nepal with focused and meaningful partnership with its stakeholders, NELTA has incorporated the undertaking of ELT survey as a part of its strategic plan which has been envisaged for years. As a preliminary task of outlining the nature of the survey, NELTA has now been engaged in developing the proposal with the kind assistance of the US Embassy in Nepal.

With the rationales mentioned above, NELTA feels that with the experiences and its strengths earned during these years since its inception, it is in a position to carry out this task of ELT Survey in Nepal. For this task, NELTA has formed a high level survey team to detail out the proposal.

### **Objectives of the survey**

The objectives of the proposed ELT Survey include:

- To document the state of English language teaching in Nepal at both public and private sector.
- To observe and describe the teaching and learning of English at all levels of education.
- To justify the role of English to promote and strengthen democracy in Nepal.
- To analyse the ELT curriculum with respect to the current trends in ELT.
- To assess the English language teaching

and learning materials and examination practices in formal education system of Nepal.

- To assess the English language proficiency of teachers and students.
- To review the research activities in the field of English language education in Nepal.
- To assess the kind and quality of English in academia.
- To draw an outline of Nepali variety of English.
- To identify the role of NELTA for the enhancement of ELT in Nepal including networking and professional development of English language teachers.
- To recommend strategies for the enhancement of ELT in Nepal.

### **Coverage/scope of the survey**

NELTA is shaping the proposal drawing suggestions from the key ELT stakeholders in Nepal. In this connection, NELTA has organized rounds of discussions, workshops and seminars throughout the year and has collected views, opinions and suggestions from the experts and policy makers. The inputs received so far have indicated the following areas to be considered in the forthcoming survey.

- Language policy and position of English in formal education.
- Teacher education policy and practices with reference to English language teaching.
- English language proficiency of the learners of all levels of education.
- English language proficiency and performance of English language teachers.
- Perception, attitudes, aspiration of parents towards English.
- Status of English in both public and private educational institutions.

- English language teaching learning materials.
- Testing and evaluation policies and practices with reference to ELT.
- English literacy and role of English in strengthening democracy.
- English in the development sector (I/NGOs).
- Role of International agencies working in English language education in Nepal.
- English and its use in the ICT.
- Coordination among ELT stakeholders.
- Research in ELT.
- Role of NELTA and other organisations.

### Expected outcomes of the survey

Once the survey is accomplished, Nepal will have an authentic document to fix the position of English in the national language policy framework. It will document the English language needs of the Nepalese learners both in formal and information sectors. The use of English in the world of academia and beyond will also be traced out. The findings of the study will also help us demarcate the status of English for a few decades to come.

The survey will also provide valuable input in order to revisit and reshape the existing ELT pedagogy – training, materials production and evaluation system. Accordingly, the document will provide NELTA with clear directives regarding the mode of contribution and operation for the promotion and enhancement of quality ELT in Nepal.

### Conclusion

The proposed ELT survey is an ambitious and historic endeavour. Once accomplished, this document is expected to provide clear directives in the future of ELT in Nepal. Moreover, the role and status of English will clearly be defined in the national language policy.

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