

# TeachingEnglish

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## **Current practice in English-medium education in higher education: Case studies from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Bangladesh and Nepal**

Andrew Linn, Prithvi Shrestha, Anastasiya Bezborodova, Kristina Hultgren



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# Introduction

It may now be something of a platitude, but it has become customary to begin studies of English-medium education (EME) with the observation that ‘since the turn of the millennium, the use of English has grown unstoppably in universities across the globe’ (Dafouz and Smit, 2020:2). While some theoretical frameworks for understanding the phenomenon are beginning to emerge (notably the ROAD-MAPPING model set out in the work just cited), as well as the infrastructure for EME studies (a journal, a book series, a focused Masters programme), case studies remain the primary lens through which to view the experience of EME.

The “explosion” in EME means that, despite the endeavours just referred to, ‘the spread of EMI [English as a medium of instruction] has outpaced research’ (Bowles and Murphy, 2020:2), and analysis is running to catch up with little capacity to do more than sketch isolated examples. The British Council’s efforts to chart EME activity across the globe as part of a single project are therefore highly welcome, as this will allow the opportunity for proper comparison and the drawing out of properly calibrated commonalities and differences so that the phenomenon can be considered in the round. A key question will be to what extent it is a single phenomenon, the monochrome operationalisation of the internationalisation of higher education (HE), or a string of local developments, each one driven or constrained by local conditions. Our prediction is that it is a combination of these factors.

## Case studies: approach, methods, challenges

This study was commissioned by British Council as part of a larger project to explore current evidence, research, policy, practice, and potential future trends in EME in HE. The outputs of the project include a literature review, *English in Higher Education – English Medium, Part 1, Literature Review* (Curle et al., 2020), a global mapping of EME in HE in 52 Official Development Assistance (ODA) eligible countries (Sahan et al. 2021), this in-depth examination of EME in HE in four institutions in two ODA eligible countries, and a British Council perspective on EME in HE (Veitch, 2021).

The four case studies presented here have been chosen to represent a cross-section of institutions, their students and their staff in a variety of ODA eligible countries. Two countries are in Central Asia and two in South Asia. They range from ‘Least Developed’ in ODA terms (Bangladesh and Nepal) to ‘Upper Middle Income’ (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan), and the institutions surveyed embrace large established public universities (South Asia) and small specialised institutions, both established and very recent (Central Asia).

Although the data drawn on is limited, the research design is intended to offer at least a tentative model to address the extent to which EME exacerbates existing global and societal divisions. Existing inequalities operate both “horizontally” and “vertically”, and both categories may be perpetuated through EME. Horizontally there are clear geopolitical differences between ‘Least Developed’ and ‘Upper Middle Income’ nations, and vertically there are internal stratifications between those who can afford private education and those who cannot. Such inequalities may be exacerbated by EME as well as EME being an index of those inequalities.

The project was time-limited, launching in December 2020 and concluding in March 2021, with activities constrained and delayed in several ways by the global pandemic. The British Council provided background information and prior findings relating to the four countries. This background research was supplemented by an online questionnaire survey provided to each of the universities (see Appendix 1) but only completed by three of the four institutions. Responses came from students and staff, and related to their experiences, their attitudes and their preferences in the context of their EME environment.

<sup>1</sup> Wealth is not evenly distributed and c. 60 per cent of the population live below the poverty line (cf. <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-down-in-the-dumps>).



## EME in Central Asia

EME in HE is burgeoning rapidly in the Central Asian context, where a very small percentage of the population knows English. To illustrate, based on a study conducted in 100 countries among 2.2 million non-native speakers of English, four out of five Central Asian countries (Turkmenistan not being represented) traditionally occupy the lowest-ranking positions, reflecting a “very low” level of English proficiency (EF English Proficiency Index, 2020). In the annual global ranking, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are ranked 88, 92, 96 and 100 out of 100 respectively. Even though the level of English is generally low, EME is being pursued enthusiastically, associated as it is across the region with wider educational and employment opportunities and higher prestige. The association of English with modernisation and internationalisation has also positioned English as a dominant foreign language within the education system, and at tertiary level in particular (Liddicoat, 2019). Some governments in the region are keen to promote the study of English and implement EME across the education sector with the extensive support of external NGOs and relevant organisations from English-speaking countries.

Along with the growing number of international branches of foreign HE institutions using English as their language of teaching and learning, EME is becoming better represented at state universities competing for higher rankings, increased enrolments and international recognition. The largest number of HE institutions in the Central Asian region, and consequently the greatest representation of EME in HE, is in Uzbekistan, with 131 HE institutions listed in 2021, of which 22 are affiliates of overseas institutions. Kazakhstan is the only country of Central Asia to belong to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), signed up to the Bologna Process, and has been a member of the EHEA since its establishment in 2010. Even before this, the number of EME Masters programmes grew from 560 in 2002 to 3,701 in 2011 (Seitzhanova et al., 2015). EME in Tajikistan is offered by the University of Central Asia in Khorog city, established in 2017 after the opening of the branch in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan and subsidised by the Aga Khan Foundation. Some local universities in the country also teach some programmes in English.

There are also several private EME universities in Kyrgyzstan, and at Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University in Bishkek three languages are used to teach different disciplines: Turkish, English and Kyrgyz. Despite the country’s more constrained international outlook, Turkmenistan has also embraced EME in HE at the International University for Humanities and Development and Oguz Han Engineering and Technology University of Turkmenistan (English and Japanese), and both universities follow the Bologna structure.

## EME in South Asia

English language has a long historical connection with South Asia. Once the British Raj (British East India Company) began in 1600 (Mondal, 2017), English language started influencing language policy in the region for political, economic and pragmatic reasons (Mahboob, 2017). While Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (all called India up to independence in 1947) were under the British Raj from the start, other South Asian countries like Sri Lanka and Maldives were colonised later. Bhutan and Nepal were never under the British Raj, yet language-in-education policies in these polities were always influenced by the colonial legacy in the Indian subcontinent. The significance of English has been spurred on by globalisation (Sah and Li, 2018), and English language is taught as a compulsory foreign or second language from school to university, with Bhutan having EME from primary to university level (Jhingran, 2019). English has also increasingly become the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in schools and universities in these countries (McCulloch et al., 2020) as in other Asian and European countries, due to the global push for internationalisation of HE (Hamid, Nguyen, et al., 2013). However, how EME policies are implemented in HE varies from country to country.

# Kazakhstan: KIMEP University

## English in education in Kazakhstan

The former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, since when both education reforms and language policy reforms have been proactively pursued. Language policy is based on the “Trinity of languages” with Kazakh as the state language, as enshrined in Article 7 of the Constitution, and with Russian ‘officially used on equal grounds’. In 2007 then President Nursultan Nazarbayev formally committed to accelerating the knowledge and use of English ‘as a language of successful integration into global economics’. His aim was for 20 per cent of Kazakh citizens to speak English by 2020, supported by a shift after 2018 from the Cyrillic to the Roman alphabet for the national language. In 2015 a Roadmap of Trilingual Education Development was laid out including a phased transition towards STEM subjects being taught in English at all levels of education, increasing the ‘share of teachers lecturing in science and mathematics in English’ from 0.6 per cent in 2010 to 15 per cent in 2020 (State Program, 2010:19). In 2019, however, this policy was stalled (Karabassova, 2021), with the President urging the Ministry of Education and Science not to rush to introduce trilingualism without appropriate teacher training (Kazakhstan Today, 2019).

## KIMEP University

KIMEP University was founded in 1992 by presidential decree as a private not-for-profit institution based in the former capital city of Almaty and has been led since its foundation by the President’s former economic advisor, Professor Chan Young Bang. Officially, it has been fully English medium (EM) from the start and is now one of two fully EM universities in Kazakhstan, the other being Nazarbayev University founded in 2010 in the current capital Nur-Sultan (previously known as Astana until 2019).

KIMEP University had a student population of 2,135 in 2019, of whom 12 per cent were international, representing 20 different countries; there is a strategic commitment to increasing the total enrolment to 3,000 by the 2023–24 academic year. Most international students are from Central Asia, China and South Korea, but the University has a strong commitment to faculty and student mobility, with 80 students (2020) travelling abroad on exchange programmes. According to the University Strategic Vision, there were 110 faculty teaching on degree programmes in 2019, of whom 46 per cent were international, representing 18 countries, and 68 per cent of teaching faculty (of whom 63 per cent are female) have gained qualifications overseas. Increased internationalisation runs through the strategic vision: Goal 4, for example, is to ‘receive further international accreditation’, and recruiting more international professors with overseas qualifications is a clear key performance target. It is a prestigious university in the region.

Teaching is provided across four academic colleges. The largest of these (42 per cent of total student numbers) is the Bang College of Business. The other three colleges are Social Sciences, Humanities and Education and the School of Law. All four colleges offer Bachelors and Masters (14 per cent of enrolments, Fall 2019) qualifications based on the international ECTS system of credits, and PhD study is available in all colleges except Law. In addition, KIMEP has an Executive Education Centre, offering an Executive MBA and a range of CPD courses and programmes for business professionals, testifying to its prestige. While all degree programmes are EM, there are some Russian cohorts on the executive programme, while for undergraduates the compulsory History of Kazakhstan unit may be taken in Kazakh or Russian as well as English.

There were 61 survey responses from KIMEP University: 49 students, 11 faculty and one administrative staff member. The majority of student respondents were first-year and represented a broad range of degree programmes.

## English in policy and practice at KIMEP University

In Kazakhstan only KIMEP University and Nazarbayev University are fully EM institutions, but 70 universities across the country offer learning and teaching in English ‘in pedagogical, technical, natural science specialties’ (MES, 2020:17) in line with the roadmap for trilingual education outlined above. The private Suleyman Demirel University (founded 1996) operates a trilingual policy, and nationally only five per cent of university students are enrolled on trilingual programmes. Only a handful of university teachers are able to teach across all three languages (MES, 2020:18). The policy balance between L1, L2 and L3 provision and the challenges in implementing the policy that 60 per cent of the school curriculum be delivered in L1 and the remainder in the other languages of the “trinity” does not impact on KIMEP, being fully English medium (bar the exceptions noted above).

The only mention of language policy in the University’s charter, approved in 2019, appears in Section 12.3 under Management of Educational Process:

*The language of instruction at KIMEP University is English. KIMEP University also has the right to provide educational services in the state and/or Russian language.*

As is invariably the case in EME institutions, language is assumed to be an unproblematic issue; everyone will just get on with it. Research into EME globally presents a much more nuanced and challenging picture, of course, and EM institutions have been found to benefit from the existence of more fully elaborated policies (cf. Linn et al., 2020). In terms of an actual language policy, it is well recognised in the literature that such policies need not be explicit but may exist de facto as the side-effect of other decisions, and that policies are not static things but rather exist via the reality of their enactment. Thus, in practice, as we shall see, language practices on campus are not as monolingual as the official policy may suggest. According to KIMEP University’s mission statement, the strategic aim of the University is to offer ‘undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes at the highest level of international educational standards to outstanding students, who will become equals to graduates of other world-class universities’; students are being prepared for international employment. It is clear from this mission statement that KIMEP sees itself as striving for excellence, which is a different pitch to the two public universities in South Asia discussed below, needing to cater for a wider student population.

English should be used in all academic settings, and instances of translanguaging or code-switching are rare. If teaching colleagues used languages other than English in the classroom on a regular basis, students might report this to the University authorities as a breach of expected practice. However, it is also clear that other languages than English are used in class. English is the language of all official meeting minutes, otherwise English is not much used for administrative purposes, except when international faculty are in attendance.

Other languages are indeed used on campus, as would be expected in an international institution in a multilingual country; Lewis et al (2015) list 14 languages used in Kazakhstan plus 30 immigrant languages, though a figure as high as 117 has also been given (American Councils for International Education, 2015). 52.5 per cent of survey respondents reported Kazakh as their “mother tongue”, 34.4 per cent Russian and the remainder covered five additional first languages. Knowledge of a further nine languages was also reported by this 61-strong sample, suggesting that KIMEP University is a highly multilingual setting. Outside class and in “para-academic” settings such as office hours, language use is more flexible and based on pragmatic considerations. In such settings code-switching is common as English terms relating to academic life at KIMEP are absorbed into Kazakh or Russian morphology and syntax. This is regarded as a natural process and one which is taken for granted by speakers. 34.4 per cent of respondents report that they use more English in their spare time than on campus, with a further 29.5 per cent reporting about the same amount of English use in and outside the University.

## Student experience

Students wishing to gain access to undergraduate degree programmes either take the KIMEP English Entrance Test or submit IELTS or TOEFL scores with a minimum of IELTS 5.5 or equivalent required. The fact that KIMEP has invested in developing a bespoke in-house English language screening process is interesting in itself, as this is not the case at either Tribhuvan or Dhaka, the two public universities in South Asia. Once again, this testifies to the high standards to which KIMEP is committed as well as to its comparatively well-resourced setup; developing and administering in-house English language screening processes is known to be very resource intensive. Although we have no data on how many students had taken the KIMEP test, 41 per cent of respondents had taken one of the international tests. This contrasts markedly with Tribhuvan and Dhaka, at which only 15 per cent and 30 per cent respectively had taken an international test. Of those KIMEP students who were willing to disclose their IELTS score, it ranged from 5 to 7. It seems clear from this that KIMEP is in the privileged position to be able to engage in greater English language proficiency screening processes upon student enrolment, something which is likely to influence the extent to which students report challenges associated with EME.

Students with lower scores first enrol on the Foundation programme, which leads to B2-level English. Most students proceed directly to the first year, and the picture is one of steadily improving English proficiency among new students, supported in particular by private tuition and overseas visits (when possible). (As in most countries where English is a foreign language, it is a privileged elite that has access to foreign language learning, or individual and family effort to help to learn English outside educational institutions (Gaynor, 2017)). In the survey, 70.5 per cent of students felt themselves to be of at least B2 level (upper intermediate) with only 18 per cent reporting B1 (these are likely to be enrolled on the English Foundation programme). Again, this contrasts markedly with respondents at Tribhuvan and Dhaka where a greater number of students reported their English language proficiency levels to be at B1, intermediate level. 72 per cent at Tribhuvan reported being at intermediate level while 89 per cent at Dhaka judged themselves to range from intermediate (B1) to advanced level.

For all first-year students there is a compulsory English programme provided by the College of Humanities and Education, comprising four modules: Academic Listening and Note Taking; Academic Reading and Writing 1; Academic Speaking; Academic Reading and Writing 2. This is an intensive programme, and after the first year there is no formal provision of English teaching.

According to the survey, KIMEP students are confident in their English skills. 57.4 per cent felt that their English met their needs ‘completely’ and a further 32.8 per cent felt that their English needs were met ‘to some extent’. 43 out of 49 students reported that the University had provided them with support to improve their English since enrolment, but, interestingly, in response to the question, ‘If you were offered additional professional English support by the institution, how likely would you be to sign up?’ (Q19), nearly half (45.9 per cent) responded that they would be ‘very likely’ and 32.8 per cent ‘somewhat likely’, so over three-quarters of the sampled population would value additional support. 24 of the 43 reasons given for wanting additional support were simply a desire to get better at English, rather than because there was a sense that current proficiency levels are inadequate. Reasons included: because it’s useful to get more knowledge; because I want to develop myself more; because I know my English level is not perfect; because I want to improve my English better.

Reasons for choosing an EM programme tended also to focus on the attraction of learning English per se. It does not seem that it was the opportunity to study the discipline via English that attracted students so much as getting more proficient in English. This begs the question of whether dual provision might not be a more suitable offer; studying the content via the “national language” alongside intensive English language training. (“National language” is a problematic concept in a trilingual polity, as one of the respondents pointed out; 32 stated Kazakh as their “mother tongue” and 21 Russian). While a few studies report very strong proficiency gain from EM programmes in speaking (e.g., Rogier, 2012; Yang, 2015), there are also studies that report no or insignificant positive effect on English (e.g., Lei and Hu, 2014; Tai, 2015)). While several free-text answers to Q13 (‘What was the main reason for you to choose to study/teach on an English-medium Programme (EMP)?’) mentioned the prestige of KIMEP University (the best university in the country; one of the best universities in Central Asia), half of the answers (20/40) refer directly to improving language skills as the rationale.

On the other hand, the most highly ranked factors in a 'good English-medium course' (Q23) were the teacher's subject knowledge and teaching abilities, with 86 per cent of respondents rating them 'very important' compared with only 64 per cent judging 'teachers' fluency in English' to be 'very important'. Only 38 per cent of respondents deemed 'students' fluency in English' to be a 'very important' factor in a good EME course. Students have enrolled on their courses with a strong desire to improve their English proficiency, so getting "better at" English is a key consideration in ensuring that students get what they want out of their time on an EME programme. However, what they want from their teachers above all is excellence in their subject and in their teaching. This is not unusual in EME environments, and the field is moving in the direction of emphasising pedagogy and disciplinary expertise over English language proficiency. Certainly, there are discussions to be had around whether English language proficiency, however that is understood, is the most important factor in predicting success in EME contexts. Moves that emphasise academic literacies or the integration of content and knowledge represent more recent developments in the field and this is clearly reflected in the students' comments here as well. So, the University is an environment where excellence in English will be acquired, but the job of faculty is to know their subject and be good teachers, not first and foremost to be language role models. The University is moving towards a minimum documented English proficiency level for faculty, however (see next section), and one of the free-text responses also stated University lecturers should have a minimum English language proficiency.

## Faculty experience

In the Ministry of Education and Science Strategic Plan (MES, 2020:34), there is a strong commitment to developing all those involved in EME via 'courses of professional development, mass online courses, remote learning technologies. In addition, English language courses will be offered to teachers, students, undergraduates and doctoral students'. This is not the case at KIMEP. The English proficiency of new faculty is assessed at interview. As of this year (2021), new teaching staff are required to evidence IELTS level 8 or equivalent, although this is not yet universally tested or observed. Once in post there is no formal language support for faculty members. As elsewhere in the region, language competence is variable, with younger and internationally educated faculty tending to be more proficient; English skills may (albeit rarely) be a factor in determining whether or not to renew a contract.

The snapshot of the view and experiences of faculty (n=11) in this study indicates that they have a high level of English proficiency, with eight describing their level as 'advanced' and two being native speakers. Four state that they have been offered courses to improve their English while at the University, while seven state that they have not. This is a surprisingly positive number, as the institution does not provide any formal support for faculty to develop their English, since it is assumed that all colleagues have the necessary competence already. Six of the non-native-speaker faculty report that it is 'much easier' for them to discuss their academic subject in English than in their first language, by comparison with one-fifth of students who report in answer to Q22, 'I am more confident using my native language to discuss my academic interests'. In answer to the question (Q25), 'Does your university offer you sufficient support with English language development', six faculty answered yes and three 'maybe'. If there is no formal language support for faculty, we should interpret this answer as meaning that the colleagues who answered 'yes' don't feel they need that additional support. 'Maybe' is a potentially multifaceted response, but the fact that there appears not to be universal satisfaction with the support arrangements for faculty suggests that the University might do well to explore this matter further with non-native-speaker faculty.

## Wider institutional support

All staff are eligible for free English language courses as part of the community language programme. Furthermore, family members are entitled to a 50 per cent discount on language courses. Such courses are not compulsory, but this offer is admirable, recognising as it does that staff do have particular language needs and that resourcing them is a responsibility of the University; EME is not the preserve of those in academic roles.

# Turkmenistan: International University for the Humanities and Development

## English in education in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, from 1925 the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, gained independence in 1991 and, although not initially in favour of the break-up of the Soviet Union, quickly took a lead amongst the former Soviet republics, hosting the initial meeting of Central Asian leaders in Ashgabat in December 1991 to discuss joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Following independence, as invariably the case with newly independent states, attention turned to the language as the key expression of national identity. Work began to develop a new Roman-based script for Turkmen to replace the Cyrillic alphabet, which had been in use since 1940, indicating 'participation in an anti-Russian cultural stance that was moving swiftly throughout the former Soviet Union' (Clement, 2018:132). Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have also more recently made the symbolic break with Cyrillic, but this has not been the only language planning move to signal a political will to side more closely with the West.

Alongside the shift in Turkmen schools away from Russian as a LoLT to being regarded as a foreign language post-independence, in 1993 a three-language policy (*üç dil syýasaty*) was implemented to include English, as in Kazakhstan, encouraging English-language signage wherever possible.

Turkmenistan is listed as an upper middle-income country in the 2021 OECD list of countries eligible for Official Development Assistance, and indeed the country has access to ten per cent of global natural gas reserves. However, 'despite its status as a middle-income country, Turkmenistan is still at an early stage of transition to a market economy, requiring reforms such as price and trade liberalisation, privatisation and the creation of market regulatory institutions' (Lloyds Bank, 2021). In this challenging economic context, it has been hard to maintain a commitment to English throughout the education sector.

By the end of the century, the teaching of foreign languages had become limited to 'specialised language schools or designated institutes of higher learning' (Clement, 2018:145). A decade later in 2010, against a backdrop of enthusiasm for learning English, symbolising as it does, here as elsewhere, the opportunity for international study or business, opportunities to study English were seriously constrained. Writing of her experience teaching English in Turkmenistan, Sartor (2010) lists corruption, issues relating to access to computers and the internet, funding and infrastructure as the major impediments to English teaching, concluding that 'English remains a rare commodity, distributed only to privileged urban Turkmen who utilise English for their own personal means' (Sartor, 2010:35). Furthermore, 'higher education has been and remains an elite privilege' (Gaynor, 2017:474–5).

English is officially taught in schools from the first grade onwards as part of the six-day-a-week educational provision which lasts for 11 years from age six to age 17. The curriculum includes Turkmen, Russian and English, but it is not possible to provide tuition in English in all schools due to the lack of teachers. Private language schools are in high demand to supplement tuition in the state schools, and it is suggested that the best teachers tend to be drawn to the private sector. Some specialist schools in Ashgabat offer EME, typically in science subjects from the 7th grade onwards. Ashgabat International School is funded by the US Department of State and is located next to the US Embassy, offering EME to expatriates and locals able and willing to pay the fees. There is also a French-medium school in the capital Ashgabat, built by Bouygues Construction as part of a significant construction contract in the country, which has high prestige, but which struggles to recruit French-speaking teachers, and the Turkmen-Russian Pushkin School.

The International University for the Humanities and Development is the first and only fully English-medium HE institution (HEI) in Turkmenistan, founded in 2014 (see next section). English is however taught at most of the country's 24 HEIs, while the International Relations University (founded 2011) uses some EME in training future diplomats, and English remains the most popular of the 11 languages taught at the Turkmen National Institute of World Languages named after D Azadi.

In short, despite the formal commitment to English in the “trinity of languages”, teaching is patchy in the state sector and quality teaching is the preserve of the children of the Ashgabat elite. English has a foothold in HE, but, despite the nearly 30-year policy commitment to English, a fully EME provision, which was symbolically implemented at KIMEP in Kazakhstan hot on the heels of independence, has only within the last seven years arrived in Ashgabat.

## **International University for the Humanities and Development (IUHD)**

IUHD held its opening ceremony on 01 September 2014 with Esen Aydogdyev as inaugural President. Mr Aydogdyev, who has a US Masters degree following undergraduate studies in English Philology and Law in Turkmenistan, was previously the Turkmen ambassador to the United Nations and prior to that Ambassador to Switzerland and Austria. His appointment embodies the international aims of IUHD, even though ‘few jobs require knowledge and/or fluency in English in Turkmenistan’ (Sartor, 2010:32).

The University comprises five faculties: Social Sciences, International Law and International Relations, International Economics and Management, Information Technologies, and Language Learning (English). The latter offers a Foundation Programme, designed to enable students to progress from A2 to B2 level of English competence prior to starting their academic programme. Students who are already of B2 standard, based on the University's own placement test (like at KIMEP), enrol directly on their degree and are able to avail themselves of ESP courses during their first year. There are also general elective courses on Chinese, Japanese and advanced Legal English. We were told that language learning is a key instrument in the country's policy of permanent neutrality, allowing for the development of international trust and the pursuit of peace.

Once enrolled on a Bachelors programme, students study for four years to gain 240 ECTS credits, after which they may progress onto a one-year Masters. There are 16 undergraduate programmes available, ranging from Philosophy to Computer Science, and there are currently two Masters programmes, in Education Management and in Business Administration. There are ambitions to grow student numbers from the current 1,800 to 2,000.

It has proved insurmountably difficult to engage with the University in a meaningful way on this project, despite the herculean efforts and endless patience of staff at the British Embassy in Ashgabat, acting as an intermediary. Even to engage with a University in Turkmenistan requires the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 15 January 2021, the British Embassy sent a note verbale to the Ministry, requesting permission for Andrew Linn to disseminate the online survey to staff and students at the University. In the meantime, emails from Andrew Linn to the one public-facing email address utilised by the University went unanswered. On 18 February 2021, the Ministry granted Prof. Linn permission via a return note verbale, to have a meeting with the University, which took place on 04 March 2021. The meeting took the form of an online presentation of the current project to two representatives of the University: a Head of Department and an English language lecturer. Both were receptive and interested in the investigation of the experience of EME being conducted by the British Council. Having learned more about the project and its intended outcomes, Prof. Linn was advised to write with more detail so that the intended online survey could be considered by the University. Due to staff changes, there was no ongoing point of contact at the University. The request for approval of the survey by the “expert analytical committee” of the Academic Council of the University, sent on 10 March, remained unanswered by 24 May, by which point we had to determine that we had reached the end of the line for now.

This experience is a common one for international researchers seeking to develop collaboration in Turkmenistan. In 2014, before the establishment of IUHD, the British Council undertook a scoping study on opportunities for English Language Teaching (ELT) in the country (British Council, 2014). Although this involved a pre-pandemic visit to the country and face-to-face meetings with representatives of various institutions, progress was similarly challenging:

*It was clear from the meetings that doing business in Turkmenistan is a very complicated and long process of identifying the real decision makers, securing approvals from them, negotiating a contract and mitigating against risks particular to this country. Except in the truly private sector, the real decision makers will always be in central government and a foreign entity should always begin with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the Ministry of Education it is likely that decisions about such agreements would need to be approved by the Department for International Relations before the specialists start talking about the details. (British Council, 2014:n.p.)*

This is a real shame. IUHD clearly has genuine globalising ambitions, not least via the implementation of EME, but engagement with the international community of researchers and indeed employers is not going to progress rapidly while it is hobbled by outmoded and obstructive bureaucratic processes. We were told that the main ambition of IUHD is to join the world university rankings, and this ambition would certainly be facilitated by a more open door to the community of world universities (cf. Gaynor, 2017:490).

## Student experience

Thanks to the efforts of Mr Kakajykov, however, we did get the chance to talk to one student from IUHD, who is studying for a Bachelors in International Trade. She confirmed that students at the University speak English at all times, both in and outside class, noting that 'every student prefers to speak in English'. There appears to be a sense of solidarity around the learning of English, and students are said to help each other, arranging self-help courses in addition to the courses offered by private language schools in Ashgabat. As in other countries in the region that we have surveyed previously (cf. Linn, 2021), the main motivation for taking an EME programme would seem to be to get better at English, something that the IUHD student stated quite categorically.

Not knowing English is seen as a disabler, excluding students from international Olympiads and from the opportunity for overseas study. The student we spoke to hopes to do a Masters in London and expects to work in international trade in the future.

## Faculty experience

Not being able to speak to teaching faculty or to carry out a survey of their experiences, it is difficult to know for sure what their experience is like or what support they receive in delivering EME programmes. Teachers at IUHD are said to be predominantly early-career and to be graduates from overseas universities. Competence in English is assessed at interview, and the University seeks to engage 'people who speak English well'. The standard of English among teaching faculty is seen by the University management as 'not a very big problem', but there are language clubs for teaching staff to provide peer support as with the students. Names of teaching staff are listed on the University website, but no further information about their background and experience is available, and names look to be all Turkmen.

The previous British Council scoping study from 2014 concluded that 'there is clearly no culture of institutions investing in the professional development of their teachers' and that 'money [for teacher training] is held centrally, not in the institutions, and decisions made there' (British Council, 2014:n.p.). However, in our meeting with the senior staff from IUHD, a more positive picture was presented for IUHD, noting that 'many' had gone through the IUHD Masters in Education Management.

Much more work is needed than has proved possible in this time-limited project to explore the policy and the reality relating to EME in Turkmen HE. Because of the bureaucratic context, research proceeds slowly, but we do hope that this research can be pursued once international travel becomes possible again. The official policy of trilingualism is a fascinating one in a country without a widespread need for the use of English across society. The ambition of IUHD remains compelling and positive. Without detailed research into the lived experience of EME and a full understanding of the reality of delivering EME programmes on the part of the Ministry and universities alike, however, there is a danger that it will remain an experiment for the elite only.



# Bangladesh: University of Dhaka

## English in education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has always been associated with the mother language movement (also known as Bhasa Andolon in Bangla) because the nation was founded on 21 February 1952 based on this. About 98 per cent of the country's population speaks Bangla (Hamid and Honan, 2012; Imam, 2005; Rahman et al., 2019) although there are around 39 minority languages, such as Chakma, Hajong and Chatgonian, spoken in different parts of the country.

It was a British colony until 1947 and was East Pakistan until its independence as Bangladesh in 1971. Soon after this, Bangla was the medium of education at all levels except in Madrasah schools and some elitist EM schools in the cities (see Hamid, 2010; Hamid and Honan, 2012). However, language-in-education policy has changed as the National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2010) shows, and the government has promoted English language education through different ELT projects (Hamid and Erling, 2016; Shrestha, 2013) due to its association with economic growth and globalisation. English is also widely used in urban areas and large business organisations.

English is taught as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 up to degree level. The language of learning and teaching in primary schools is Bangla, and learning an ethnic language is promoted. In secondary schools, both Bangla and English can be used as the LoLT in practice, however, Bangla predominates in all state and community secondary schools. All EM private schools adopt EME, thus creating a divide between state/community and private schools. There is no information on whether any private schools adopt Bangla-medium education (BME). The National Education Policy 2010 allows universities to use Bangla alongside English. Nevertheless, while public universities do use both Bangla and English, private universities have EME only (Hamid, Jahan, et al., 2013).

## University of Dhaka

The University of Dhaka (DU) was established with three faculties and 12 departments in the capital city Dhaka in July 1921. It is the oldest university and one of the prestigious universities which played a key role in the Language Movement to establish Bangla as the state language.

Currently, DU has 13 Faculties, 83 Departments, 12 Institutes, and more than 56 Research Centres (see DU website). As of 2021, it has 37,018 students and 1,992 teachers. Among the students, there are 20,773 male and 12,028 female students, indicating a notable gender gap in the student enrolment. There is no information as to what proportion of students enter DU from EME, BME, state or private schools, although it is likely that many students will have come from BME backgrounds, given that about 80 per cent of secondary schools in Bangladesh follow BME (see Jahan and Hamid, 2019:392). Of the 1,992 teachers, 1,327 are male, 638 female and 27 other.

DU also has 105 constituent colleges and institutes across the country, comprising 45,374 students (16,922 male and 28,452 female) and 7,981 teachers (4,200 male and 3,721 female). The student figures show that, in contrast to the student body in the main campus (Dhaka), constituent colleges have many more female students. This may be due to the capital Dhaka being less accessible than other cities and towns to female students for various reasons including economic and sociocultural ones (for statistical information: [https://www.du.ac.bd/main\\_menu/the\\_university/du\\_at\\_a\\_glance](https://www.du.ac.bd/main_menu/the_university/du_at_a_glance)).

DU attracts a small number of international students too, primarily from South Asia. Currently (2021), the proportion of international students is three per cent according to Times Higher Education, while [bdnews24.com](http://bdnews24.com) reported a decline in international students in 2019 – just over 8,000 in the affiliated colleges.

Subjects on offer include a wide range as in other well-established universities: Arts, Social Sciences, Law, Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Education, Pharmacy, Medicine, Business Studies and so on. Institutes range from Education and Research, Modern Languages to Business Administration, and Nutrition and Food Science. There is no information about the gender distribution across the disciplines.

## English in policy and practice at University of Dhaka

Bangladesh's National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2010) specifies the following regarding the use of English language in HE:

*Strategy 9: English will be taught as a compulsory subject at the degree level of all colleges and universities. It will carry 100 marks/three credits.*

*Strategy 11: Curricula and syllabi of higher education will be updated to meet international standards. In order to expand tertiary-level education, it is essential to translate standard books of modern knowledge and science into Bangla. Recognising the national importance of such a programme, urgent steps will be taken. English will remain as a medium of instruction in higher education along with Bangla.*

This education policy mandates English language as compulsory for all HE students and as a LoLT alongside Bangla. Therefore, the policy seems to encourage a bilingual education. However, DU does not appear to have any published language-in-education policy, although private universities in the country often have explicit EME policies as reported in previous studies (e.g., Hamid, Jahan, et al., 2013). DU's website is mostly in English except for the use of both Bangla and English on the home page. The undergraduate admissions page is in both Bangla and English versions. All faculties and institutes use English to describe their missions and programmes. This demonstrates the strong presence of English in the University.

Most arts and social science subjects are primarily taught through Bangla, whereas STEM subjects, business studies, economics, medicine and pharmacy are taught primarily through English with Bangla, thus offering flexibility. Outside the formal classroom, Bangla is used as a lingua franca and there is some use of English and Bangla dialects (e.g., Sylheti) and minority languages. Our DU survey data (n=74; 61 students and 13 staff members; all Bangladeshis) also shows students and teachers to be multilingual, as they used Bangla, English, Hindi, Urdu and Spanish in the classroom. The mention of Spanish is surprising, but it is a language taught at the Institute of Modern Languages. Additionally, the survey participants spoke other languages: Arabic, French, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Turkish and German. These languages have economic value due to Bangladesh's trade relationships with countries where they are spoken.

Teaching materials are available in both Bangla and English. However, materials in STEM subjects, medicine, pharmacy and business studies tend to be predominantly in English. Likewise, examinations and assessment in these disciplines are conducted in English while Bangla is used in other disciplines except language subjects.

Like all other universities of similar status in Bangladesh, DU holds its own in-house entrance examinations for all its undergraduate and research degree programmes. They include English as one of the subjects. The English test includes reading comprehension, grammar and paragraph/essay writing tasks. There does not seem to be any indication of the level of proficiency required, though cut scores may be set. There is no published information available about the rationale for the use of the English test.

## Student and faculty experience

This section is based on the survey data collected from DU. Due to the low number of staff participating in the survey (n=13), the staff data is not statistically significant. Therefore, both student and staff experiences data are reported together, but where possible comments on staff experiences are made (see the Appendix for a full list of the survey questions).

The survey indicates that students and teachers use multiple languages, although Bangla and English are predominant. The participants were asked to estimate their current level of English. Most respondents (89 per cent) judged themselves to range from Intermediate (B1) to Advanced level. It is interesting to note that a few students felt themselves to be at a very low level. Among the faculty, a professor reported being of native-speaker level of English language proficiency, and the rest reported Advanced or Upper-Intermediate levels.

The survey went on to ask what languages are used for various purposes, and the results show that, unsurprisingly, Bangla use is high outside the classroom and formal situations. For example, the respondents predominantly used Bangla with students outside class and with maintenance staff whereas the use of Bangla and English was quite common in classrooms, meetings and training. However, the most striking result concerns the overwhelming use of English for email communication (90.5 per cent) followed by research purposes (75.6 per cent). This is due to written communication for email and research knowledge/publications mostly being English and because of the wider and more diverse audience for these channels of communication.

Participants were asked to give reasons for their choice to teach on or study EME programmes. Their reasons included: Employment opportunities, Love for/interest in English, Professional improvement/self-development as a language teacher, Learning/improving English skills, Going abroad, English as modern language/becoming part of the global community, EMI is a requirement, Access to materials, and Personal aspiration. Most of these reasons seem to be driven by instrumental motivations to achieve career goals.

When asked about how much they are exposed to English in their spare time compared to their university time, about a third each reported 'about the same time', 'less English in spare time' and 'more English in spare time'.

Participants were also asked if they had taken international English tests like IELTS and TOEFL. About 70 per cent (n= 52) replied negatively, which could be because DU does not require students to pass such external tests. Most of those who had taken a test indicated that they took the IELTS test.

This question was followed by Q17 on whether their English language proficiency meets their university needs. The majority (over 91 per cent) believed it does to some extent or completely.

The next set of questions focused on English language support. The first question was about the current provision, and about 62 per cent (including four lecturers) reported that they were offered English language courses to improve their English. About 88 per cent of respondents thought that they would be likely to sign up for additional professional English support to improve their professional communication skills, job prospects and study abroad. This high level of interest in professional English support suggests its lack in the current provision.

Respondents were asked about various tasks and their ability to cope in English. While respondents felt confident to carry out everyday university tasks and receptive tasks (reading, listening to others) with no or little difficulty, the productive task of speaking seemed challenging to most. However, they seemed more comfortable with the writing task than the speaking task, which may be a function of the historic de-emphasising of speaking in secondary school English (see Das et al., 2014).

Free text responses in the survey confirm that what students would find most useful in terms of English language support are speaking courses.

*More day-to-day interaction in English should be increased in the classroom in order to make students competent users of English.*

*University generally offers academic courses in English, which is not quite helpful to improve our overall speaking skill. So, I think University should be more careful towards improving the overall proficiency in English. Moreover, it becomes more difficult for students who have beginner level of proficiency. So extra care should be provided to them. And University can also help students by providing them spoken English course instead of giving us academic courses in general.*

Respondents were asked about their ability to use English in academic contexts. About 85 per cent felt comfortable discussing their academic subject in English while a small number felt more comfortable in their native language. Among academic staff (n=13), eight felt comfortable to discuss their academic subject in both English and their native language.

The next section of the survey aimed to capture respondents' perceptions about various aspects of EME. The first question (Q23 – see appendix) asked them to rate the importance of various aspects. Respondents rated teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical abilities, fluency in English, variety of classroom activities, student contribution to classroom interactions and access to English sources in the library as very important. This indicates these participants attribute higher value to pedagogical abilities and communicative classroom practices than support structures. Aspects like speaking English all the time, international staff and students were not considered as important. This may be due to the fact that all our participants were Bangladeshis, and DU has very few international teaching staff and only a small number of international students who are primarily from South Asia and can speak and understand Bangla due to intelligibility across major South Asian languages.

Respondents were then asked to what extent they value linguistic diversity and the use of English. While most of them strongly agreed or agreed with most statements, they had less strong views as to whether 'Using English on campus is just as easy as using my own language'. In the absence of a clear university policy on languages in education, the National Education Policy 2010 still reflects the use of Bangla and English alongside one another as well as more linguistic diversity.

This official bilingual policy was reflected also in students' free-text responses.

*It is necessary to be able to read and write in English up to a workable level. We should put more focus on studying in native language. Reading materials should be available in native language. Teachers should be more engaged in writing books in native language, at least translate books in native language.*

*English is a must but It's not above my mother tongue. Universities should provide English language development courses in the first semester of the programme. Teachers should balance their lectures, adding English and the native language where needed and they should motivate students to adhere to their academic courses!*

*English should be learnt as a medium of communication not for showing pompousness. One's mother tongue should be given the most importance.*

These comments show a recognition, on the one hand, of the importance of English while also, on the other, advocating use of the students' first language, Bangla, to support learning. Some students commented on challenges related to communicating in English for particular groups of students:

In my university there is a lot of diversity in students. There are students from very rural place too. They often have poor base in English. But most of the time they lack interest and sincerity to learn more. The university should work on this.

This last comment suggests that some students, particularly those who are already disadvantaged, may be particularly adversely affected by EME. This, then, provides some evidence in support of EME exacerbating existing inequalities.

The penultimate questions asked respondents if they think that DU offered them sufficient support for their English language development. As with the previous question on English language provision, the opinion seemed to be mixed: 35.1 per cent (yes), 32.4 per cent (maybe) and 32.4 per cent (no). It appears that most of the students and the teaching staff think either there is insufficient support or are unsure about the support. These responses may have depended on which disciplines they came from, as most respondents (65 per cent) were from English language, Applied Linguistics and Literature departments too. Those respondents who replied 'no' or 'maybe' suggested the following actions:

1. Establishing an English language support unit (20 responses)
2. Providing writing support (15 responses)
3. Delivering English language courses (13 responses)
4. Providing more materials in English (11 responses)
5. University lecturers should have a minimum English language proficiency (eight responses)
6. Providing vocabulary lists with translation of key terms from English into the local language (eight responses)
7. Providing more materials in English (seven responses)
8. Providing more materials in the local language (four responses)

## Wider institutional support

Dhaka University does not appear to have any clear policy on providing wider institutional EME support to other staff, including administrative staff.

# Nepal: Tribhuvan University

## English in education in Nepal

Nepal, like Bangladesh, is listed among the 'least-developed' countries in the DAC List of ODA Recipients. A highly multilingual country, at least 123 languages are spoken across Nepal (Phyak, 2016; Sah and Li, 2018; Shrestha, 2009). English has always enjoyed a higher symbolic status and value than the local languages including the national language Nepali. The English language is the most widely used foreign language in the country and has gained currency in the last few decades in all spheres of life, including education (Ibid).

As a subject, English has been compulsory throughout schooling for over 50 years, now starting as early as Grade 1 (Shrestha, 2009). With regard to the medium of education, Nepali has been used since the democratic movement in 1951, prior to which other than those from the ruling class had no access to education. While EME was originally confined to private schools, thus restricting access to affluent families, it has gained prominence in recent years (Shrestha, 2009; Phyak, 2016). Due to demands from parents (Sah and Li, 2018), the Education Act has since 2010 allowed EME alongside Nepali-medium education (NME) in state schools as well (Sah and Li, 2018). This policy, reinforced by the National Education Policy 2019 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2019), has led to a significant increase of EME in state schools (Ranabhat et al., 2018). However, the quality of EME in schools is under-researched and thus little is known about the impact of EME on educational attainment and progress. The government admits that teachers are poorly prepared for EME (Ministry of Education, 2016). Moreover, EME appears to be increasing mostly in urban areas, potentially exacerbating existing societal divides between urban and rural areas in what is already a highly stratified Nepalese society. All this may lead to inequality in educational opportunities across the country.

In contrast to the case in pre-tertiary education, the government has never had a clear policy on the LoLT in HE. The most recent education policy from 2019 remains silent about this, although it clearly states that in secondary schools both NME and EME or a mixture of both will be used. Only one university, Kathmandu University (autonomous and self-funded), seems to have an EME policy, and it is considered to be an expensive university.

This institution does not appear to have a university-level LoLT policy document although some departments mention it on their website, and the university website is almost entirely in English. Nationally, EME is more widespread in STEM, medicine and forestry, whereas NME is prevalent in the social sciences and humanities, in line with the disciplinary variation observed in other countries (Owen et al., 2021; Phyak and Ojha, 2019).

## Tribhuvan University

Tribhuvan University (TU) is the oldest state university in Nepal, being established as a national HE institution in 1959. With almost 90 per cent of the nation's HE students enrolled at and faculty affiliated with this university, it is by far the largest in Nepal. Its main campus is located south west of the capital, Kathmandu, in Kirtipur, a historic town in the Kathmandu valley. In 2013, the university was declared as the Central University by the Government of Nepal, thus receiving more funding from the University Grants Commission. TU is one of the largest universities for student enrolment in the world as of 2021, testifying to the growing significance of higher education in developing economies. It currently has 61 constituent campuses and 1,080 affiliated campuses across Nepal, thus making HE accessible to the wider population in the country. Out of 1,080 affiliated campuses, 529 are 'community' and 551 'private', the latter offering TU programmes and following TU policies to provide affordable HE courses. Most of these campuses are located in the hilly region of the country, including major cities like Kathmandu.

TU has four faculties (Humanities and Social Sciences, Management, Education and Law), five institutes (all STEM disciplines, medicine, agriculture and forestry) and four research centres. These faculties and institutes are sub-divided into a number of departments. The University Grants Commission (equivalent to the UK Office for Students and Research councils) report for 2019 shows that TU had 7,592 teachers and 335,543 students enrolled in that year. Among the students, 180,326 were female and 155,217 male, showing a higher rate of female enrolment. TU does not appear to have any international students although there may be students from neighbouring India. The new education policy of 2019 encourages internationalisation of HE, which may change the student demography in future.

## English in policy and practice at Tribhuvan University

Language-in-education policy for HE in Nepal, as noted above, is vaguer than for schools. The recent attraction towards more EME at TU appears to be driven by internationalisation and globalisation ambitions. In practice, however, TU teachers adopt NME and/or EME depending on the discipline they teach. It is also worth noting that the multilingual student population may not speak Nepali as their first language (Phyak and Ojha, 2019). Not all teachers are prepared well to teach their subjects through EME and are thus unlikely to be able to provide English language support to those students who need it. The situation becomes worse when students from both Nepali-medium and English-medium schools come together to study at TU. Students who come from NME schools have typically received no English language support, which may significantly disadvantage them in terms of academic achievement compared to those from EME school backgrounds. The difference in experience between those students who have come from EME schools and those who have come from NME schools were highlighted in free-text responses in the survey, e.g:

*As from our high school level we have to study in English, and as for me I have been studying English from my junior class. So, I don't have much problem in English but also it is not my native language. So, in some cases it affects me as well.*

*Most of the students from government [typically NME] school have more difficulties in understanding and writing skill in English because of their poor knowledge in English in previous academic level.*

These comments suggest that students who have come to Tribhuvan's EME programmes from EME schools will find it easier to cope. However, even students coming from EME secondary schools are not impervious to the challenges.

In disciplines where EME is adopted, it is rarely the case that an English-only policy is adopted because often teachers use Nepali to explain difficult concepts to students. It is also likely that if there is a different majority language spoken by students in the classroom and the teacher (e.g. Maithili), the teacher may use it in addition to English and Nepali. Therefore, there is plenty of translanguaging – the resourceful drawing on features from different languages – going on in the classroom.

As evidence of such translanguaging practices, as well as of their effectiveness for enhancing understanding, students commented:

*Most of our professors deliver lectures in Nepali medium for English-based subject also. Also, I feel difficulty in talking with person who are English native, because of difficulty in understanding their words.*

*If our teaching staff are able to make us understand our academic education/lesson in both English as well as our native language, would be more effective and easy to understand all the related subjects' knowledge.*

These comments indicate not only that lecturers at TU draw on translanguaging strategies but also that students find this useful as a way to ameliorate comprehension.

Teaching materials for courses in TU are available in Nepali and English. However, subjects taught in English tend to have more materials in English than in Nepali. Some subjects may also have them in Hindi. As with teaching, most of the Arts and Humanities subject materials are in Nepali and increasingly in English too. Most of the STEM subjects, medicine and business management course materials are in English and some in Nepali. One student comments on the preponderance of English-language teaching material as such:

*English is the prime medium for our university that we were taught in English with English-based books, notes, all the examination, presentation, thesis in English medium.*

As with teaching, assessment questions are provided in both Nepali and English except for language subjects (e.g. French) and subjects predominantly adopting EME (e.g. sciences). This gives students an option to write their responses in either English or Nepali. TU also has in-house entrance examinations for undergraduate- and postgraduate-level programme admissions that include English language as a component. They assess students' general English language proficiency but there is no information regarding the rationale or proficiency level required. Some institutes, such as the Institute of Engineering, have published an admissions booklet in Nepali while others do not have anything in the public domain. Disciplines predominantly taught through EME (e.g. STEM subjects) require students to use English in assessment. In the absence of formal English language support provision (EAP or any other type) in a department (Owen et al., 2021), the adoption of English in assessment is likely to further disadvantage students with NME in schools.

## Student and faculty experience

The survey respondents (n=86 responses, mostly students) were all Nepalese nationals and therefore spoke the national language, Nepali. However, five of them mentioned a different mother tongue: Hindi, Maithili, Newari, Surajpuri and Tharu. They spoke multiple languages including Nepali and English with a majority speaking Hindi (45/85) as well. This is not surprising in Nepal. Their disciplines were primarily STEM subjects such as Zoology and Chemistry and applied sciences such as Forestry and Agriculture. There were five respondents from Public Administration.

When asked about the current level of their English language proficiency, most of them (72 per cent) perceived it to be Intermediate. It is worth noting that eight of them felt their English was at the Beginner level, which would pose significant challenges in pursuing an EME programme. It is also possible that their understanding of 'beginner' may not be that of the standard term used in language proficiency, under-rating themselves because they would have completed at least 12 years' English language learning in school.

The survey went on to ask what languages are used for various purposes (see Appendix).

The results show that respondents mainly use the national language, Nepali, with students outside class (79 per cent) and with maintenance staff (86 per cent). This is not surprising as all of them speak Nepali and the maintenance staff are not required to speak English. However, a large majority of the respondents use English for email communication (94 per cent) and research purposes (85 per cent). Again, both email communication and research are written and formal domains with a wider audience, dominated by English, as was the case at Dhaka University. For other purposes, such as administration and meetings, respondents use either or both Nepali and English, as all involved speak both, and the choice seems to be a pragmatic one.

Respondents were asked for their reason for choosing to study or teach on an EM programme. The open comments underscore the various themes referred in the survey:

Status of English (International, global, universal): English is globally accepted language; English is an international language and world's science and researches are based on English language; English is the international language and the different textbooks, journals and other study materials are also available on English language; international Language; My study Wildlife Management and Research subjects are in English.

English Medium Programme the only option (mandatory, compulsory): Study of science is available only in English medium; As per our subject we have to write answers in English as compulsory.

English improvement: To learn English language quite more.

Easy to study in English: As we have been studying in English medium since pre-primary level, and most of the courses are offered in English medium, it was easy for me to choose an English-medium programme.

Better job opportunities: For a successful career.

Availability of materials: All our study materials are in English language.

These positive comments about English are not surprising and bear out other studies on the use or value of English language in Nepal (e.g., Owen, et al., 2021). The respondents' reasons appear to be influenced by external factors; however, their personal motivations for NME or EME are difficult to elicit from the reasons given, although career prospects is one reason. For disciplines like STEM, students have no choice other than EME.

When asked about how much they are exposed to English in their spare time compared to their university time, about two-thirds (65 per cent) responded 'less English in spare time'. This is similar to the finding at KIMEP University where 34.4 per cent of respondents reported that they use more English in their spare time than on campus. Only about nine per cent of them stated 'more English', which may be an index of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Question 15 asked if respondents had taken any English language tests like IELTS and TOEFL. Most respondents (85 per cent) stated 'no'. Among those who had taken a language test, five reported taking IELTS and others mentioned other lesser-known tests. The next question concerned respondents' English language proficiency meeting their university needs. Many reported that it met the needs to some extent (56 per cent) or completely (27 per cent). However, seven respondents felt that it did not meet their needs.

The next set of questions focused on English language support. The first question was about the current provision, and 87 per cent, including four lecturers, reported that there is no English language support offered to them. When asked if they would sign up for such support if it were offered by their institution, almost all of them (96 per cent) said it was 'very likely' (73 per cent) or 'somewhat likely' (23 per cent). The reasons for their signing up for the course included: English improvement, better job or study opportunities, and boost confidence.

In light of students' belief that English is very important, there seems to be something of a mismatch in the extent to which language support is provided by TU. Free-text survey responses testify to the importance students accord to English but also to the absence of institutional support to enhance their language development.

*We all know that English is an international language. It is spoken worldwide. So, it is important to communicate in English language. University should offer English language course first so that everyone can understand lectures. Nowadays people are taking English language as a measure of intelligence.*

*Fluency in English is very essential. Our university is unable to fulfil this criteria, and it has hampered my career a lot.*

*I think professors should emphasise more in speaking English in and outside the class, in lab, and campus should provide English course classes to students.*

*It is better if our university provides the facility to enhance our English speaking and learning trainings.*

Respondents were asked about various tasks and their ability to manage in English. While the respondents felt confident (with no or little difficulty) to carry out everyday university tasks and receptive tasks (reading, listening to others), a third of them seemed less confident about the productive task of speaking. Speaking may have been challenging to them because they have limited opportunities to practise it outside the classroom or even within the classroom where the teacher-talk tends to predominate.

Respondents were asked about their ability to use English in academic contexts. About 79 per cent feel comfortable discussing their academic subject in English. About 20 per cent of the respondents feel more comfortable in their native language. Among academic staff (n=4), two felt comfortable discussing their academic subject in both English and their native language and the other two in English.

The next section of the questionnaire aimed to capture the respondents' perceptions about various aspects of EME practices. Question 23 asked about their relative importance. The results suggest that teachers' subject knowledge, pedagogical abilities, teachers' fluency in English, variety of classroom activities, student contribution to classroom interactions, access to online resources and access to English sources in the library are very important. This indicates these participants attribute high value to pedagogical abilities, communicative classroom practices and support structures. Aspects like speaking English all the time, international staff and students were not considered as important as those previous aspects. This result may be due to the fact that all our participants were Nepalese, and TU has no international teaching staff and students.

Respondents were asked to what extent they value linguistic diversity and the use of English language. The results suggest that they strongly agree or agree with most of the statements about these two aspects. However, they remain ambivalent (30 per cent neither agree nor disagree and 29 per cent disagree) about the statement 'Using English on campus is just as easy as using my own language'. The respondents appear tolerant to not having native-like English and positive about learning other languages. This result appears to contradict studies which show preference for native-speaker-like English and signals a tolerance for linguistic diversity at TU.

The penultimate questions asked respondents if they think that TU offered them sufficient support for their English language development. Nearly half of the respondents, including four lecturers (47 per cent, 40), thought there was no such support while 37 per cent of them thought 'maybe'. Only 16 per cent thought there was support. It appears that most of the students and the teaching staff think there is not sufficient support or are unsure about the support. Those respondents who said 'no' suggested the following remedies:

1. Delivering English language courses (33)
2. Providing vocabulary lists with translation of key terms from English into the local language (30)
3. Establishing an English language support unit (29)
4. Providing writing support (25)
5. Providing more materials in English (20)
6. University lecturers should have a minimum English language proficiency (20)



The results above suggest that there is a clear call for additional English language support. Potentially, all students and staff following EME would derive benefit here, although their needs will be different and the challenge of effective delivery across such a large and dispersed institution could be considerable. The expressed demand may derive from the absence of a clear LoLT policy at TU.

## **Wider institutional support**

Tribhuvan University does not appear to have any clear policy on providing wider institutional EME support to other staff including administrative staff.

# Concluding remarks

This report provides the briefest of reviews of four complex EME contexts. The respondents in three of the countries were self-selecting, and in the case of Turkmenistan it was not possible in the event to gain a significant insight into the attitudes and experiences of those involved in EME. However, we are in a position to suggest some broad patterns emerging from our four vignettes, which may be tested against further case studies being explored by the British Council in ongoing work. Our case studies, backed up by further local examples from the existing EME literature, may even suggest a heuristic for HE institutions seeking to internationalise through EME.

However, before offering such a heuristic, it is important to be clear that our study has pointed, however tentatively, to some important structural constraints that are likely to contribute significantly to the extent to which HE institutions are in a position to implement EME in a way that is conducive to quality education. This can be tied back to our conceptual framework as briefly introduced in the introduction, which classified our four institutions as 'Least Developed' (Nepal and Bangladesh) vs 'Upper Middle Income' (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) and as elite (KIMEP and International University for the Humanities and Development) vs public (Tribhuvan and Dhaka).

On the proviso of a small sample size, this conceptual model allows us to make a tentative suggestion that large state universities in Least Developed countries which seek to add EME to their existing portfolio of programmes face significant and well-documented challenges in so doing. Challenges include the preparedness of faculty, students and administrators to deal with EM, adequate support arrangements for those involved in those programmes, sufficient learning resources, and developing different pedagogies. Dhaka University and Tribhuvan University as very large, long-established multidisciplinary state universities face just those challenges, along with more diverse student populations compared to small elite universities. Often, they will be under government mandate to cater for a wide range of students. Elite universities, on the other hand, can be more selective and may even implement their own in-house English language

screening tools. It is notable that students at the large state institutions, at least as it comes through in our survey, may place a stronger emphasis on gaining subject knowledge while students at the small globally-oriented universities in Central Asia place more emphasis on the acquisition of better language skills as a key investment in international employability. One Nepalese student commented, 'English language is important but understanding studying topics is most important. Native languages should also be given priority', and another took the view, 'except for academic purposes, it's better to use native language, save your mother tongue'.

We noted above that there is a sociolinguistic divide between students from Bangladesh and Nepal who have attended state/community schools and those who attended private EME schools. As private universities are EME in these countries, social advantage is built into the EME pipeline. Furthermore, access to EME STEM subjects at tertiary level is facilitated for those with a private school EME background, and, as those disciplines will on balance provide access to careers in more lucrative sectors of the economy, advantage is baked in throughout the education system and the flow through to employment. EME, thanks to parental pressure, has become more widespread in state schools in Nepal, but here EME is an index of urban versus rural advantage. Only Kathmandu University is fully EME, and enrolment at that institution comes with an enhanced price tag. One student from Tribhuvan University commented that 'most of the students from government school have more difficulties in understanding and writing skill in English because of their poor knowledge in English in previous academic level'.

KIMEP University on the other hand is in many ways an optimal EME environment, exhibiting the key conditions for EME to succeed, which are:

- Being officially fully EM, although translanguaging is used in practice
- Being EM from the beginning
- Being a relatively small institution with a clear mission and sense of identity, offering a coherent mix of programmes

- Being private and having a more than adequate level of resourcing, greater prestige and thus the ability to attract higher-ability students who report few challenges studying through English
- Operating in an education context with English as part of general education from Primary onwards
- Recruiting students with the opportunity for additional tutoring before and during university and for global travel and international experience
- Recognising the need for extensive EAP training and providing it
- Testing the English proficiency of new students and faculty and responding proactively to the outcomes
- Making EME an explicit part of a wider internationalisation strategy
- Recognising the needs of administrative staff

Few institutions have the privilege of working under all or even some of these conditions, and admitting that successful EME presupposes students from supportive backgrounds (as well as paying larger salaries to attract internationally competitive faculty) is not a comfortable admission. However, the fact remains that EME is not an abstraction. It is informed and enabled by its context, and an optimal context presupposes certain conditions. If some of those conditions are not in place, the outcomes of EME will be proportionately impacted, and institutions and ministries seeking to implement EME need to recognise that. Not all EME contexts are like KIMEP University, so not all EME experiences and outcomes will be like those at KIMEP.

At a broader level, we would suggest awareness of the possibility that EME serves to perpetuate existing global and societal divides. English, in other words, may act as a propeller of existing geopolitical and societal stratifications, accumulating privilege where privilege already exists and exacerbating challenges where challenges already exist.

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# Appendix

Survey questions:

## Context

1. What University do you work/study at?
2. Which one of the following best describes your status...?
3. What subject do you teach/study?
4. If you are an international student/staff, what is your home country?
5. When did you start working/studying at your University?
6. What is your mother tongue?
7. What other languages do you know?
8. What languages do you use when you are at university?

## Experience

9. What do you think is your current level of English...?
10. Do you use more than one language when at University?
11. If the answer to the previous question is Yes, what languages do you use in the following situations at university? (With students outside class; During class; During office hours; During PhD supervision meetings; To email; For administrative purposes; For research purposes; With maintenance staff; During formal meetings; During training sessions)
12. If you chose the “other” language option in the previous question, please specify your answer.
13. What was the main reason for you to choose to study/teach on an English Medium Programme...?
14. How often are you exposed to English in your spare time (for example, through music, computer games, or films; interacting with friends and family) compared to when you are at the University...?
15. Have you ever taken an international test in English, such as TOEFL or IELTS?
16. If the answer to the previous question is ‘Yes’, what level did you achieve when you started your English-medium study/work at your university?
17. Do you think your level of English proficiency meets your needs at university...?
18. Since you started at your university, has it offered you any courses to improve your English?
19. If you were offered additional professional English support by the institution, how likely would you be to sign up...?
20. Why would or wouldn't you be likely to sign up?
21. How able are you to perform in the following situations? (To understand English in your daily activities at university; To speak English in your daily activities at university; To write English in your daily activities at university; To read written documents in English in your daily activities at university; To understand spoken English in general; To speak English for general purposes outside the university; To write English in general; To read English for general purposes)
22. Which of the following sentences is true about you? (Discussing my academic subjects in English is much easier for me compared to my native language; I can discuss my academic subjects in both English and my native language; I am more confident using my native language to discuss my academic interests; I am a native speaker of English)

# Appendix (cont)

## Attitudes

23. On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 – “very important” and 5 – “not at all important”), please rank the important factors in a good English-medium course. (Teacher’s subject knowledge; Teacher’s teaching abilities; Teacher’s fluency in English; Students’ fluency in English; Variety of class activities; All students contributing to class discussions; Using English all the time; Access to online resources; Access to English sources in the library; International staff; International students)
24. What is your opinion of the following situations? (I think we should be more tolerant to linguistic diversity on campus; I think that knowing English will make me more likely to succeed in my career; I like using English; Using English on campus is just as easy as using my own language; It doesn’t matter if someone does not speak English like a native speaker; I am interested in learning languages)
24. Does your university offer you sufficient support with English language development?
26. If the answer to the previous question is No, what additional support could be offered? (Providing writing support; Delivering English language courses; Providing more materials in English; Establishing an English language support unit; Providing more materials in the local language; University lecturers should have a minimum English language proficiency; Providing vocabulary lists with translation of key terms from English into the local language)
27. Please add any additional thoughts or comments on the above questions or on the issue of English language use at your university in the box below. Feel free to expand the box if you have a lot to write!



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