

Ideology of Second Language Policy in Nepal

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the situation of Nepali second language policy in terms of ideological, global, and technological influences, and sociocultural and economic forces of the society. The main purpose of this study is to analyze how English is identified as the second language in Nepal, what factors play a role in determining the second languages, and why the issue of the second language is controversial in Nepal. This study followed a phenomenological research design under a post-positivistic research paradigm, which is known as the qualitative research approach. Both secondary and primary sources of data were used in this study. Secondary data were collected from already published books, articles, journals, and various legal documents that were gathered through offline and online libraries. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with participants. Long-term ideological influence of England and the English people, social and political influences of the English-speaking world, and interest of the rulers play a vital role in recognizing English as the second language in Nepal. The process of democratization, liberalization, capitalization, Christianization, influences of western education, technology, and modernization also play a role in the use of English as the second language, and international or foreign language; however, it creates new challenges to maintain the linguistic diversity in Nepal. The study will be very important and applicable for policy makers and researchers to analyze the negative and positive impacts of the English language for maintaining linguistic diversities in Nepal. To maintain the originality of the study, it uses first-hand data and analyzes the issue of the second language, mother tongue, and linguistic diversities.

Keywords: English, ideology, language, Nepal, language policy.

尼泊爾第二語言政策的意識形態

摘要:

本研究從意識形態、全球和技术影响以及社会的社会文化和经济力量方面分析了尼泊爾第二語言政策的狀

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况。本研究的主要目的是分析尼泊尔如何将英语确定为第二语言、哪些因素在确定第二语言中发挥作用，以及为什么第二语言问题在尼泊尔存在争议。本研究遵循后实证主义研究范式下的现象学研究设计，即定性研究方法。本研究使用了次要和主要数据来源。二手数据是从通过线下和在线图书馆收集的已出版的书籍、文章、期刊和各种法律文件中收集的。主要数据是通过参与者的深入访谈收集的。英国和英国人民的长期意识形态影响、英语世界的社会和政治影响以及统治者的利益对于尼泊尔承认英语为第二语言起着至关重要的作用。民主化、自由化、资本化、基督教化的进程，以及西方教育、技术和现代化的影响，也对英语作为第二语言和国际或外语的使用产生了影响；然而，这给维持尼泊尔的语言多样性带来了新的挑战。这项研究对于政策制定者和研究人员分析英语对维持尼泊尔语言多样性的负面和积极影响非常重要且适用。为了保持研究的原创性，它使用第一手数据并分析第二语言、母语和语言多样性问题。

关键词：英语、意识形态、语言、尼泊尔、语言政策。

1. Introduction

Nepal is a multilingual and multicultural nation. According to the national population census report 2021, there are 143 languages in Nepal; however, only 129 languages have speakers. Nepal is recognized as a multilingual, multicultural, multiracial, and multi-religious nation. In its small territory, four major language families exist: Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian (Munda), and Austro-Asiatic. Poudel and Baral (2021) mentioned another one language as “Language isolate, Kusunda”. Instead of having 143 languages, the Nepali language is known as the medium language of communication among mother tongue speakers. It is also used as the official language of Nepal. The English language is officially recognized as the second language, and a foreign language in Nepal; however, some politicians and activists are not ready to accept English as the second language. The English language is the international language, and official and medium of transaction in outer and expanding circle countries (Kachru, 2005, as cited in Kadel, 2021, p. 174). They claimed that Nepali is the second language of non-Nepali mother tongue speakers. In this context, there is ideological and political level controversy regarding the second language policy in Nepal. Nepali mother tongue speakers claimed that English is the second language of Nepal; however, the national population census of 2022 showed that only 44.86% of the population uses the Nepali as their mother tongue. The national population record of 2021 shows that around 56% of the population is non-Nepali speakers who use Nepali as their second language in their workplaces, homes, and academic institutions.

There is a debate on the second language and mother tongue in Nepal since the language is documented on the basis of caste and ethnicity rather than the current speaking situation. Adhikari (2022) noted that except the people living in the core ethnic area, other people speak the Nepali language as their mother tongue. In the city area, children of indigenous nationalities also speak Nepali as their mother tongue; however, the census recorded their own language as their mother tongue. The number of languages has increased in each census; for instance, 123 languages were recorded in 2011; however, in 2021, 143 languages were reported. Twenty languages were added in the past 10 years. Due to the

pressure of activists and politicians, new languages are recorded in the census. The same tradition can be seen in the case of the issue of English as the second language (ESL).

Mother tongue refers to the first language acquired by birth. The second language is not the native language that some one learns at a later stage of life. In this context, the study analyzes the roles of ideology and the desire of rulers to recognize the second language. Adhikari (2022) notes that “constitutionally, there are many provisions to promote and preserve minorities’ language; however, in practice, government only leads the program of assimilation” (p.108). The government neglects the use of a mother tongue and emphasizes the promotion of the ESL in society. The education system highly promotes the English language. Both community and institutional schools have begun teaching English as a compulsory subject since the pre-primary level of early childhood classes. Kadel (2021) argues that “there are no exclusively monolingual learners in the class generally in any school across the country. However, there can be majority and minority learners in the class” (p.12).

Legislation and administrative trials have played a crucial role in the process of linguistic assimilation, which has historically been the dominant ideology underlying language policy and planning. Ideological influences such as those of democratic ideology play an important role in determining the existence of language, for example, in Nepal, the influences of democratic nation and global organizations, such as the United Nations, International Labor Organization, Millennium Challenges Corporation, and European Union, have played an important role in creating the ideological space of English language in Nepal. Before the establishment of democracy in Nepal, only Nepali was recognized as a language of communication and official language. There is a restriction to speakers of other languages. After abolishing the monarchal regime, the government of Nepal also followed the international perspective of language planning and made the provision of a language commission in the constitution of Nepal 2015. However, the commission does not function as an international norm because language policy and planning are guided by certain ideologies (Zeng & Xialong, 2023). Language ideology, as defined

by Silverstein (1979), is a “set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (p. 193). In language policy and planning, the definition is widely used. Kroskrity (2004) adds “in language policy and planning (LPP), it concerns individual speakers’ political and economic interests, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation-states” (p.4). Language policy and planning also attempts to address the interests of local people and socio-economic demands of society.

Majhanovich (2014) provided an example of a postcolonial nation and noted, “during the process, most postcolonial countries have to deal with the relationship between less influential indigenous languages and more economically and influentially powerful languages left by the former colonizers” (p.4). In postcolonial nations, neo-colonization has rapidly expanded as a form of neo-liberalization that plays a significant role in enhancing the position of the English language as either the second or foreign language. In the context of Nepal, neoliberalism plays a significant role in positioning the English language as the second language.

2. Literature Review

Sociocultural forces and ideological influences play an important role in using language in society. According to Cobarrubias (1983), the government prioritized at the time of achievement of using language in a country. Different language ideologies coexist and manifest simultaneously within a language policy or a society (Faulk, 2020; Kang, 2012; Kroskrity, 2018; Reagan, 1986). In the context of Nepal, the ideological juncture of political movements plays an important role in the formulation of language policy. In this regard, as noted by Pelinka (2018), every political movement is the outcome of different conflicting ideas between language users and linguistic differences running through any society. Thus, Joseph (2006) argues that “the politics of language choice becomes particularly difficult when institutional choices have to be made in what language(s) the government will conduct its business and communicate its citizens, and, above all, what the language(s) of education will be” (p.10). The language policy and planning of Nepal is guided by a certain political movement. Before the unification of Nepal, the Nepali language was spoken by a certain group of people living near the area of Gorkha, which is known as *Gorkha Bhasa* (Language spoken by the people nearby Gorkha). After the unification of Nepal, the Great King Prithivi Narayan Shah and his descendants forcibly used the Nepali language in the nation. At that time, the Sanskrit language was known as the respected language along with Latin.

After the establishment of the Rana regime in Nepal 1846, Rana rulers restricted other languages and compelled all to use Nepali as an official language and medium of instruction in the country. Having visited Great Britain, the first Rana Prime Minister of Nepal, Junga Bahadur Rana introduced English as a powerful

and respected language in Nepal. The position of the English language is more prestigious than other local vernacular languages. The language policy makers in the Panchayat system killed the rights of other local and indigenous languages and established unity on language and culture. In this regard, Gautam (2021) highlights the situation as follows:

Following the Gorkha 1 conquest, Gorkhali or Khas (now known as Nepali), the language of ruling elites and the mother tongue of many people in the Hills, was uplifted as the national official language in Nepal. After unification, a hegemonic policy in terms of language and culture was formulated that promoted the code (linguistic and dress) of the Hill Brahmins, Chhetries, and Thakuris to the ideal national code (i.e., the Nepali language and Daura Suruwal Topi - dress).

The above highlights the situation of Nepal in the context of language and culture. State authority controls the diversity by heading the agenda of nationalism and national unity. Education policy also focused on unity rather than diversity, and, according to Sardar et al. (1956), the status quo of the Nepali language was further strengthened as it was made the prominent language of governance and education. The government legally controlled the diversity of languages; thus, they “united the ideas of Nepali nationalism around the “triumvirate of the Nepali language, monarchy, and Hindu religion” (Pradhan, 2019). The same idea was reinforced by K. I. Singh’s government in 1957 by prescribing Nepali as the medium of instruction in school education (Pradhan, 2019, p. 169). In the name of nationalism, the Panchayat Government introduced a new policy with the slogan of, “one language, one dress, and one country”. This ideology continued until 1990; however, the English language was used as the second language because children from aristocratic families used English as a means of education.

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, a new constitution was promulgated that addressed certain linguistic issues. The constitution of Nepal of 1990 mentioned the Nepali language written in Devanagari script as the national language and recognized all the mother tongues as the languages of the nation with their official eligibility as the medium of instruction in primary education. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities Act was introduced in 2001 enshrining certain linguistic rights of the indigenous people. Linguistic and cultural groups were involved in People’s Movement II, which abolished the monarchical regime. As a result, the federal republic democratic system of government was introduced in 2005. The 2007 Interim Constitution of Nepal was promulgated to ensure the rights of language of the peoples of Nepal. Apart from further confirming the rights of each community, the 2007 Interim Constitution of Nepal preserves and promotes its language, script, culture, cultural civility, and heritage (Part 3, Article, 17). In a similar vein, the 2015 Constitution of Nepal also mentioned certain linguistic issues, as well, and each state was given the authority to

provide one or many languages spoken by the majority population as the official languages. The constitutional provision has not been implemented in Nepal till date, and government policy is concentrated on assimilation rather than promoting linguistic identities.

The above reviews showed that no systematic research has been conducted on the second language policy and practice of Nepal in terms of ideology, socio-economic demand, and global influences.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study followed a phenomenological research design under a post-positivistic research paradigm, which is known as the qualitative research approach. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview was conducted with four individuals who have been involved in the formulation of language policy in Nepal. Subjective questions related to objectives were asked on the basis of guideline questions, and data were collected regarding the ideological and socio-economic demand of selecting English as a second language in Nepal. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were given pseudo names, such as P1 for participant one, P2 for participant two, P3 for participant three, and P4 for participant four. A semi-structured interview was conducted with participants from April 1 to April 20, 2023 and a recorder was used to record information. After completion of the recording, the recorded data were transcribed and translated into English, and a member-checked strategy was adopted for accuracy, reliability, and validity of the data. Secondary data were collected through library and internet research. Books,

articles, research reports, and legal and constitutional documents were the main sources of secondary data.

3.2. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Participants

P1 is a 40-year-old young scholar, currently teaching at the university. He completed his PhD Degree in Linguistics. He has been involved in language policy and planning of the nation for a decade.

P2 is a 62-year-old female who has been teaching at a university for approximately 35 years. She is also a professor of linguistics and English. She has been involved in various research projects related to language policy and mother tongue education.

P3 is a 50-year-old male. He is a politician and activist who completed his PhD in English. He has been involved in the formulation of language policy of the nation for more than two decades.

P4 is a 78-year-old male scholar of language. He completed his PhD and was involved in various research projects. He is a retired professor of linguistics. During primary data collection, questions related to the ideology of the second language policy in Nepal were asked.

3.3. Research Area

Geographically, Nepal is located between India and China. Diversities of culture and languages exist in Nepal. People from various castes and ethnicities have settled in various parts of Nepal. Politically, Nepal is known as a federal republic democratic nation with a federal system of government. It covers an area of 1,47,516 square kilometers of land and is administratively divided into seven provinces, 77 districts, and 753 local bodies. Map of the research area is shown in Figure 1.

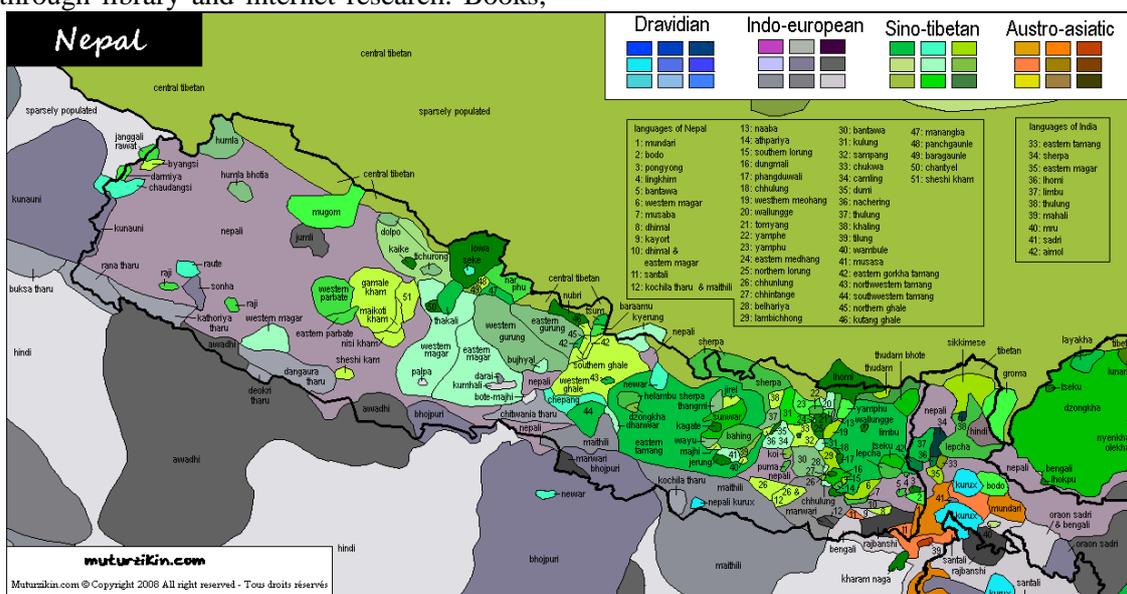


Figure 1. Map of the research area (www.wikipedia.com adopted on July 12, 2023)

4. Results and Discussion

Officially, English is known as the second language, and the foreign international language of Nepal; however, some scholars disagree with accepting

English as a second language. All stakeholders agreed that English is a foreign language in Nepal. It is known that political ideology plays an important role in determining whether English is a second language or a

foreign language in Nepal. Since the Rana regime, the English language has been used for diplomatic purposes. During the Rana regime, only a limited number of people, including their relatives, had the right to study English. After abolishing the Rana regime, a democratic system of government was established in 1949. At that time, Nepal followed the British ideology of democracy. Agencies of the United Nations (UN), such as the World Health Organization, World Trade Centre, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and non-government organizations, such as DFID, US Aid, and other European organizations, ideologically forced Nepal to adopt English as the second language.

In this regard, P1 stated, since the Rana regime, Nepali rulers have followed the English language to enhance diplomatic relations with other nations. After the restoration of democracy in 1949, Nepal constitutionally and legally adopted a democratic system of government. Democratic ideology compelled Nepal to use English as a second language because all development partners use English as the official language (Personal Interview, 2023).

Likewise, P2 also agreed with P1 and argued "Nepal is ideologically near to England and America; hence these countries influence the use of English as a second language in Nepal" (Personal Interview, 2023). However, P3 had a different opinion on the second language. He demanded the government to omit the English language from the position of the second language and asserted that Nepali should be given the position of the second language. Nepali political rulers neglected the existence of indigenous languages so that the English language was categorized as the second language and silently announced the Nepali language as the first or official language of Nepal" (Personal Interview, 2023). P4 also accepted that ideology plays an essential role in determining the position of language in the nation. In the Terai region, people use Hindi as the second language; however, the government neglects the existence of Hindi in Nepal and only focuses on Nepali and English. After 1990, the Government of Nepal introduced English from class one and indirectly began to teach other non-English subjects through English medium instruction in public schools. All of these activities are the outcome of ideological influences.

Except ideological influences, globalization, use of technology, and the influence of the Western education system also play a significant role in using English as a second language in Nepal. In this regard, P1 stated:

Annually, thousands of students migrate from Nepal to English-speaking countries such as America, England, Australia, and Canada. In recent years, Canada, Australia, and America are the main destinations of Nepali students because they love to study English in Nepal and have prepared the foundation for educational migration. Therefore, English is the compulsion for those students who dream to settle in inner circle countries (Personal Interview,

2023).

P1 insisted on educational migration; however, P2 had different experiences. In this regard, P2 noted

In Nepal, the government forces public schools to follow English medium instruction and prepares to send students to the West. The Government of Nepal never thinks about other languages and only focuses on English. Internal policy and wrong practices of the government are responsible for dictating linguistic diversity in Nepal (Interview with P2, 2023).

Linguistic diversities are not the problems of the nation that help to enhance the intellectuality of the nation, as Agnihotri (2017) highlights, "just as biodiversity enriches the life of a forest, linguistic diversity enhances the intellectual well-being of individuals and groups, both small and large" (p. 85). There exist various languages in the nations like Nepal, and there may be two or more languages that can hold the position of the second language. In this regard, P3 highlighted

For a long time, Nepal has emphasized unity in the name of nationality. Now, the English medium of instruction (EMI) also controls the linguistic diversity and psychologically controls them all by showing the dream of the English language. Now EMI appears as the main tool that controls other languages (Personal interview, 2023).

P4 also agreed with P3 and blamed that government policy and noted knowingly or unknowingly, the Government of Nepal has emphasized the Nepali and English languages and neglected the other languages. The language commission is still confused about suggesting the government because overall government policy is guided to promote the Nepali, English, and Sanskrit languages. In recent advertisements for basic level teachers, none of the vacancies have been published in other languages; however, the government has already announced that it will provide basic education in the mother tongue. Without teachers, how can it be possible? There is contradictory language policy and ultimately contradictory support to enhance English in Nepal (Personal Interview, 2023). Due to globalization, the government also follows a policy to promote the English language rather than other languages in Nepal. The practice of EMI in public schools is one of the first steps of the Government of Nepal.

Socioeconomic forces also play a crucial role in using language in daily life. English is the language of science, technology, and business, so it is popular among all. The English language is used in cell phones and computers, which forces people to learn English as the second language. More than that, English has also been used in business activities and business-related software. In this regard, P1 highlighted "English is one of the powerful languages; but Nepal only focuses on English, which is wrong; however, Hindi and Chinese are also the languages spoken by a large population of the world. The language policy is wrong for mutual cooperation with neighbor" (Personal Interview, 2023).

P2 also agreed with P1 that “she also suggested to the Government of Nepal to make equal distance on language policy. The people who lived in Terai love to speak Hindi as the second language; but Hindi language is not recorded as the second language” (Personal Interview, 2023). P3 contradicts the argument of using English as second language and noted that “since Rana period, language policy is wrong in Nepal because the policy always ignores people’s desire and demand”. After adopting the semester system in universities, the Nepali language is omitted from instruction in general subjects such as political science, history, sociology, and economics.

University unofficially declared that English is the language of instruction medium in Nepal for general subjects except Nepali, Hindi, Maithali, and Nepal Bhasa (Newari). In language education, only the English language is issued for instruction except Nepali. Examination questions are also asked in English. It is proved that unofficially Nepal has already been colonized by the English language. However, P4 has different arguments on that issue: “English is used in universities to enhance the quality of university education so that using English as a second language is not so worse; but it is better to promote endangered or other languages at the university level. University is only the institution to preserve endangered languages and cultures; however, the role of the university is not positive for preserving endangered languages in Nepal. In second language policy also, the university is confused” (Personal Interview, 2023). The English language is also related to economic benefit, so people are motivated to learn and use English. In Nepal, to gain economic benefit, people of ethnic groups such as the people of Mustang and Manang show an attraction to the English language. They use their language only to capture the sentiments of the local people; otherwise, they follow the English language for economic benefit. In this context, Gautam (2018) shows the situation by highlighting the situation in the Kathmandu Valley as a cause of intergenerational shifts in languages among youths of indigenous languages such as Newar, Sherpa, and Maithili in Kathmandu Valley. Consequently, this trend has influenced the participation of the relevant communities in campaigns for the revitalization of their languages, which points to the influence of the Global North in bringing ultranationalist values to Nepal’s language politics and diversity.

Second language plays an important role in connecting different language communities; however, the process of assimilation not only disturbs linguistic diversities; but also neglects the role of the second language in society. Nepal neglects the geo-political relationship in the formation of language policy, especially in the issue of the second language. In this regard, P2 noted, “Nepal is culturally and linguistically close to the Indian culture and the Hindi language; but Hindi is recorded in other language. The language is hardly used as an official language spoken in Terai. The Maithali and Bhojpuri languages are also used as the

second languages; however, they are only mentioned as mother tongues, so the concept of mother tongues is not objective and clear in Nepal. The language commission also shows an interest in identifying the mother tongue and second language” (Personal Interview, 2023). In the same line, Giri (2015) highlights the situation of Europe and justifies that nationalism plays the role of restricting the language of neighbors as “geopolitical conditions and the waves gravely influenced the closely related communities to the development of nation” (p.101) In the context of Nepal, panchayat rulers neglected the existence of the Hindi language in Terai and officially declared Hindi as other language and categorized Maithali and Bhojpuri as mother tongues of a small number of people, and forced the majority to speak Nepali. At that time, monolingual ideology replaced the concept of linguistic and cultural diversity. In this regard, P4 stated, “Nepal not only follows monolingual policy; but tried to erase the existence of local languages, local languages are called ‘man eating languages’ (manchhe’ khanebhasa). Due to hesitation, people from ethnic and minority language communities hardly used their language” (Personal Interview, 2023). Some people from ethnic and minority language communities do not like to speak Nepali because they prefer their own language rather than Nepali. After 1990, the situation changed and they mentioned their respected language as the mother tongue and English as the second language. Localization and globalization began once in Nepal, and the value of the English language has increased, as Crystal (2012) mentions: a language attains a global status once it has gained an administrative role in every nation-state around the globe. This special role is manifested in three ways: functioning as the mother tongue of most citizens, being assigned the official status, and/or playing the role of the major foreign language. Many observers view English as the global language par excellence of the Internet, science and education, entertainment, popular culture, music, and sports. The emergence of global English is also attributable to factors, notably the economy, military, and politics (p. 20)

English is not only limited in popular culture but also used in education for academic research and scientific explanation. More than that, it is also used for domestic and other communication to maintain social prestige and hierarchy. Kashru (2005) opines that Nepalese learners do not learn English to communicate in their homeland; but they learn to talk in their work abroad. The young generation of Nepal uses English not only as an academic language but also as a means of communication abroad. Ideologically, the position of English in Nepal is influenced by neoliberal policies that play a role in convincing people to follow English for a better future. Sharma and Phyak (2017) highlight the situation as, the state’s neoliberal structural reforms, much institutional schools popularly known as ‘English medium’ and ‘boarding’ schools have been established with private investments in many parts of the country (p. 5). In the same line, Gautam (2021) notes, “learning

English is deeply rooted among Nepalese people across the country, although the government seems reluctant to force the users to use English as a medium of instruction formally and officially” (p. 81).

The above analysis and the perceptions of participants highlight that the English language is protected by the government as a second language for two hundred years. Participants and writers analyzed the reason for using the English language in Nepal and claimed that linguistic diversity will fall down due to the vision of the English language. Policy related to second language is important to protect ethnic and minority languages, but this has not happened in Nepal.

5. Conclusions

Both tyrannical and democratic ideology equally play a significant role in establishing the second language policy in Nepal. From the autocratic regime to the democratic republic regimes, all of the governments have been following the same values toward the English language in Nepal due to the various internal and external forces and declared that English is the second language of Nepal. The Rana regime and the panchayat autocratic regime used the English language as a tool to control linguistic diversity and positioned Nepali as the first language and English as the second language of Nepal.

After the establishment of democracy, Nepal follows the ideology of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberal social and economic systems cannot exist to expand the English language, so the position of the English language is stronger and more secure in Nepal, and it is widely accepted as the second language. However, some leftist traditional people blamed it as the language of cultural and religious invaders. In short, political ideology, socio-economic forces, science and technology, and global influences of mass media play a role in securing the position of English as the second language in Nepal. In the context of debate and discussion, there should be independent research on linguistic diversity and the second language policy and recognition of the second language on the basis of the demand of people.

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