

**Mother Tongue Education:
Nepal's Educational Dilemma**

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Abstract

This study set out to determine the value of mother tongue education in Nepal. Does education in the mother tongue empower minority students and help them succeed in school? How does it affect culture? This study consists of primary research conducted in the Kathmandu Valley as well as follow up research done at Franklin & Marshall College. I observed three private schools with different language instruction programs and interviewed several experts on the subject. I conclude that mother tongue education is vital to the preservation of culture, but economic empowerment is better served by learning Nepali or English from as early an age as possible. For this reason Nepal should adopt an education policy that protects mother tongue languages and introduces them in school from grade one, but also introduces Nepali and English as early as possible to allow students the greatest chance of success at learning all three languages.

Dedication

To my Grandfathers, for always instilling in me the value of education and for teaching the important lessons in life that allowed me to become the person I am today.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a rapidly globalizing and modernizing world, cross-cultural communication is becoming increasingly important. As a result, dominant, popular languages are gaining ever more speakers, while small minority languages are dying out faster than ever. The loss of languages across the globe is detrimental to cultural preservation, but the realities of the modern world are making the more common languages—such as English, Spanish, and Mandarin—are more economically important than ever before. People around the world have to decide between the tradition of their native language and the necessity of speaking a more dominant language, and that decision starts with what language children learn in the classroom. Should students be learning in their own language, often called the mother tongue, or should they be taught in more widely spoken second languages? This study uses the case of Nepal to explore what language should be taught in school.

Nepal is a small, diverse nation landlocked between the world's two most populous countries, China and India. Nepal is currently in the midst of a transition from civil war to democracy. From 1995-2006 Nepal was embroiled in a bloody civil war fought between the Monarchy, led by King Gyanendra, and a group of Maoist rebels who wanted the government overthrown. In 2006 the Maoists and the Government signed a peace accord, bringing an end to the ten-year conflict. Shortly thereafter, in 2007, the parliament approved the abolition of the monarchy, ending the rule of King Gyanendra and making Nepal a republic. Despite the peace agreement and subsequent end of the monarchy, there has still been significant

political unrest. Consensus has been hard to come by among the major political parties, making progress on a new constitution virtually non-existent. An interim constitution was put in place in 2007, but work on a permanent constitution has stalled time and time again due to lack of political consensus. The lack of a permanent constitution has led to uncertainty and fear that the peace agreement could fail.

In this new democracy, despite the uncertainty, many previously marginalized groups are finding that they have a say in politics for the first time. With a new constitution in the making and the young democratic government working to establish itself, the voices of previously marginalized ethnic groups are now gaining strength. As a result, the demand for minority rights and recognition is now greater than ever. There has been a steep rise in the number of political parties, and many minority groups are taking advantage of this opportunity to make their voices heard. With that voice many have advocated for the rights of minority groups, including linguistic rights. Education in particular has become a very contentious battleground.

One of these battles is the medium language of instruction in Nepal's schools. Currently the Nepali language is the medium of instruction in the vast majority of public schools. Nepali is the official state language of Nepal, but only approximately 48 percent of the population speaks it as a first language.¹ There are at least 70

¹ "South Asia: Nepal." *The World Factbook*. CIA. 12/20/11.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html> [Accessed 1/2/12]

other languages spoken as a first language or mother tongue.² To clarify, a mother tongue, or native language, is simply the language that a person learns first. The learner's parents usually speak it and it is the primary language spoken within a household and community. Mother tongues can be very important culturally, as many traditions and local knowledge are passed down through that language to the next generation. Many ethnic groups are unsatisfied with the fact that Nepali is the medium of instruction in the public schools and would prefer instead that their children be taught in their mother tongue. This paper explores whether or not there is a strong alternative to using Nepali as the sole medium of instruction in order to better serve minority language groups.

Today there is a great demand from minority groups to learn their mother tongues in the classroom. Advocates for mother tongue education claim that it allows students to better understand the material at a younger age and helps them succeed in school. In addition to promoting academic success, being taught in and being able to speak one's own mother tongue is of vast cultural importance. The other side of the debate claims that, in the long run, Nepali or a western language such as English is more important. They argue that the earlier a student starts to speak in these more widely used languages the better grasp they will have of them and the better they will be able to use them. Also, many believe that Nepali is a necessary *lingua Franca* for Nepal and that without a common language it will be impossible for Nepal to feel truly unified.

² Bhattachan, Krishna. "Exclusion/Inclusion and Ethnicity in Nepal." (Lecture presented to SIT Nepal on 9/9/10).

This research examines if mother tongue instruction promotes achievement in academics as well as if it promotes cultural preservation. It will also look at different methods of mother tongue education, such as language of instruction versus offering it as a separate optional subject to see if some combination or compromise works best for students and communities. The paper explores the role of Nepali language and English in the Nepali school system. This paper argues that mother tongue instruction is invaluable and should be implemented wherever possible for primary school students. However, Nepali and English are important for students long-term academic and economic success, and should therefore also be introduced in school as early as possible. Specifically, I argue that all three languages should be taught to Nepali students from the moment they begin school.

Nepal, because of its vast linguistic diversity and rapidly developing economy is an excellent case study for this research. Beyond Nepal, the issue of language preservation will become an increasingly important issue as global communication becomes faster and more prevalent. All over the world minority language speakers will have to choose between their traditional languages and the languages of their nation and international languages such as English. Because of this the world stands to lose much of its linguistic diversity if measures are not taken. By understanding how Nepal can preserve languages through education we can better understand how other places around the world can also preserve their own linguistic diversity.

Methodology

I used two main methods of gathering information for this research. I conducted primary research for this project in the Kathmandu Valley at three different schools, each with a different perspective on how language should be taught. One school is a boarding school and two others are day schools. One teaches primarily in a mother tongue, another teaches multiple languages simultaneously and the third teaches only in Nepali. I gathered information using unstructured interviews conducted in Nepal during the fall of 2010. I then conducted secondary research at F&M during the spring of 2012. To gather background information on mother tongue education and language learning, I consulted journal articles, books and popular media articles.

For the interviews, I focused on interviewing faculty and staff at schools in the Kathmandu Valley that had positive reputations and unique linguistic curricula. I also met with a variety of experts, including policy consultants and government officials, based on their knowledge of the subject. The government officials gave overviews of the government's policy on mother tongue education and the programs designed to enhance mother tongue education. The consultant gave me the perspective of mother tongue advocates. When searching for educators to interview, I chose to focus on three specific schools in the Kathmandu Valley. The first, Jagatsundar Bwonekuthi School, is a school that taught primarily in a mother tongue. In this case that mother tongue is Newari. The second, The Shree Mangal Dvip School, taught a form of mother tongue, Tibetan, as an additional subject. The third, the Rato Bangala School, did not use mother tongue at all and instead taught

entirely in English. Once the primary research was completed in Nepal, secondary research and synthesizing the data continued in Lancaster, PA.

Obstacles to the research included scheduling of interviews, logistics, language barriers, and an inability to speak with children. Finding interviewees and scheduling interviews was a constant challenge. Email was largely ineffective, and phone conversations often led to either immediate meeting plans or confusing directions. Fortunately, I was able to overcome these inconveniences and conduct eighteen interviews. With some interviews there existed a language barrier, but I was able to overcome this with the help of interpreters. Due to the short amount of time for research in Nepal I confined most of my research to the Kathmandu Valley. I supplement my interviews with secondary research on different parts of the country.

The information gathered, especially the primary research done in Nepal, has allowed me to draw conclusions on the value of mother tongue and other languages in the classroom. While the academic findings on the benefits of mother tongue instruction can be conflicting, the evidence provided here clearly shows the value of starting students learning several languages as early as possible.

Defining Mother Tongue Education (Nepal's Linguistic Landscape)

For the purposes of this study, a mother tongue is defined as the first language a person learns and it is the language that connects that person to their community. It is the language a person grows up hearing their parents speak in the home and the one that is commonly used in their home community. It often connects the speaker with older generations and with the past of his or her ethnic,

social or religious group. For this research the term mother tongue will refer to minority languages and not Nepali or English. I recognize that the term “mother tongue” is not universally accepted, nor is it particularly useful for understanding more complex linguistic situations, such as when a child is raised bilingually. The term is, however, widely accepted at the U.N., and is the term that is used in current debates in Nepal. Because this is the terminology used in Nepal, I adopt this term for my own research.

In the case of Nepal there are approximately (estimates vary) 70 different languages spoken within a population of over 29 million.³ Nepali is the official language of the state, but it is the first language of only 48% of the population.⁴ Millions of children grow up not hearing or using Nepali in their home, which is not a problem until it is time for a child to begin school, where they are taught in Nepali. Thus, children are entering the school system, where Nepali is used as the sole language of instruction, with a limited or no grasp of the language.

I explore mother tongue education and whether teaching in the mother tongue affects both academic achievement and cultural preservation as it is discussed in debates in Nepal. I measure academic success as the ability of a student to pass the SLC (School Leaving Certificate) exam, which is basically the Nepali equivalent of the American high school diploma. In Nepal currently, the ability to speak Nepali is required for most middle and high schools, and English is required

³ Bhattachan, Krishna. “Exclusion/Inclusion and Ethnicity in Nepal.” (Lecture presented to SIT Nepal on 9/9/10).

⁴ “South Asia: Nepal.” *The World Factbook*. CIA. 12/20/11.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html> [accessed 1/2/12]

for a higher education. If a student does not speak either language their ability to continue their education is severely limited. I define cultural preservation as the ability to speak one's own mother tongue, communicate with community elders and carry on cultural traditions such as caring for the land and religious rituals.

Understanding how language education affects educational outcomes and cultural preservation is vital for Nepal. By better understanding this relationship Nepal can adjust its policies to better protect minority languages while improving educational outcomes.

Linguistic Human Rights

The belief that a child's mother tongue should be their language of instruction when entering school can be traced back to a UNESCO conference in 1951.

UNESCO constituted a committee of experts in 1951 to consider the question of medium of instruction on a worldwide basis. The committee gave priority to the mother tongue, the language that children can effectively use, to be the medium of instruction at primary level and also recommended that the use of mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible.⁵

The committee considered the mother tongue to be best psychologically, sociologically and academically. They reasoned that psychologically, a student's mother tongue is made up of signs that a student recognizes automatically and can understand and express automatically. Thus, it is the better language for learning. Sociologically, a student's mother tongue is a major part of the community identity and allows them to feel more connected with their community. Academically students understand their mother tongue and therefore understand better when

⁵ Uprety, Narayan. "Mother Tongue Education." *Journal of Nelta*. Vol. 3 No. 1-2. (1998) 92.

their lessons are taught in that language as opposed to a different language that they do not understand. This should lead to higher academic achievement and a greater ability to progress in school.

Despite the committee's conviction that the mother tongue is the best choice for students, there is no shortage of critics. The linguist William Bull commented on the committee's decision and had this to say about the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction: "What is best for the child psychologically may not be what is best for the adult socially."⁶ Some also argued that many mother tongues were underdeveloped and did not have an adequate vocabulary or advanced enough writing system to be used in modern education.⁷ Given these limitations, linguist Ralph Fasold questioned the recommendation's practicality, asking: "Is it possible? Does it work? Is it worth it?"⁸ All of these challenges, as well as others which will be outlined later, left many skeptical that universal use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in schools was possible.

The UNESCO committee anticipated objections and responded immediately: "although inadequate language development, a lack of text books and educational materials, a shortage of trained teachers, extreme diversity and popular opposition may present serious problems, these problems are to be overcome if at all possible."⁹ Governments were urged to work against shortcomings in the system and work towards an "ideal" of mother tongue education for everyone. This same logic is driving the current debate over mother tongue education in Nepal today.

⁶ Uprety, Narayan. "Mother Tongue Education." *Journal of Nelta*. Vol. 3 No. 1-2. (1998) 92.

⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁸ Ibid., 93

⁹ Ibid., 92.

Subsequent conventions have reaffirmed the right of minority groups to both use their own language as well as use their own language as the medium of instruction in schools. The United Nations has consistently reaffirmed the rights of people everywhere to speak and use the language of their choice. This desire to protect rights so explicitly emerged in the aftermath of the atrocities of WWII. There was a broad worldwide demand that individual rights be protected by the international community, not by individual national governments. The first step in this process was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations General Assembly adopted in December of 1948. Once that was adopted the U.N. needed to find a way to translate the Declaration into a binding legal treaty. The result was the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹⁰ The Covenant was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 16th, 1966 and entered into force on March 23rd, 1976. Included among the long list of protected rights listed in the Covenant is the protection of linguistic rights. Article 27 states:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.¹¹

The right to speak one's own language was given the same importance as the right to practice religion, a widely recognized right. The Covenant, however, only

¹⁰ Tomuschat, Christian. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights New York, 16 December 1966: Introduction." 2008. <http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/ha/iccpr/iccpr.html> [accessed 4/17/12]

¹¹ "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." UNHCR. UN. 1966. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm> [accessed 2/20/12]

guaranteed the right to speak your language when in your own language community. Further resolutions would expand the idea of what should be considered linguistic rights.

At the end of the Cold War the international community again began to pay more attention to the rights of minority groups. The U.N.'s General Assembly adopted resolution 47/135, titled "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" on December 18th, 1992. The declaration makes mention of linguistic rights five times and was designed to reaffirm the U.N.'s mission to "encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."¹² The text includes the following references:

Article 2:

1. Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.

Article 4:

2. States shall take measures to create favorable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs, except where specific practices are in violation of national law and contrary to international standards.

3. States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.

¹² "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" UNHCR. UN. 1992.
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/minorities.htm> [accessed 2/20/12]

4. States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.¹³

Here the U.N. reaffirms that every minority group has the right to use their own language without interference. The right to an education in a person's mother tongue, not just the right to speak it, is emphasized. And, it should be noted, states are encouraged to promote and protect minority languages so they have every opportunity to thrive. Because language is linked inextricably with culture, the U.N. recognized that a minority person's language is of vital cultural importance not just to that minority group, but to the society as a whole. States should stand up for minority languages and be encouraging their use because it is good for everyone.

Mirroring the U.N., the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 169 was adopted in 1992 and sets forth the rights of indigenous peoples. Article 28 pertains to language and language education in particular.

Article 28:

1. Children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.

2. Adequate measures shall be taken to ensure that these peoples have the opportunity to attain fluency in the national language or in one of the official languages of the country.

¹³ "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" UNHCR. UN. 1992.
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/minorities.htm> [accessed 2/20/12]

3. Measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the indigenous languages of the peoples concerned.¹⁴

Nepal ratified ILO No. 169 in 2007 and it is binding.

One issue that has plagued each of the aforementioned treaties is implementation. Questions of how to enforce and practically implement the requirements of each convention are brought up repeatedly, but no concrete solutions are given. Language such as “wherever practical” is added as a condition, giving states a way out of providing services. Unfortunately, there is no defined standard for what is and is not practical. This is a loophole that governments could potentially exploit: denying resources to linguistic minority groups by claiming it is impractical. Each convention and covenant makes it clear that minority language education is valuable and something to be protected, but the condition of practicality of implementing services is a concern for language rights advocates. This language seems to imply that while universal mother tongue education is a wonderful ideal, in practice compromises may be necessary and are acceptable.

While each of these conventions has affirmed the rights of minority groups to speak in their own languages, they did so within the context of overall minority rights. In each case linguistic rights were just one small piece of a larger declaration on minority rights. In the early 1990s groups concerned with linguistic rights began to recognize that the world was changing rapidly and that linguistic diversity was in danger as a result. These experts note that the “trend toward a worldwide economy and consequently towards a worldwide market of information, communications,

¹⁴ ILO. 2010. “Convention No. 169.” International Labor Organization. <http://www.ilo.org/indigenous/Conventions/no169/lang--en/index.htm> [accessed 4/23/12]

and culture” were making the minority of widely used languages more useful, while devaluing minority languages that had smaller language communities.¹⁵ In response to this trend a group of experts came together in Barcelona in 1996 to discuss linguistic rights specifically. According to the conference’s follow-up committee:

From the 6th to the 8th of June, 1996, sixty-one NGOs, forty-one PEN Centers (a human rights group that promotes intellectual cooperation and fights for freedom of expression) and forty experts in linguistic rights from all over the world met in Barcelona. The convocation of the World Conference on Linguistic Rights (WCLR) was an initiative of the Translations and Linguistic Rights Commission of the International PEN Club and the CIEMEN (Centre Internacional Escarré per a les Minories Ètniques i les Nacions) with the moral and technical support of UNESCO.¹⁶

PEN then wrote the “Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights”, a ten-page declaration split into six sections and fifty-two articles, all pertaining to the linguistics rights of humans. The Declaration lays out the inalienable linguistic rights of all people in Article 3. There is clear mention of the right of someone to learn and use their own language in a number of different ways, unimpeded by any person or state. The text states:

Article 3:

1. This declaration considers the following to be inalienable personal rights which may be exercised in any situation: the right to be recognized as a member of a language community; the right to the use of one’s own language both in private and in public; the right to the use of one’s own name; the right to interrelate and associate with other members of one’s language community of origin; the right to maintain and develop one’s own culture;

¹⁵ “Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights.” Universal Declaration Of Linguistic Rights Follow-up Committee. April 1998. <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/versions/angles.pdf> [accessed 2/20/12] 13.

¹⁶ Ibid.

2. This declaration considers that the collective rights of language groups may include the following... the right for their own language and culture to be taught; the right of access to cultural services; the right to an equitable presence of their language and culture in the communications media; the right to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socioeconomic relations.¹⁷

By guaranteeing a person the right to use their own language and maintain and develop their own culture the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights puts linguistic rights squarely in the category of a fundamental human right.

Article 4 addresses the issue of when a person of one language group moves into a region where another language is spoken. Integration is encouraged, meaning:

An additional socialization of such persons in such a way that they may preserve their original cultural characteristics while sharing with the society in which they have settled sufficient references, values and forms of behavior to enable them to function socially without greater difficulties than those experienced by members of the host community.¹⁸

This is not to be confused with assimilation, which would imply that a person's original culture would be replaced by the new culture. Assimilation is discouraged and should only be done if it is "an entirely free choice" of the individual.¹⁹ While I have highlighted specifically relevant articles, unmentioned articles go on to protect a myriad of different, specific linguistic rights.

Section II pertains to education specifically. Articles 24 and 25 are particularly applicable to this paper. They are as follows:

¹⁷ "Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights." Universal Declaration Of Linguistic Rights Follow-up Committee. April 1998. <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/versions/angles.pdf> [accessed 2/20/12] 24.

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹ "Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights." Universal Declaration Of Linguistic Rights Follow-up Committee. April 1998. <http://www.linguistic-declaration.org/versions/angles.pdf> [accessed 2/20/12] 24.

Article 24

All language communities have the right to decide to what extent their language is to be present, as a vehicular language and as an object of study, at all levels of education within their territory: preschool, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, university, and adult education.

Article 25

All language communities are entitled to have at their disposal all the human and material resources necessary to ensure that their language is present to the extent they desire at all levels of education within their territory: properly trained teachers, appropriate teaching methods, text books, finance, buildings and equipment, traditional and innovative technology.²⁰

The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights received widespread support from many reputable public figures. Many human rights activists and notable public figures from around the world recognize that denying a person the right to learn and use their own language is a violation of their rights as humans. They also recognize the potential benefits in the form of peace, inter-cultural understanding, and cultural preservation that accompany the protection of linguistic rights. Noteworthy endorsements of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights include (but are not limited to):

The Dalai Lama:

I am honored to receive a copy of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights and would like to extend my full support for it. I believe that all language communities have the right to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage. The encouragement and promotion of these will go a long way in enriching the linguistic and cultural diversity of our common world.

Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Prize 1989²¹

Desmond Tutu:

²⁰ Ibid., 27.

²¹ Ibid., 49.

I am pleased to endorse the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. I believe it is the right of every person to be able to express themselves in the language of their choice. This right has been enshrined in the new South African Constitution and my sincere hope is that may be accepted at the next UNESCO General Meeting. In recognizing the value of individual languages we acknowledge the dignity and worth of our fellow human beings. I appreciate your effort to promote this basic right. God bless you.

Yours sincerely,
ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU
Nobel Peace Prize 1984²²

And artist Peter Gabriel:

The influence of technology, trade and big business is linking up the world in many interesting ways. One danger is that we end up with a unified, homogenous and boring place to live in, in which one country's city street looks very much like every other. We must value and protect our cultural differences. A gene pool is not capable of producing vital and vibrant new life unless it has a wide variety of gene diversity. It is the same for culture and language.

PETER GABRIEL
Musician and founder of WOMAD²³

Thus, language rights have been repeatedly affirmed by multiple international organizations, groups, and leaders to be basic human rights.

This international debate was begun in the context of the end of WWII and the tragedies of the holocaust, and continues as minority groups increasingly call for more rights. I recognize that the very concept of "human rights" is a contested one, which some view as a western construct. The aforementioned articles and conventions can all be viewed as ethnocentric and as imposing western values. While these arguments may have merit, this

²²Ibid., 53.

²³Ibid., 75.

paper is not the appropriate place to explore this particular debate.

Additionally, the concept of a human right, as laid out in these and other conventions, has been adopted in Nepal in the debate over mother tongue education. Therefore, I explore the issue of mother tongue education in the context of a country that has mostly adopted these ideas as the norm structuring the debate.

Despite the vast protections given by these multiple international treaties and covenants, the state of the world's languages is considered grave by many. Languages today are disappearing at an unprecedented scale. "Even the most 'optimistic realistic' linguists now estimate that half of today's oral languages may have disappeared or at least not be learned by children in 100 years time. The 'pessimistic but realistic' estimate that we may only have 10% of today's oral languages left as vital, non-threatened languages in the year 2100."²⁴ Major language advocacy groups, such as the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, estimate that one language dies every two weeks.²⁵ This loss is faster than at any time in human history. Linguist Ken Hale describes current language loss: "language loss in the modern period is... part of a much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity in which politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures."²⁶

²⁴ Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. "The Globalization of (Educational) Language Rights." *International Review of Education*. Vol. 47, No. ¾. (July, 2001): 201-219.

²⁵ "Who We Are." *Livingtongues.org*. Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages. 2012. <http://www.livingtongues.org/aboutus.html> [accessed 4/17/12]

²⁶ Hale, Ken. "Endangered Languages." *Linguistic Society of America*. Vol. 68 No. 1. (1992): 1-

Some may ask: what do we lose when a language dies? According to the Living Tongues Institute, humanity loses “a vast repository of human knowledge about the natural world, plants, animals, ecosystems, and cultural traditions is in the language. Every language contains the collective history of an entire people.”²⁷ The fewer users a language has, the less political influence it has and the more threatened it is.

Further, the majority of the languages around the world have relatively few speakers. “The median number of speakers is probably around 5,000-6,000. Ninety-five percent of the world’s spoken languages have fewer than 1 million native users; half of all the languages have fewer than 10,000. A quarter of the world’s spoken languages have fewer than 1,000 users.”²⁸ Languages with a small number of users are particularly vulnerable because the fewer people who speak a language, the less effective that language is as a tool for communication. Languages that have small communities of users tend to have less economic utility because they are often confined to a small geographic area.

With so many languages, each having such small communities of native speakers, it is vital that each is protected and supported to avoid massive loss of languages. The solution, many believe, is in domestic legislation. “Language rights is basically about the legislation—or absence of

42. <http://www.rnld.org/sites/default/files/Hale%20et%20al%201992.pdf> [accessed 4/17/12] 1.

²⁷ “Who We Are.” *Livingtongues.org*. Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages. 2012. <http://www.livingtongues.org/aboutus.html> [accessed 4/17/12]

²⁸ Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. “The Globalization of (Educational) Language Rights.” *International Review of Education*. Vol. 47, No. ¾. (July, 2001): 207.

legislation—for the rights and privileges of languages and their speakers.”²⁹

Creating legislation and programs that support, protect, and promote minority languages is one of the best ways to ensure their survival. Without protection these languages could be doomed to be overwhelmed by more commonly spoken languages.

The key way to support minority languages, thus, is to support the learning of the languages, either through legislation or grass roots movements. Prominent linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas believes that “the most important right, the right to mother tongue medium education, is inadequately protected in existing instruments.”³⁰ This inadequate protection is of serious concern. “Mother tongue medium (MTM) education is one of the most important elements in the right not only to exist with a separate identity but, most importantly, to reproduce this identity.”³¹ By allowing students to learn in their own language they are gaining not only literacy, but also cultural knowledge that is passed down in that language.

Teaching the next generation is the only way to ensure that a language will survive. Skutnabb-Kangas writes, “if there are no minority teachers in the pre-schools/schools and if the minority languages are not used as the main media of education, the use of these languages is indirectly prohibited in daily intercourse/in schools, i.e. it is a question of linguistic genocide.”³² The language that is taught in school becomes the dominant language of the community, and eventually those

²⁹ Paulston, Christina. “Language Policies and Language Rights.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 26. (1997): 74.

³⁰ Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. “The Globalization of (Educational) Language Rights.” *International Review of Education*. Vol. 47, No. ¾. (July, 2001): 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

³² *Ibid.*, 206.

students will teach that language to their own children. For example, if the language taught in school in Nepali, then it will inevitably become the dominant language and begin to replace the original mother tongue. This will result in languages disappearing in only one or two generations, a concern for many in Nepal. If preservation of languages is the goal, nothing is more important than making sure that the next generation learns that language completely and can therefore pass the language on to their own children.

Mother tongue education does not only protect language for the sake of language, but it can also be vital for passing on knowledge that could be lost otherwise. As Skutnabb-Kangas explains, “Cultural knowledge, encoded in a diversity of the world’s languages, is a necessary prerequisite for sustainable maintenance of natural resources.”³³ Knowledge of biodiversity, local healing practices and an understanding of the world are all stored in these minority languages. Each language is a store of indigenous knowledge, and with each one that dies the knowledge held in that language dies with it. Especially when it comes to biodiversity, indigenous cultures often have a deep understanding of their local environment; this knowledge can be invaluable and is worth protecting.

Unfortunately the modern world economy does not place a concrete value on this cultural knowledge. Currently this indigenous knowledge is hard to market; i.e., people do not profit from it. This has made the knowledge expendable and makes other languages, such as Nepali and English, which are more market friendly, attractive. However, just because knowledge does not create a profit does not mean

³³ Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. “The Globalization of (Educational) Language Rights.” *International Review of Education*. Vol. 47, No. ¾. (July, 2001): 203.

it is not valuable. Some say that Nepal should have an interest in preserving this knowledge, not only for nostalgic reasons, but because one day this resource could become valuable, perhaps in the form of new pharmaceuticals from local plants or simply as an attraction for tourism, which is a major piece of Nepal's economy.

Additionally, some have argued that by accepting all languages Nepal's government would be promoting equality for all of the people of Nepal. This could lead to less violence and a more peaceful society. There has been a global trend away from violence between countries and toward violence within countries. Many of these conflicts erupt because of friction between groups over distribution of power and rights. Skutnabb-Kangas notes, "most [recent] wars and other physically violent conflicts have been intra-statal. Many of them, certainly most of the ones involving indigenous peoples, could be (and some have been) completely avoided by states granting the nations/groups involved (indigenous nations, minority groups) some of those human rights which dominant/majority groups take for granted for themselves."³⁴ This tension over rights is causing friction between dominant groups and marginalized minority groups. Language rights, like many other human rights, are something that dominant groups often take for granted, while smaller minority groups may have to fight for them rigorously. When the rights of all people, including linguistic rights, are respected, the result is far less tension between different groups and therefore less chance of violence.

Thus, the issue of preservation of minority languages is an important one with wide-ranging consequences. The international community has continually

³⁴ Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. "The Globalization of (Educational) Language Rights." *International Review of Education*. Vol. 47, No. 3/4. (July, 2001): 203.

reaffirmed that the right to use the language of your choice is a basic human right that should be afforded to everyone. Despite this, languages are dying at a faster rate than ever before in human history. The loss of these languages is accompanied by a loss of both traditional culture and knowledge. Additionally, the denial of the right to use a language can create tensions within a country that can lead to unrest or violence. This paper tackles this issue by looking at language education in Nepal to determine how best to educate students so that culture and knowledge can be preserved while still preparing students to compete in a rapidly modernizing economy.

The next chapter will provide the necessary background on Nepal's education system as well as the history of the Nepali language and the history of the movement toward mother tongue education in Nepal. This will provide context for the current linguistic situation in Nepal, without which we would not be able to draw reliable conclusions.

Chapter 2: History of Nepal and its Languages

This chapter provides background information on Nepal, including its education system, the Nepali language and on the movement promoting mother tongue education in Nepal. This background information provides a better understanding of the current language situation in Nepal, allowing us to draw proper conclusions regarding education policy.

Nepal's population of approximately 30 million people is spread out across three major climactic regions. In the north lie the high Himalayas, the middle hills run through the center of the country, and the lowland Terai region is in the south bordering India. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, with over one quarter of its population living below the poverty line. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, but tourism and some manufacturing are becoming increasingly important. Given the political transition, there is a significant amount of uncertainty in Nepal, but the economy does continue to grow and modernize despite these problems.

Education in Nepal

The history of the modern school system in Nepal is relatively short but very important. From 1846-1951 an elite group of ministers called the Rannas ruled Nepal using hereditary succession to maintain power. The Ranas consolidated power by ousting the monarchy and cutting Nepal off from the rest of the world.³⁵ The Ranas feared an educated public and subsequently outlawed all schooling. Only

³⁵ "Nepal Profile: Timeline." *BBC News South Asia*. BBC. 1/11/12.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12499391> [accessed 2/15/12]

the children of the elite could attend small private schools, almost all of which were located in the Kathmandu Valley.

After World War II things began to change. The legendary Gurkha soldiers, who had fought for the British army, began to return home, bringing with them western values. They wanted their children educated and began to build schools of their own. Rapidly, education became highly valued and some students even managed to go to university in India. The Ranas had good reason to fear an educated public because popular support quickly increased for the return of the monarchy and the end of Rana rule.³⁶

In 1951 King Tribhuvan, bolstered by popular support, returned to Nepal from exile in India and restored the power of the monarchy.³⁷ Immediately the King began to open Nepal to the world and set about overhauling the education system to allow more Nepali people to attend school. This opening of Nepal began major changes to Nepali society. Now open to the world, Nepal saw an influx of foreign travelers who came to experience Nepal's many natural beauties, or to seek spiritual enlightenment. With these foreigners came "development" and with that came a modernizing economy. While still agrarian, Nepal began to experience job growth in other sectors such as manufacturing (e.g. textiles and building materials) and the service industry (tourism).³⁸ This modernization and development meant that

³⁶ "Education of Nepal." *Nepal.com*. Nepal Channel. 2012.

<http://www.nepal.com/education/> [accessed 2/15/12]

³⁷ "Nepal Profile: Timeline." *BBC News South Asia*. BBC. 1/11/12.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12499391> [accessed 2/15/12]

³⁸ "South Asia: Nepal." *The World Factbook*. CIA. 12/20/11.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html> [accessed 1/2/12]

Nepal's education system needed an overhaul.

The National Education Planning Commission was founded in 1954, and by 1975 the government offered free primary education to all. However, caste discrimination, need for children as labor and the long distances kept many from enrolling in or attending school.³⁹

“Primary schooling was compulsory; it began at age six and lasted for five years. Secondary education began at age eleven and lasted another five years in two cycles--two years (lower) and three years (higher). Total school enrollment was approximately 52 percent of school-age children (approximately 70 percent of school-age boys, 30 percent of school-age girls) in 1984. Secondary school enrollment was only 18 percent of the relevant age-group (27 percent of the total boys, 9 percent of the total girls).”⁴⁰

Low enrollment rates are a major problem for the Nepali school system, and creating programs that will encourage students to enroll, attend and finish their schooling is a major hurdle for the education department.

The department of education developed the initial curricula, based on United States models, with assistance from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. The goals of primary education are to teach basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. There are also components that include discipline and hygiene. “Lower-secondary education emphasized character formation, a positive attitude toward manual labor, and perseverance. Higher-secondary education stressed manpower requirements and preparation for higher education. The Department of Education emphasized national development goals through the curriculum and administered the School Leaving Certificate

³⁹ Savada, Andrea Matles ed. “Education.” *Nepal: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress. 1991. <http://countrystudies.us/nepal/> [accessed 2/15/12]

⁴⁰ Ibid.

examination, a nationally administered and monitored high-school-matriculation examination, after completion of the higher-secondary level to test competency.

Those who passed this examination were eligible for college.”⁴¹

Despite increased openness and decreased costs, it is still widely acknowledged that schools disproportionately serve the privileged classes. Quality schools with quality teachers are concentrated in urban areas and are usually private, meaning they are only accessible to those who can pay. According to Savada, “In rural areas... the quality of instruction was inferior, facilities were very poor, and educational materials were... virtually unavailable. Consequently, if rural families were serious about the education of their children, they were forced to send them to urban areas”⁴² Many children of poor families dropped out early, and few students took the School Leaving Certificate exam. Those families with better jobs, higher incomes and more power were more easily able to keep their children in school after they completed the primary level.⁴³

Education in Nepal today has come a long way, but there is still a long way to go. Statistics show a high initial enrollment in schools, with close to 90% of school age children attending primary school. This is promising, as this percentage is up from only 64% in 1990.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, there is also a high drop out rate, with only

⁴¹ Savada, Andrea Matles ed. “Education.” *Nepal: A Country Study*. GPO for the Library of Congress. 1991. <http://countrystudies.us/nepal/> [accessed 2/15/12]

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Millennium Development Goals: Nepal.” *Undp.org*. United Nations Development Program. 2012. <http://www.undp.org.np/mdg/goals/goal2.php> [accessed 4/17/12]

62% of students attending the final grade of primary school.⁴⁵ Statistics also show an overall literacy rate of 60% for adults but over 80% for children, suggesting education has been improving over time.⁴⁶ These statistics show that Nepal has made significant progress toward improving education, but that there is much more work to be done when it comes to keeping children in school.

The information gathered by UNESCO also shows clearly the hardships faced by ethnic minorities in terms of linguistic bias. People who are members of a linguistic minority have more difficulty accessing basic education and on average have higher rates of illiteracy.⁴⁷ This shows that the issue of minority languages is not confined only to Nepal, but is internationally recognized as important. Nepal is, however, a particularly difficult case. There are over seventy languages spoken in Nepal in a population of approximately thirty million people. The languages of Nepal fall into four language families:

Indo-European (Indo-Aryan – Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Rajbansi, Danuwar, Darai, Majhi, Bote and Kumale), Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman – Newari, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Chepang, Dhimal, Pahari, Meche, Jirel, Thami, Thalaki, Raji, Raute, Hayu, Byasi, Lepcha, Sherpa, Manange, Kaike, Kham, Tibetan, Chantel, Kagate, Lhomi, Lhoke, Dolpa, Tchurong, Dura etc.), austro-Asiatic (Munda – Santhali or Satar) and Dravidian (Northern Kurux – Dhangar or Jhangar).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “Nepal: Statistics.” *UNICEF*. 2012.

http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nepal_nepal_statistics.html#90 [accessed 4/17/12]

⁴⁶ “UIS Statistics In Brief: Nepal.” *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*. UNESCO. 2010.

http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=5240. [10/3/10]

⁴⁷ “Mother Tongue/bilingual literacy programme for ethnic minorities.” UNESCO.

12/12/2008. <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/appeal/programme-themes/literacy-and-continuing-education/mother-tongue-literacy/>. [10/3/10]

⁴⁸ Bandhu, C.M. “The Role of the Nepali Language in Establishing the National Unity and Identity of Nepal.” *Kailash*. Vol. 15, No. 3. (1989): 122.

Some languages, such as Nepali, Maithili and Bhojpuri have millions of speakers, but others, such as Thakali or Santhali, have linguistic communities of only a few thousand speakers each.⁴⁹ Languages lines often mirror ethnic lines, but they are not one in the same. Nepal's great linguistic diversity is linked with its ecological and geographic diversity. Nepal's topography is extremely varied, and over hundreds of generations this harsh terrain has isolated groups from one another. This isolation caused Nepal's different ethnic groups to develop separate from one another, causing them to create their own unique cultures and languages.

While Nepali has traditionally been the medium of instruction in government schools, there is a large portion of the population that does not speak Nepali, which is creating a problem for the school system. The sheer number of different languages makes the task of creating a curriculum for each language a daunting one.

Overall, the Nepali education system is mediocre at best. There are high drop out rates and an overall low literacy rate. This research attempts to determine whether or not the addition or removal of mother tongue education benefits Nepali students and, as a result, Nepali society as a whole.

Nepal as a nation has recently recognized the importance of mother tongue education in its schools and is actively creating programs to accommodate students who speak minority languages. In an interview one government official at the Department of Education who deals with mother tongue education explained Nepal's plan for mother tongue education now and over the next five years. In the current regulations for government schools as well as in the Interim Constitution

⁴⁹ Ibid.

there are provisions that state that all primary education should be in mother tongue as per communities' wishes. The Department of Education cannot and does not want to impose any language on anyone and does its best to accommodate all peoples. As of 2010 18,000 schools, out of a total of approximately 50,000, are meeting their own mother tongue needs without the help of the government. In addition to those schools, the government has pilot programs for mother tongue education in six districts using eight languages (Tewari, 2010).

To address the issues of textbooks, the government is providing curriculum assistance and funding, but the local communities put together their own textbooks specific to their location, language and needs. Currently the Curriculum Development Center has produced materials for eighteen mother tongues and they are working on more. In accordance with ILO 169, which Nepal has ratified, by the year 2015 there will be 7,500 government supported mother tongue schools in Nepal.

To address the need for second and third languages, Nepal is about to start a three-year interim program to phase in trilingual education. Mother tongue, Nepali and a foreign language, usually English, will be taught in primary school. The mother tongue will be the medium of instruction, with both Nepali and English taught as separate subjects. While mother tongue is important for beginning school, government officials recognize that for jobs and interacting with the outside world both Nepali and English are very important for the students.

When interviewed, a prominent advocate for minority rights went discussed the three-tiered system of language education for Nepali schools that the

Department of Education is adopting. He believes that it will be best for students to learn languages one at a time in the order in which they will need them. In primary school, from class one to class five, students will learn in their own mother tongues. At this age students are living at home and usually don't stray far from their villages, so their mother tongue is their most important language. In classes four and five children would have transitional classes to help them learn Nepali. In lower secondary school, classes six through eight, students will learn in Nepali. The government believes that, as children get older they, begin to travel out of their villages, to markets and other cities. In these places, where people from multiple places converge, a common language is needed and in Nepal that is most often Nepali. Then, in high school, classes nine and ten students take separate English classes, to help them transition to being taught in English in college and university. He also believes that throughout lower secondary and high school there should be separate mother tongue classes to reinforce mother tongue languages amongst students.

The Nepali government has clearly recognized that the current model of only using Nepali as a medium of instruction does not meet the needs of today's students. The current proposal for teaching students the three basic languages they will need to be successful is a step in the right direction. The main problem with this policy is the timing of instruction in each language, which the later chapters explore in more depth. To understand the Nepali education system better, we now turn to the history of the Nepali language as well as what linguistic protections do exist.

Nepali Language

Language has played a major role in shaping the political and social landscape of Nepal throughout its history. In the middle of the 18th century King Prithwi Narayan Shah the Great conquered the territories of Nepal and was committed to building a strong, unified nation. Nepali, derived from Sanskrit, was the official medium of communication in the newly unified Kingdom of Nepal. Nepali was used exclusively as the medium of instruction in schools. According to C.M. Bandhu, “Nepali was used in the traditional learning centers in the hill areas as a medium of instruction. In the beginning of this century only schools with Nepali as a medium and as a subject were opened.”⁵⁰ Requiring Nepali to be used in schools cemented the language's importance and role in official communication. The reach of Nepali language expanded after that point. As more young men traveled abroad to join the British army, they were bonded together by the Nepali language.

After the fall of the Rana regime in the 1950s the people of Nepal had even greater freedom of movement. As different political parties began to emerge, there was much discussion of national development and with that, the choice of a national language. Because of its broad reach, Nepali was a clear favorite despite the popularity of other languages.

“[Many] felt that only Nepali deserved the status of national language. In fact, during the 1950s, a large part of teaching in the Terai was done in Hindi. There were no textbooks in Nepali. The students in the Terai have had difficulties in understanding courses taught in Nepali, but literary Hindi was not their mother tongue either... In view of the problem that existed [the King] proclaimed Nepali the medium of

⁵⁰ Bandhu, C.M. “The Role of the Nepali Language in Establishing the National Unity and Identity of Nepal.” *Kailash*. Vol. 15, No. 3. (1989): 125.

instruction in the secondary schools, encouraging teachers to learn Nepali and use it in the classrooms.”⁵¹

At the time the Nepali language faced many of the same challenges that other mother tongues face in Nepal today, such as a lack of textbooks. Despite the challenges Nepali was made the medium of instruction and remains the medium of instruction in secondary schools to this day.

In 1959 a national university was established with the goal of providing higher education in Nepali. Unfortunately, Nepali was not developed enough to deliver education in science and technology. Eventually many decided that it is futile to replace English with Nepali in higher education, and “that the two are not mutually opposed, but complementary to each other.”⁵²

As Nepali and English have grown more dominant in Nepali society they have started to replace other languages. Minority languages are seen by some to be less valuable. For critics, they have limited economic or communicative utility, providing minority groups little incentive to invest time and energy in learning and preserving them. According to Ram Giri, “People have started to consider their languages insignificant with no practical value. Seeing no prospect at all, they abandon their languages to adopt Nepali.”⁵³ Because the usefulness of a minority language is often limited to a small geographic area, languages such as Nepali are seen as being more useful, and therefore more valuable. Nepali is seen as opening doors. It allows people to work in more places and communicate with more people.

⁵¹ Bandhu, C.M. “The Role of the Nepali Language in Establishing the National Unity and Identity of Nepal.” *Kailash*. Vol. 15, No. 3. (1989): 128.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵³ Giri, Ram Ashish. “Cultural Anarchism: The Consequences of Privileging Languages in Nepal.” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Vol. 31. No.1. (2010): 87-100.

As Nepal develops economically, English is becoming more common. In some ways English is taking the place of Nepali. As Mr. Giri writes, “English remains a ‘foreign’ language since its adoption in the Nepalese education system in the mid-nineteenth century. In practice, however, it is the most sought after language in Nepal.”⁵⁴ English proficiency is required for many jobs in both the tourism sector and with the many non-governmental organizations that operate in Nepal. These jobs are lucrative and prestigious and have added significant value to the English language in Nepali society.

In Nepal the issue of what language(s) should be taught in schools has become a contentious one. Previously marginalized minority groups are beginning to speak out against Nepali as the *lingua franca* of Nepal. The Constitution of 1990, as well as today’s interim constitution, guarantees the people the right to be educated in the language of their choice. Section 18 of the Nepali Constitution clearly protects, and even promotes, the idea of mother tongue education. It states in Section 18:

18. Cultural and Educational Right:

(1) Each community residing within the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script and culture.

*(2) Each community shall have the right to operate schools up to the primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children.*⁵⁵

However, even though the right to learn and use a mother tongue is protected by the constitution, the issue of mother tongue education has not been

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Nepalese Constitution.” *Supreme Court of Nepal*. 2008.

<http://www.supremecourt.gov.np/main.php?d=lawmaterial&f=constitution> [accessed 3/21/12]

settled (Tewari, 2010). Language of instruction has become a polarizing debate and one of the key pieces of a larger struggle for Nepal's minority groups to protect their identities and cultures and to gain more self-determination. As a result a local movement has emerged in support of mother tongue education.

The Mother Tongue Movement in Nepal

As democracy has begun to reemerge in the last decade, many are beginning to see Nepali as a language imposed by former rulers.⁵⁶ Under the Monarchy as well as under the current interim government, advocates for mother tongue education argue that the ruling elite has taken advantage of the complicated linguistic situation to impose Nepali on the nation. The Constitution of 1990 declared Nepali as the *Rashtra-Bhasha* or National Language, and other native languages as *Rashtriya-Bhashaharu* or languages of the nation.⁵⁷ This was seen by many as unfair, discriminatory, and as favoritism toward the Nepali language.

In 1992 tensions grew when the government tried to impose Sanskrit as a required subject. Sanskrit is the root language of Nepali, much like Latin is considered the root language of English. Some elite members of society believed that schools should teach Sanskrit. "A group of seventy-seven members of parliament submitted a memorandum to the Minister of Education for making Sanskrit 'compulsory' from grade 1 through 10 in public schools, and recently, as a retort as it were, a group of ninety members of Parliament submitted a signed

⁵⁶ Bhattachan, Krishna B and Pyakuryal, Kailash N. "The issue of national integration in Nepal: An ethnoregional approach." *Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology*. Vol. 5. (1995): 17-38.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

petition to His Majesty's Government against this political maneuver."⁵⁸ Minority rights activists saw this political maneuver to make Sanskrit a required subject in school as a step toward pushing out other languages in favor of the languages of the elite. Minority groups believe that Sanskrit is unnecessary and exclusionary and requiring it in schools is a step toward excluding minority groups by undermining their languages and bolstering elite languages.

Many do not want to learn Sanskrit and instead demand to be taught in their own native languages. Minority groups are angered that their own mother tongues are marginalized while educational resources are being diverted to create Sanskrit classes. This legislation began a heated debate between minority groups and the majority Nepali speakers over what is culturally important and where resources should be allocated. This debate is considered the flashpoint for the current debate over mother tongue education.⁵⁹

We are currently seeing a divergence from the old way of thinking. Nepali was once seen as a great unifier, but it is now being seen more and more as an imposition. The government's attempt to teach Sanskrit in schools was seen by minority groups as a move to further establish Nepali at the expense of mother tongue languages.

To conclude, education and language in Nepal have historically favored the economic, social and political elite at the expense of minority groups. The Nepali language, consistently favored by the ruling classes, has been a requirement for

⁵⁸ Yadav, Ramawatar. "The Use of Mother Tongue In Primary Education: The Nepalese Context." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Vol. 19 No. 2. (July 1992)

⁵⁹ Gopal Shrestha, Bal and Van Den Hoek, Bert. "Education In The Mother Tongue: The Case Of Nepalbhasa (Newari)." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Vol. 22, No.1. (2005): 73-86.

holding political or economic power. But Nepali is also a unifying language and has the ability to connect people throughout Nepal. Education was, until recently, a luxury of the elite and ruling classes. Now every child in Nepal is entitled to an education, but many people are still slow to take full advantage of this opportunity. As a result of generations of lack of opportunity many minority groups are now seizing the moment to advocate for their rights, one of which is the right to be taught in their mother tongue.

The next chapter explores the scholarship that outlines arguments both for and against mother tongue education. I contrast the academic arguments with information I gathered during primary research interviewing educators and students. I later explore language curricula that differ from the current government proposals. This allows us to understand the strengths and weaknesses of mother tongue education, contrast the academic arguments with the reality in Nepal and determine what is the best course of action for the Nepali education system.

Chapter 3: Pros and Cons of Mother Tongue Education

This chapter helps us to understand what works best for students in terms of educational attainment and for preservation of culture. I first look at the arguments from experts and advocates, then offer data from my primary research, specifically the language curricula used by academically successful private schools, as well as the opinions of teachers and students. Contrasting these arguments will give us a better understanding of the debate about education in Nepal.

Arguments for the Use of Mother Tongue in Education

As noted in chapter one, the argument for mother tongue education has two main pillars. The first is that mother tongue medium is the best thing for the child educationally. Second, some argue, is that the preservation of minority languages is vital for the preservation of culture. The evidence for both of these arguments is conflicting, sparking debate over whether mother tongue education is, in fact, best for children. This chapter explores both sides of the argument in more depth.

The educational argument rests on the idea that students will understand more of what they are taught, and retain the information better, when they are taught in a language they already know. In education this is referred to as “step incremental learning.” It reflects the idea is that students should progress from known to unknown. If students completely learn their mother tongue first, then they can use their knowledge of that language to move on and learn Nepali, English or some other language.⁶⁰ Literacy translates between languages, as do certain subjects such as math, so when you can teach a student in a language they already

⁶⁰ Uprety, Narayan. “Mother Tongue Education.” *Journal of Nelta*. Vol. 3 No. 1-2. (1998): 93.

understand (because they have been speaking it in their home their entire life) they can move forward with their education, while using their mother tongue to learn the second language, whatever that may be.

Children in Nepal who do not speak Nepali as a first language have been found to struggle in school and have on average lower test scores.⁶¹ Because they are taught in a language that they do not fully understand, non-Nepali speaking students often miss concepts and do not succeed to the same level that Nepali speaking students do. A study by the Department of Education found that when Nepali is used as the sole medium of instruction many children do not understand some or all of what is being taught to them and their learning is stunted as a result. Those students who have been taught in their mother tongues have been shown to understand more of what they are learning in the classroom, and the results show in the form of improved testing scores.⁶²

According to one educator, many minority language users never fully learn Nepali because of their inability to keep up in school. As a result they can be left with a lifelong limited capacity to use the Nepali language.

A great majority of non-Nepali speaking users/consumers of Nepali control but only a 'restricted' code of the Nepali language. This linguistic deprivation continually conspires to be a major deficit to the non-Nepali-speaking individual, who may meet unequal chances for advancement and upward mobility in social, educational, political economic as well as administrative realms of life in Nepal.⁶³

⁶¹ "Mother Tongue Intervention at Primary Level: A Study Report Submitted to Research and Education Information Management Section." *Center for Research, Education and Development*. Government of Nepal. . 27th June, 2005.

http://www.doe.gov.np/download/download_933981270.pdf [accessed 4/17/12]

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Yadav, Ramawatar. "The Use of Mother Tongue In Primary Education: The Nepalese Context." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Vol. 19 No. 2. (July 1992): 181.

Because they are being taught in Nepali, as opposed to being taught Nepali specifically, many students are not learning major components of the language. Without proper instruction these students do not learn the intricacies of the language. Because they struggle to understand what is going on students often drop out and are left with lifelong deficiencies in the language. And because Nepali language is so vital in political and economic realms in Nepal this lack of proper language education has a serious effect on Nepali students' prospects later in life.

Other studies have found that when Nepali is the medium of instruction, non-Nepali speaking children don't easily cope with classroom instructions and are more likely to drop out.⁶⁴ A 1984 study concluded...“the probability of participation in education for a child who spoke Nepali at home was higher by .124 than for a child who spoke another language at home.”⁶⁵ Teaching younger students in their mother tongue is seen as a way to curb drop out rates. Some believe that when students hear their own language being spoken in the classroom, it feels more welcoming. The students feel more comfortable and as a result they become more engaged and are more likely to continue in their studies.

One government official interviewed recognized that, with 146 languages spoken in Nepal (the highest estimate encountered), allowing everyone to learn in their mother tongue will be a very difficult and time consuming task. At the same time, however, he believes that it is the right thing to do, the best thing for students and the best thing for Nepal. In studying the pilot programs of mother tongue as the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 179.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 180.

medium of instruction, the Department of Education has found that schools offering mother tongue education had higher initial enrollment and a lower drop out rate. This initial success has given some hope that as mother tongue programs expand, overall education quality will improve.

At a fundamental level pro-mother tongue advocates believe that a child's needs are best served by learning in their mother tongue. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, a professor and prominent minority language advocate, is firmly on the "pro" side of the mother tongue education debate. She agrees that being taught in your mother tongue should be considered a basic human right, writing that a "child must be given the freedom to learn through the language in which he/she feels comfortable."⁶⁶ As an expert on linguistic rights she also laid out a list of what she believes to be a child's linguistic human rights:

1. Every child should have the right to positively identify with the mother tongue and have his identification accepted and respected by others.
2. Every child should have the right to learn his mother tongue fully.
3. Every child should have the right to choose when he wants to use the mother tongue in all official situations.⁶⁷

In Skutnabb-Kangas's opinion, language is so fundamentally important that it must be fiercely protected. Raising linguistic rights to the level of a basic human right gives, in her opinion, added weight to the issue and shows the seriousness with which it should be handled. By allowing students to speak and learn their mother tongue freely she believes you are allowing them to feel pride in their culture. Denying a student the right to learn in their own language implicitly or explicitly

⁶⁶ Uprety, Narayan. "Mother Tongue Education." *Journal of Nelta*. Vol. 3 No. 1-2. (1998): 96.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

denies them the right to feel equal in society. It is not healthy or right, in her opinion, to have some students treated as inferior because of the language they speak.

Along with being a basic right, language equality is seen by others as a democratic value. A popular belief among mother tongue advocates is that acceptance of all languages in Nepal will go a long way towards unification.⁶⁸ Nepal is a new democracy, and many minority groups are participating in politics for the first time. Some argue that if you deny those groups the right to participate by denying them the right to use or learn their own language, it is necessarily undemocratic. Imposing Nepali, even if it may seem practical, is a form of oppression not so different from when the King imposed Nepali language on everyone. These advocates argue that accepting all languages is a democratic value and by doing so the state can foster a sense of unity and acceptance for all people.

One school, The Jagatsundar Bwonekuthi School, illustrates the benefits of mother tongue education. The school has 300 students and is located in Chagal, Kukhutirtha in Kathmandu. It has a 60% pass rate for the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam.⁶⁹ According to the principal, it is the first school in Kathmandu to focus specifically on mother tongue education. They use Newari language as the medium of instruction with additional Nepali and English classes. When interviewed, the principal spoke about the importance of mother tongue education and the success of her students. She believes that mother tongue is incredibly important for culture

⁶⁸ Tamang, Mukta Singh. "Mother Tongue: Nepal's Linguistic Diversity Should be seen as a Strength," *Nepali Times*, 3/6/09.

⁶⁹ See glossary of terms.

and identity and that it should be preserved. Among her Newari students, mother tongue is important for establishing the students' personal identities as it keeps them connected with their community. In addition, by teaching in Newari the students can understand better the material being taught. She also spoke about the need for mother tongue education in other parts of Nepal. According to her, small minority groups often do not need Nepali, and it is much better for their communities to teach them in their mother tongues.

One of the senior teachers with twenty years of experience echoed this principal's sentiments. Newari is her mother tongue, and she is very much in support of mother tongue education. At the very least she believes it should be offered as an optional subject. She recognizes that people appreciate their own languages and want to use them to stay connected with their communities and to establish their identities. When asked about her own students and how easy Newari and Nepali is for them, she answered that both languages are easy and hard. It depends on how hard the student works. Most students, however, are fluent in both Nepali and Newari by the time they graduate.

It is interesting to note that mother tongue advocates also argue that the state should recognize all languages in Nepal and make all of them acceptable for use beyond education, such as in state business, like giving testimony in court. Currently the only language acceptable for state business is Nepali. If a person does not speak Nepali, but is forced to seek justice from the courts for any reason, that person might not get justice because they do not speak the recognized official language. Advocates argue that this is not only grossly unfair, but it is a violation of

rights that must be addressed. Allowing the use of mother tongues in state business would go a long way toward securing the political rights of many who feel they have been marginalized.⁷⁰ Thus, this issue goes beyond education.

Mother tongue advocates are not blind to the challenges associated with providing mother tongue as a medium of instruction for all, but many believe that working toward the goal, even if it cannot be fully accomplished, is valuable in itself. As one expert said, "It is surely utopian to hope that Nepal can endow every speech community with a complete vernacular school system and a complete library full of vernacular textbooks and reading materials, but a start will have been made after all, and this is significant."⁷¹ By actively working toward the ideal of mother tongue education for every child in Nepal advocates argue that the state would be sending a message to every citizen that his or her language is important. The state would also be recognizing the inherent value of diversity and acknowledging that is a valuable asset that Nepal should protect.

A well-known minority rights advocate was highly in favor of preserving minority languages and spoke to me about his views in an interview. As an advocate for the protection of minority languages in Nepal he first addressed the practical issues of implementation. He was quick to dismiss the argument that a lack of textbooks would be a reason to stay away from mother tongue education. For young students at a primary level, he argues, textbooks are of lesser importance and he had confidence in the ability of the Nepali education system to come up with

⁷⁰ Bhattachan, Krishna. "Exclusion/Inclusion and Ethnicity in Nepal." (Lecture presented to SIT Nepal on 9/9/10).

⁷¹ Yadav, Ramawatar. "The Use of Mother Tongue In Primary Education: The Nepalese Context." *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Vol. 19 No. 2. (July 1992): 182.

different curricula to circumvent this problem. He also believed that resources could be reasonably rationed. Where communities are better off, they will receive less government assistance, but it is in the poorest communities, where mother tongue is often most important, where the government really needs to step in to help preserve mother tongues. Finally, he believes that people are innately able to learn more than one language, and it does not really matter when they start to learn the languages.

According to one advocate, mother tongue education is not necessarily for everyone, but it is imperative for preserving culture among those groups that have been in one place since “time immemorial.” For those communities preserving their mother tongues is of the utmost importance. It is in these small, insular communities that mother tongue languages He does not believe that any one language can be prescribed as the best language for that person and believes very strongly that people have the right to choose what language they want to learn and speak. When language is imposed, such as Nepali was, there are winners and losers, and this is detrimental to Nepal. There is support for a new federal system that will allow for the people to decide for themselves their own fate and in the area of language decide for themselves what they want to speak.

Thus, many advocates feel that the benefits of mother tongue education far outweigh any of the possible difficulties in implementing such a language curriculum. The educational benefits to children in terms of understanding the lessons and feeling comfortable in the classroom are significant. By making all languages acceptable for use in school, children are more inclined to feel like they

belong. Also, mother tongue education is the best way to protect the languages and culture of smaller minority groups. On the other hand, many do not agree with these arguments, and instead believe that using Nepali or another non-mother tongue language as the medium of instruction is more efficient and better for the students over the long term.

Arguments Against The Use of Mother Tongue in Education

As noted in chapter one, when UNESCO made its recommendations on medium of instruction in 1951, linguists “challenged the basic assumption [that mother tongue was preferable] by saying, ‘What is best for the child psychologically may not be what is best for the adult socially, economically or politically and what is best for both the child and the adult may not be best or even possible for the society.’”⁷² Linguists like William Bull wanted to look beyond primary school to what a child, and society as a whole, need to function well. Mother tongue may well work best for a small child entering school for the first time, but what language will that child need when they are leaving school and entering the workforce? In Nepal, Nepali or English is required for most of the higher paying jobs.

UNESCO had anticipated some of these objections, and responded that “Although inadequate language development, a lack of text books and educational materials, a shortage of trained teachers, extreme diversity and popular opposition may present serious problems, these problems are to be overcome if at all possible.”⁷³ Again, UNESCO uses the language “if at all possible.” There is serious

⁷² Uprety, Narayan. “Mother Tongue Education.” *Journal of Nelta*. Vol. 3 No. 1-2. (1998): 92.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 93.

concern that the task of implementing universal mother tongue education is logistically impossible.

Those who caution against mother tongue education in Nepal, such as the Center for Research, Education and Development or respected educator Milan Dixit, give three major reasons for caution: 1) the risk of lower academic achievement by students; 2) the lack of educational material; 3) the divisiveness of multiple languages. Detractors from the movement believe that nurturing mother tongues will hold children back in school, be costly and confusing for state business and divide Nepal, possibly irreparably.⁷⁴

Education in Nepali is considered better because Nepali allows students better access to job advancement. A study funded by the Finnish Embassy in Kathmandu also finds that having local teachers (who presumably speak in a mother tongue) in local schools has no significant impact on examination scores, suggesting that mother tongue as a medium of instruction does not necessarily increase test scores as the mother tongue education advocates claim.⁷⁵ This data contradicts other reports that have found that mother tongue medium of instruction helps students learn more effectively.

Furthermore, the sheer number of languages makes implementing universal mother tongue education a logistical challenge. First and foremost there is a need for textbooks. With over seventy languages spoken there will be a need to create new textbooks for each language. Additionally there is a need for teachers trained to

⁷⁴ Turin, Mark. "Linguistic Diversity and the Preservation of Endangered Languages: A Case Study From Nepal," Kathmandu: Nepal, 2007.

⁷⁵ Vaux, Tony, Alan Smith, Sirjana Subba. "Education for All-Nepal: Review from a Conflict Perspective." *International Alert* (2006).

teach in that language, another logistical challenge that requires teacher training in all seventy plus languages.

Textbooks and making languages acceptable for use in the classroom is the most immediate obstacle to the implementation of mother tongue as the medium of instruction. The writing, printing and distributing of so many textbooks is a massive undertaking that consumes a lot of manpower and resources from an already struggling education system.

Additionally, some argue that many of the languages are, in their current form, unsuitable for classroom learning. The process of preparing languages to be taught in schools has three steps: codification, standardization, and elaboration. The first step, codification, requires creating or deciding upon a single writing system. Many mother tongues in Nepal are purely spoken languages and have no written component. For these languages to be used in school there is a need to create the written language, which “calls for extensive research into the morphological, phonological and syntactic structures of these languages.”⁷⁶ This is the case for the Limbu Language. According to Ramawatar Yadav, “a concerted effort [has recently been made] at the Royal Nepal Academy to develop a suitable Devanagari writing system for Limbu through a Limbu-Nepali dictionary project. This may facilitate and pave the way for developing an effective writing system for Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Sherpa and other hitherto unwritten Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Yadav, Ramawatar. “The Use of Mother Tongue In Primary Education: The Nepalese Context.” *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. Vol. 19 No. 2. (July 1992): 184.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Other languages, such as Maithili, have given up their writing systems (Mithilaksar for Maithili) in order to transition to Devanagari for practical reasons.

Standardization is also difficult. Many languages have differing dialects and no agreed upon norms of speech, which makes it difficult to teach them in a classroom setting. Most of the languages in Nepal are not standardized; therefore, before they can be taught in school, every language community has to decide upon generally accepted norms for their language. As Mr. Yadav writes, “standardization is ‘the process of one variety of language becoming widely accepted throughout the speech community as a supradialectal norm – the “best” form of the language – rated above regional and social dialects.’”⁷⁸ This process would eliminate certain dialects and create agreed upon rules and standards for each language. To do this, tools such as dictionaries must be developed. More advanced languages can develop a literature to help standardize the language. This can be very complicated; even Nepali has not been completely standardized, as there is no standard reference grammar on modern linguistic principles written for Nepali.⁷⁹

The final step is elaboration. Many smaller minority languages in Nepal do not possess an adequate vocabulary to address the needs of modern society. Because of this, new words needed to be added to the lexicon in order to keep the language relevant. This can be done through a variety of means, such as borrowing words from other languages, giving new meanings to existing words, and compounding existing words to create new words. “Elaboration is a slow and arduous process for language development. Development of scientific and technical

⁷⁸ Ibid., 186.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

vocabulary in particular is exceedingly time consuming.”⁸⁰ Nepal’s languages in particular often do not contain vocabulary suitable for modern education. The time, resources and energy needed to create a sufficient vocabulary for classroom use for every language in Nepal could be overwhelming. These three processes, plus the creation of textbooks would be required for each language that any community would want to use as a medium of instruction in their schools.

Finally, there is the feeling among some educators that the demand for mother tongue education does not come from an actual need, but instead is a recent construction stemming from the current political situation. They feel that mother tongue education was a non-issue until certain politicians used it as a wedge issue to drum up support for minority political parties. These educators feel that the entire debate stems from political rhetoric and that if it were not for this divisive debate there would be no controversy over Nepali as the medium of instruction.

There is evidence that some schools are doing very well without mother tongue instruction. Tukucho is a village in the Mustang region of Nepal located along the Annapurna Circuit. The school there is a government school that accommodates approximately 300 students from Tukucho and the surrounding villages. The principal of the school, when interviewed, not express concern about the lack of mother tongue instruction at his school. The language of instruction at the Tukucho school is Nepali and English is taught as a second language. While many of the students at the school speak different mother tongues, including Thakali and Sherpa, there is no official mother tongue instruction. Despite being a government school, it

⁸⁰ Ibid., 187.

is held in high regard by the people of the area (Pul, 2010; Golbindra, 2010) and twelve out of the twenty (60%) students who graduated last year passed their SLC.

When asked about mother tongue education, the principal claims it is unnecessary. He stated that all of the students who come to his school already speak Nepali in addition to their first language. Those who do not know Nepali when they started school learned quickly and it did not hold students back. Several of the school's twenty-two teachers speak Takali as well as other mother tongue languages. According to the principal, a student's mother tongue had no bearing on their achievement, rather he believes it comes down to how hard the student works.

The mother of two students attending the school, a Takali, reported in an interview that Takali language is important, but only within the context of family. Outside of the house she and her daughter speak Nepali almost exclusively, despite living in a community where many of her neighbors also speak Takali. She wants her daughters to speak Nepali in school because she hopes to move them to a boarding school in Pokhara in a few years and believes that Nepali is more useful.

In sum, advocates for mother tongue education point to improved educational outcomes and valuable cultural preservation as major benefits of implementing universal mother tongue education in primary school. Those who are skeptical that mother tongue education is beneficial point to the logistical challenge of implementing mother tongue programs. They are also skeptical that mother tongue programs are actually beneficial, given the need for Nepali and English in higher education and the workplace. Thus, there is an active debate, with neither side having a clear advantage. To resolve these inconsistencies I turn to my primary

research, where I interviewed successful educators in Nepal, to understand how they view the issue and what policy options best serve students.

Chapter 4: Resolving the Debate in the Context of Nepal

With conflicting evidence about the usefulness and practicality of mother tongue education I sought the opinion of educators and students to help me understand how they view the issue and what really works in schools. Two very successful private schools in Kathmandu, each with a unique language curriculum, offered solid alternatives to the government model of language education. By studying these schools and listening to their administrators, faculty and students, I gathered information on what works regarding learning languages.

This chapter outlines three perspectives. The first is that of school administrators from two private schools. They are in charge of setting the curriculum and base their decisions on what they feel is best for students. The second is the perspective of language teachers, who have an understanding of how children learn in the classroom. The third and final perspective is from students who share their opinion on what value different languages have to them. Understanding each of these perspectives gives us a more complete understanding of the debate and informs us of the opinions of people who deal directly with education.

Based on these perspectives I argue that three languages, the mother tongue, Nepali and English each have their own value. Because of this, all three languages should be taught to students from as early an age as possible, when students learn languages best.

Alternatives to the Government Model

Currently the government has plans to implement an incremental, trilingual language curriculum in its school system. Students start school learning in their mother tongue and continue to be taught in their mother tongue through the end of primary school (grade 5). Throughout primary school, Nepali is taught as a separate subject. In middle school (grades 6-8) Nepali is the medium of instruction, with English as an optional subject. In high school there is a combination of Nepali and English as mediums of instruction.

There are two private schools in the Kathmandu Valley that have language curricula that differ greatly from the government model but have resulted in significant success. Both schools are very highly regarded and produce some of Nepal's most promising students, almost all of whom pass the School Leaving Certificate Exam and many of whom go on to study at foreign universities. Interviewing both of these schools' administrators allows us to look at language curricula designed purely with academic success in mind, as opposed to a government model.

The Shree Mangal Dvip Boarding School is a private school located in the Boudhanath neighborhood of Kathmandu. This school caters to Himalayan children. Students from the mountainous regions of Nepal come there to receive an education when none is available in their village. Walking into the school one would think it is a school for Tibetans. The students here do not look like "traditional" Nepali people, but Nepal is very much their home. Every class day begins with a singing of the Nepal national anthem and Nepali identity is strong.

This school offers a different approach to language learning from any of the other schools studied. The Shee Mangal Dvip school takes a trilingual approach to language learning. Every student learns Nepali, English and Tibetan, simultaneously, from class 1. According to the school's director each language serves a specific purpose.

While these students are Nepali, one of the school's main objectives is the preservation of Tibetan culture and religion. While Tibetan is not the mother tongue of many of the students, it serves a similar purpose. Most of the students speak a mother tongue that is a member of the Tibeto-sino language group. This means that Tibetan is a language that will have many similarities with many of the students' mother tongue and alleviates the logistical complications associated with trying to teach a number of different mother tongues. The director put it well, calling language the "cradle of culture." Every student takes at least one Tibetan class per day, in which the language of instruction is English, starting in grade 1. Students in grades two through seven take two Tibetan classes per day. By learning Tibetan, these students are also preserving a mainstay of their culture. By being able to read many Buddhist religious text that are only in Tibetan, they are able to learn about their religion. Additionally, they are able to communicate with the Tibetan community.

In class one the teachers speak all three languages but beginning in class two English is the language of instruction. By the time of graduation nearly all students are fluent in all three languages, but English and Nepali tend to be a little bit stronger. The vice-principal of Shree Mangal Dvip School studied in Nepali through

class ten and only started to learn English when he went to study science at a university in Kathmandu. While he speaks fluent English, he laments that his pronunciation is not as good as it should be. He wishes he had started learning English earlier. As for his students, he said that many of them show up to the school being able to speak either Nepali or Tibetan. None of the students come to the school with any knowledge of English.

According to the vice-principal, students almost never drop out, and when they do it is usually to switch to a school closer to home for family reasons. Most students, after they graduate, move on to colleges in Kathmandu and a few even go abroad to study. There are currently around twenty alumni from the school studying abroad. Those who are lucky enough to study abroad are asked to sign a pledge with Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, the school's founder, to return to Nepal to give back to their community and help better society by volunteering their time and skills in their home villages for a time before pursuing their careers.

The second school that I observed is the Rato Bangala private school located in Patan with 600 students. Milan Dixit, the principle, gave an overview of the school and her opinions of mother tongue education. Rato Bangala does not teach mother tongues. Their language of instruction is English from class one with one Nepali class per day. In the view of the administration, Nepali serves the purpose of the mother tongue in that it is a conduit for Nepali culture. Rato Bangala encourages Nepali identity and often uses the Nepali language classes to teach Nepali culture and history. Nepali is, however, second to English. English is seen as the language of success and the one that will open the most doors for students. At Rato Bangala they

make the future achievement of their students a top priority, and the first step in ensuring that success in their eyes is making sure all of their students have mastered the English language.

There is a large population of Newari mother tongue speakers within the student body, but almost all of them also speak Nepali by the time they start at Rato Bangala. They learn through their parents, who are often bilingual. There have been requests from some parents to start Newari language class, but the school's principal believes that dealing with mother tongue languages and trying to teach them is too complicated given the vast number of languages spoken in Nepal.

There are eighteen scholarship students from different villages around Nepal and they tend to have the most trouble learning new languages. Many of these students do not arrive at Rato Bangala already speaking Nepali. Additionally, it is rare that any of them receives any kind of pre-school education. Both of these factors mean they are starting behind most of their classmates at Rato Bangala. Despite starting behind their peers these scholarship students are almost always fluent in Nepali by the end of their first year and are well on their way to proficiency in English.

The principal does not believe in the benefit of mother tongue education in general. She sees students pick up Nepali and English very quickly early in their school careers and does not believe that students need to be taught in their mother tongue to learn. She believes that the current debate is political, pushed by political parties with political agendas and is not actually what is best for students educationally. While she values languages, she claims to be realistic, believing that

mother tongues hold little academic or economic value and should therefore not be a priority in school.

Opinions of Language Teachers in Nepal

To further understand how students actually learn, I also interviewed language teachers at both the Shree Mangal Dvip School and the Rato Bangala School, and while opinions differed, every teacher recognized that students learn languages faster and more easily the earlier they started learning. One of the senior language teachers at Shree Mangal Dvip, who teaches six Nepali classes per day, sees Nepali as the unifying language for all of the students. During free time he observes that Nepali is the default language of communication between the students. In addition, Nepali is vital for job applications in Nepal and communication in general. He believes that if someone only speaks their mother tongue, it restricts them to finding jobs in their own linguistic areas and makes it harder to move around. Given that students speak Nepali so much in their everyday lives, the real challenge for the teacher is teaching the reading and writing.

This teacher observed over the years that it is best to start learning languages young because younger students pick up language much faster than older students. He believes that the model of learning three languages (in his case Tibetan, Nepali and English) from class one is better and more effective than the government's model of switching from mother tongue to Nepali after class five.

A senior Tibetan language teacher of fifteen years at Shree Mangal Dvip felt similarly about the value of languages and when they should be taught as the Nepali teacher. He argued that his language, Tibetan, is important for cultural reasons and

is very valuable, even if it is not necessarily economically useful when students leave school. Right now he teaches in nursery school through class ten. His students tend to pick up the language (Tibetan) fairly quickly; especially those who have mother tongues that are similar, such as Sherpa or Nubi, to Tibetan. Classes three through seven have two periods of Tibetan language, while every other class has one. By class two his students can read basic Tibetan and by class four most students can understand complex concepts in Tibetan. He does admit that Tibetan is a very difficult language, but he estimates around 95% of his students want to learn it.

For many parents Tibetan is a big advantage of Shree Mangal Dvip. They feel that it is important for their children to know Tibetan for religious purposes. For the students and teachers at Shree Mangal Dvip Tibetan is important because their founder, Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, founded the school to preserve Tibetan culture and religion. Tibetan language is vital to that cultural preservation. It helps students understand written and spoken religious teachings.

Despite students being Nepali and living in Nepal they feel no contradictions about learning Tibetan and about Tibetan culture. Both languages and cultures are important to shaping their identity. After they leave school, they use Tibetan less than English or Nepali, but they do use it to communicate with family and the Tibetan community. Also, they can translate religious texts for family members who do not understand Tibetan. This teacher believes that it is very good to learn your mother tongue.

The director of the primary school at Rato Bangala spoke about the primary school students and how they adapt to language. Ultimately she believed that young

students soak up new languages very readily and can learn quickly. Many students at Rato Bangala were lucky enough to receive some sort of preschool education and they often started school having learned a little bit of English, such as the alphabet and basic words. Between their preschool education and speaking at home the majority of students know Nepali when they start school and many have a start on English. This head start made it even easier for them to be successful in school, showing that it is never too early to begin teaching a student a new language.

Rato Bangala's curriculum is designed so that for the first two or three months of class one the teachers speak in English and Nepali, but after that the learning is almost entirely in English. In general students pick up the language very quickly. Outside of the classroom the students speak a mix of Nepali and English to each other, but teachers encourage English practice. Parents want their kids to learn English and the school emphasizes practicing English in both speech as well as writing. Many parents speak a mother tongue but purposely speak in Nepali or English at home to give their children more practice and a head start in school. Rato Bangala uses the Nepali class as well as the social studies class to teach students about their Nepali culture. They use those classes to study local communities and Nepal as a whole. Despite a clear goal of preparing their students to study abroad they still heavily emphasize learning about Nepal.

Around 98% of students at Rato Bangala start in class one and it is rare for students to transfer into the school. For students who enter in the middle, it can take up to a year for them to catch up with other Rato Bangala students in language and other subjects. Rato Bangala boasts a 100% SLC pass rate. Around 98% of their

graduates go abroad to continue their studies after high school graduation. Parents encourage their students to go abroad and school prepares them for leaving. Many of their graduates remain abroad after completing their studies, so it has yet to be seen how many will return to Nepal.

The director likes the idea of mother tongue education, but practically knows that mother tongue speakers can't compete with Nepali speakers when it comes to exams. In her opinion waiting until class five or nine to start learning a new language is too long and will make it much harder for students to fully understand and adopt that new language. Also, teaching a language with only one class per day, as the government model does, makes it extremely difficult to gain fluency. The curriculum needs to be integrated so the language complements or is being used in other subjects as well. All of the students from Rato Bangala are bilingual and some are trilingual. Teachers are vital to the language learning process and across the board teacher training needs to be improved throughout Nepal.

A class one teacher at the Rato Bangala School had high praise for her students when it came to speaking and understanding English. While the teachers did sometimes have to repeat important or complex instructions in Nepali, by the third term they use almost no Nepali. Many students speak in English or Nepali at home and she attributes much of their success at learning language to practice at home and preschool preparation. Nepali reading and writing tends to be a little bit harder and requires more pushing as the students tend to prefer English. In her opinion it is definitely best to start learning a language as early as possible. It can be

very hard to learn after class five. The later in life you learn a language the less you understand the intricacies of that language.

There is one scholarship student who had no English instruction before coming to Rato Bangala. He is definitely behind the other students in his language abilities, and often with complicated instructions or concepts the teachers have to repeat in Nepali to ensure he understands and he gets extra help if necessary.

In terms of culture, in her opinion, learning English does not remove the students from mainstream Nepali society because they all still speak Nepali in their everyday lives. It does, on the other hand, offer them opportunities for better jobs than the average Nepali. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and other international businesses require English from their employees. English opens doors. You might be a genius, but if you only speak a mother tongue you cannot communicate your ideas and you will only get so far.

A senior Nepali teacher at the Rato Bangala School knows that most students start school speaking basic Nepali, but they still need to be taught grammar, reading and writing. At Rato Bangala students have five classes of Nepali per week; most schools in Nepal have twelve. They need to learn Nepali for a number of reasons: First and foremost it is the national language, and the government requires it. It is also the most common language in Nepal, and students should know the language of their country. Students need to know Nepali to pass their SLC's. Nepali class also serves as a time to teach about Nepali culture, keeping students connected with their community. Nepali is important at home, especially communicating with older generations. Students tend to like their Nepali classes, even if writing is hard. Still

most students use English after graduation. She believes that languages get harder to learn the older you get and that it is good they start from a young age.

The students at Rato Bangala tend to come from wealthier families belonging to Nepal's upper class and they are being groomed to be Nepal's next upper class. These students receive many advantages over their peers in government schools, and Rato Bangala's curriculum is considered one of those advantages. While it is not considered culturally sensitive to ignore mother tongue languages, Rato Bangala's focus on English is giving their students the upper hand when they leave school.

All educators agreed that the earlier a student begins to learn a language the easier it is for them to learn that language completely. Students who get pre-school education do best, and students who enter either Rato Bangala or Shree Mangal Dvip later in their school careers struggle much more than other students to pick up the languages. Given this information, the government model of introducing languages gradually over a student's academic career appears to be flawed and not what is best for students.

How Students Perceive Mother Tongue Education

The students interviewed came from the Shree Mangal Dvip School, and they gave their opinions on the languages they spoke and what value each of them had. While they all appreciated their own mother tongues and did not want to lose them, each was grateful to have learned Nepali and English fluently and all planned to use those languages to further their academic and economic careers.

A recent graduate and current social studies teacher at Shree Mangal Dvip shared her views both as a teacher and as a student who learned three languages in

school, plus two more on her own. She arrived at the school at age nine speaking Sherpa, her mother tongue, and also understanding Nepali. In her home she spoke Sherpa with her family. Starting at Shree Mangal Dvip later than other students made her feel left behind and she felt that she had to work much harder than her classmates to catch up with all three of the languages. While having her learn English was not a priority for her parents, she does feel that learning English was a privilege and opened up opportunities for her to study abroad. She studied in Italy (in English) for high school and then went to Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri for her undergraduate degree.

As for her mother tongue, Sherpa, she feels that she is a little rusty, and at times it can be difficult, but when she returns to her family and begins to speak it regularly again she picks it back up without problems. She does not believe that she will ever forget Sherpa despite often going long periods without speaking it. She also believes that in the villages these days more and more youth are communicating in Nepali and that mother tongues are most often being used by the older generations. While it might be of lesser importance for communication, she does believe that mother tongues are vital for culture and staying connected with the older generations, and she believes that they should be learned. She also believes that Nepali is a great unifying language and it is important for Nepalese people to speak Nepali. Many of the people from her village only speak Sherpa, and when they go to government offices they are often mistaken for Tibetans because they cannot speak Nepali. She believes that translation filters, meaning that it is hard to communicate one's true meaning through a translator. She believes that it is important for

communication amongst Nepalese people that they all speak at least one language in common.

From a teacher's perspective she knows that younger students pick up languages more quickly and learn the rules of that language more easily than their older counterparts. At the same time she is worried about other teachers in Nepal because there is a lack of teacher training and most teachers are just taught to lecture. She knows that immersion is the best way to learn a language and does not believe that one class per day in any language is enough to learn it fluently. At her school, she believes that native Nepali speakers have a slight advantage when it comes to learning English simply because they don't have to learn Nepali first and they can focus their energy on learning English. As to the importance of English, she believes it is an international language and no matter where you go in the world you can usually find people who speak English. Also, in Nepal, there are more English newspapers than Nepali language ones and so even in Nepal English is important for being socially aware. She believes that English language brings with it English culture and for her that is a good thing for the most part. Some mother tongue advocates believe that dominant languages, like English, bring with them a dominant culture that overwhelms traditional culture, but for her she sees these two cultures as complementing each other, not one taking the place of the other.

A second student interviewed also argued that learning English was important for him and his career aspirations. A 24-year-old graduate of the Shree Mangal Dvip School, originally from Sikkim (India) now lives in Kathmandu and started at Shree Mangal Dvip in class six. He speaks three languages. Nepali is his

first language and he learned Tibetan and English in school, with Tibetan being the hardest language for him to learn. He now mostly uses Nepali and English in his everyday life. For his parents it was very important that he learned English. When he was in school, he never felt any separation amongst student based on language; everyone spoke Nepali, and that was the unifying language. He believes that all Nepalese people should speak Nepali. He is currently in college studying mass communication. He works in newspapers and writes articles in English. If he had to choose one language to speak, he would choose English.

Another recent alumna of Shree Mangal Dvip School speaks five languages and argues that each is important for their own reasons. Her mother tongue is Rai, but she also speaks English, Nepali, Tibetan and Hindi. Growing up she spoke Rai and Nepali with her family, learning the other languages in school. The hardest to learn was Tibetan. Now that she is out of school she finds that she uses English more than any other language. Her parents consider Nepali the most important language, but for her Rai is also very important. Rai is a large part of her culture and she fears that it will soon become extinct. She would have liked to have had a Rai class in school, but also understands that it wouldn't be practical, especially considering that she was only one of two Rai speakers at the school. She said she never felt any kind of separation amongst students based on language. She believes that everyone should know Nepali, but it should never be compulsory to speak it. For her future plans she is trying to get a scholarship to study in Australia. Once she has finished her studies she wants to return to Nepal and study Rai language and culture.

The opinions of these administrators, teachers, and students give us vital insight into what actually works for students in practice. The administrators from both schools set curricula in line with their values and priorities. At Rato Bangala, the priority is academic success and the language curriculum reflected that with its heavy emphasis on English fluency. At Shree Mangal Dvip, the school cares deeply about academic success, but also about community and religious values, which is reflected in their trilingual curriculum. Nepal needs to set its language curriculum based on its values as a nation, and those values align closely with those of Shree Mangal Dvip: prioritize academic success without devaluing culture.

The teachers interviewed informed us that students are incredibly good at learning multiple languages, as long as they start early. It appears that this is too often overlooked by mother tongue advocates, who lobby for using the mother tongue as long as possible before switching to a new language. They also understand that learning multiple languages give students choices. Each language opens different doors, and the more languages a student understands the more doors are open to that student.

By interviewing students we get a better idea of what the students value. These students understand clearly the clash between mother tongue, Nepali, and English. The students value their mother tongues, which are their connection with family and their home communities. At the same time, however, it is clear that these students value Nepali and English highly. Nepali, and especially English, are the keys to further educational and economic opportunities and that is what these students value most highly.

In sum, these interviews shed light on otherwise complicated and conflicting evidence both for and against mother tongue education. It is clear that the mother tongue is important, as teachers, administrators, and most importantly, students, value it highly. At the same time, however, the importance and value of Nepali and English cannot be underestimated. Therefore, if Nepal wants an educational system that does what is best for its students and communities, it must value all three of these languages and teach all three from as early an age as possible. The next chapter outlines more specific policy recommendations based on the data gathered in this research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

When we look at the scholarly evidence, the data are mixed. There is no clear argument for how to deal with mother tongue education. With such a complicated linguistic landscape and conflicting information on mother tongue education, what is Nepal to do? There are currently at least seventy major languages spoken by the people of Nepal. Out of a population of over twenty-nine million, less than half speak Nepali as a first language. Despite that, Nepali is the official language and the medium of instruction in almost all schools. This lack of accommodation for minority languages has many concerned that Nepal's linguistic diversity could be in danger.

Linguistic rights of minorities have been established to be a human right, and they should be protected as such. With over half of Nepal's population speaking minority languages, it should be a priority for the government to protect the rights of those people. At the same time the government must prepare its students to be successful in school and in a rapidly changing economy. To do this they must be able to speak, at the very least, Nepali, if not also English.

Based on my fieldwork and interviews, I believe that students should be taught in their mother tongue, Nepali and English from grade one, as this will allow them to learn their mother tongue formally while also acquiring the language skills necessary to be successful. In other words, the trilingual model discussed in chapter four is what is best for students both academically and culturally.

Currently Nepal's department of education is trying to implement more mother tongue language programs in primary schools throughout the country. The

general thinking is that students should be taught in their mother tongue during primary school, then learn in Nepali in middle school, and finally learn in English in high school. This “stepping stone” plan is seen by many as a nice compromise between the desire to learn and maintain minority languages and the need for students to understand Nepali and English to advance in academics and in the economy. Unfortunately, this compromise does not take into account the fact that students learn languages better when they are younger. Waiting until middle and high school to start languages makes learning much more difficult for students and decreases the chances that they will become fluent. Nepal should be starting its students from the moment they enter school with at least two languages, the mother tongue and Nepali, and should add English when possible.

Despite steps taken by Nepal’s government to implement more mother tongue education programs, there also needs to be a general change in the attitude toward minority languages. These languages are often looked down upon and not taken seriously, even by their own people. Such is the dominance of the Nepali language. Protection of mother tongues must become a priority if Nepal is going to hold onto this valuable cultural resource. The benefits of protecting and preserving language are clear. Language is vital for cultural preservation. Culture is passed down from one generation to the next through language. Nepal’s languages hold a wealth of cultural knowledge such as religion, cultural practices, and creation myths. Additionally, the right to speak and learn one’s own language has been concretely established as a human right and should not be infringed upon.

Arguments on the value of preserving local knowledge and reducing intra-state violence are relevant to Nepal. Because most of the languages in Nepal have small language communities, many are in danger of disappearing, risking the loss of an untold amount of local knowledge. Nepal is one of the most bio-diverse countries on the planet with ecosystems ranging from the high Himalayan Mountains bordering Tibet, to the jungles of the southern Terai region that borders India. Much of what is known about that vast biodiversity is contained in local languages that have evolved in that environment for generations. As those languages disappear, Nepal is at risk of losing knowledge that has been built up over generations, knowledge that may or may not be recoverable. Not only does Nepal's vast beauty and abundance of different climates attract tourists from all over the world, boosting the economy, but there is value in its flora and fauna to both Chinese and western medicine. Indigenous languages hold the knowledge to all of this biodiversity, and protecting languages will go a long way toward protecting the economic potential of Nepal as well as the environment in general.

Additionally, Nepal is currently working toward becoming a functioning federal democratic state. Within that process there are intense discussions on the roles that minority groups will play in Nepal's future. According to Andreas Follesdal, "many observers seem to agree that one reason for the calls for federalism was a widespread perception that the central authorities had long dominated many of the other ethnic groups and castes of Nepal."⁸¹ If the people continue to feel that the central government, even if it is a democracy, does not respect them or their

⁸¹ Follesdal, Andreas. "Federalism, Ethnicity and Human Rights in Nepal." *International Journal on International and Group Rights*. Vol. 18. (2011): 337.

rights, the whole system will lack credibility and could fall apart. One of major rights that the state can respect is the right to use their own language for each minority group.

The Nepali people have a long history of having government imposed upon them. The Ranas, and more recently the monarchy, ruled Nepal as they saw fit, not by the will of the people. If the new democratic government continues to infringe upon the rights of minority groups the people will feel disenfranchised and excluded from the government. If, however, the government respects these minority groups and accommodates their needs, members of minority groups will feel more included and more likely to put their faith in the new government. By respecting these and other rights, the new Nepali government can gain credibility amongst minority groups and keep Nepal on the path toward democracy, not falling back into civil war.

In addition to being environmentally and culturally important, mother tongue education helps children succeed in school. When students enter the classroom for the first time they feel more comfortable when they hear the same language they hear in their homes. When primary schools use the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, students feel more connected with the school, it becomes a part of their community and they feel more invested in their own educations.

As the data from administrators and students suggest, when students are taught in their mother tongue they understand more of what they are taught. If students are taught in Nepali, and they do not already know the language, they are missing major parts of the lessons. This often causes students to drop out or fail to

continue their schooling. Teaching students in their mother tongue allows them to understand what they are being taught and gives them a foundation for success in school.

How do we reconcile the need to protect mother tongues with the realities of a rapidly developing and globalizing world? It is clear that Nepali and English are becoming more important by the day as Nepal's economy advances and tourism and technology become more prevalent and a larger section of the economy. Without Nepali or English, students are limited and confined to their own linguistic communities, which can often be small and secluded with few economic opportunities beyond agriculture. It is ideal to allow all languages to operate equally in business and government, but in reality that is just not practical. Additionally, in the current Nepali school system, students need to be proficient in Nepali for high school and need English for a higher education.

Evidence from educators in some of Nepal's most successful schools tells us that the earlier students start to learn a language the more successful they will be. The current government model of starting with mother tongue medium in elementary, Nepali medium in middle school and English medium in high school is actually further handicapping minority students. The most privileged children in Nepal already know Nepali fluently and are learning English early and well. Mother tongue speakers in this system do not start learning Nepali until they start school in class one and are not immersed until middle school and they may never learn English, but if they do, they do not start until middle school and are not immersed until high school. Mother tongue speakers are only falling further behind the most

privileged children in this system. When students are taught in their mother tongue they end up waiting longer to start learning other languages and as a result they are less proficient at Nepali and English as their elite counterparts. An example is the vice-principal of the Shree Mangal Dvip School. He only started learning English while at university, and, while he speaks fluently, he lamented that he had to work extremely hard to learn English and that his pronunciation is not as strong as it should be. By delaying the immersion of minority language students they are being left at a significant disadvantage. Mother tongue medium education is very important, but Nepal should, at the very least, give minority students a fighting chance by starting them earlier with Nepali and English.

Nepal should act swiftly and decisively to protect its languages and students by introducing a language curriculum similar to the Shree Mangal Dvip School. Nepal's schools should teach students from the moment they enter school in their mother tongue, but they should also start immediately with Nepali and English when possible. The mother tongue should be used as a bridge to Nepali and English, helping students understand what they are taught as they learn the new languages.

While education will go a long way toward preserving languages, they will not survive if they do not have value. Schools should introduce cultural programs that teach local history and traditions in the mother tongue. Imparting history in the mother tongue encourages students to learn the stories and then pass them on to the next generation. Additionally, communities should make an effort to add value to their languages. Local government could be conducted in the local mother tongue language to add value to that language outside of the home. By teaching students in

the mother tongue and making it more useful outside of the home, educators and the community as a whole add value to the language and make it far more likely that it will be passed on to the next generation.

The Nepal government is not serving students by waiting until middle school to start teaching Nepali or English. It has been shown that students could learn both languages far more easily if they started at a younger age. Students who speak a minority language are already at a disadvantage compared to their Nepali-speaking counterparts, and we should not put them at a further disadvantage by waiting to start them on a second or third language. Students learn languages better the younger they are, so it stands to reason that the earlier you start students on a second language the more successful they will be at learning it.

Introducing such a comprehensive language curriculum will take significant resources and teacher training, but the pay off for Nepali society will be invaluable. Private schools, which are able to implement this model, have significant resources and a small student body, so scaling this curriculum to all of Nepal's public schools presents significant challenges. But it is not impossible. The easiest way to teach both languages with limited resources is to recruit local teachers. If the teachers already speak the mother tongue they only need to be trained in teaching Nepali. This would incidentally add value to the mother tongue as well, as knowledge of your mother tongue could translate into a teaching job. This is where Nepal's Department of Education should start. Heavy recruitment of local teachers to help Nepal meet its mother tongue education needs could quickly get Nepal on the path toward universal bilingual education.

The final step in this process is implementing English language education. While English is technically a foreign language, its value cannot be underestimated. Training and hiring enough English teachers for every school in Nepal is a massive undertaking that will certainly take a significant amount of time. This ideal may not be realizable in the near future, but Nepal's department of education should strive to get as close as possible. Every teaching Nepali students English will doors open to them that would otherwise be closed. Empowering Nepal's youth will only lead to a brighter future for all of Nepal.

Implementing this comprehensive language policy in all Nepali schools would be best for all parties. By making sure that every student learns their mother tongue fully, one adds value to the language and ensures its preservation. Additionally, teaching mother tongue in government schools helps students feel that the greater Nepali community accepts their language and culture. Promoting acceptance makes students feel welcome in their own country and makes it more likely that a diverse Nepali population can come together to create an effective democracy. And by giving all Nepali students access to quality Nepali and English language education, it ensures that all students in Nepal will have an equal opportunity to succeed in school.

Nepal is a rapidly changing and developing nation. It is a young democracy stuck between two world powers. As the world becomes smaller, the ability to communicate is becoming ever more important. By taking steps to both protect its natural wealth of languages and to ensure that its students have the tools to succeed in a rapidly changing world Nepal will be protecting its future.

Looking beyond Nepal, this debate offers insight to all developing countries that are trying to balance tradition with modernization. Traditional languages contain a wealth of cultural knowledge and tradition and should be protected vigorously. At the same time, however, it is the government's job to prepare the students in its schools for the realities of this modernizing world and the reality is that with communication and information rapidly spreading, the ability to speak a major language is vital for economic success. For this reason governments should identify which languages are important and then give students the tools to learn those languages as quickly and completely as possible. By focusing on language we can both protect dying indigenous knowledge and tradition and prepare children to be successful, and not allow them to be limited by their ability to communicate. This allows for a more prosperous world where more people can succeed while also protecting heritage.

Glossary of Terms

- **Mother Tongue:** The language a person speaks from birth. In the case of this paper the term mother tongue refers to a minority language, not Nepali or English.
- **Vernacular:** the language spoken by the ordinary people of a particular region. (Term is interchangeable with mother tongue)
- **Language of Instruction:** The language in which a subject is taught in school.
- **SLC:** School leaving Certificate, a test taken by all Nepali students upon completion of class 10.
- **ILO 169:** a legally binding international instrument open to ratification, which deals specifically with the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.
- **Devanagari:** the writing system used for the Nepali Language.

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