

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF NEPAL: A STUDY OF PREVENTION BARRIERS AND PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: In Nepal, indigenous languages are in danger of disappearing and if the situation does not improve, the dying trend will continue to increase in the future. Thus, this paper aims to explore barriers to indigenous language activities and strategies for revitalizing these dying languages of Nepal.

Methodology: To address this objective, the study adopted the qualitative research method, using the data collected from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and secondary sources such as the existing literature through print and online sources. The results were presented thematically and discussed for qualitative analysis.

Main findings: The overall results of the study indicated that an inclusive language policy should be adopted by the government to accommodate indigenous languages of Nepal, indigenous language communities should be encouraged by the government to insist on speaking their languages, and language communities are also required to collaborate with the government to address the issues related to improving the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages of Nepal.

Applications of this study: The outcome of this particular research can be a beneficial act for engaging indigenous communities of Nepal in language revival and protecting threatened languages from extinction. It is the responsibility of the researchers that are expected by each of various indigenous language communities in particular and the Nepali society at large.

Novelty/Originality of this Study: Indigenous languages are often considered by many as 'heritage languages' and are used to describe languages that are often in the endangered list. No studies are found on the use of indigenous languages and language revival efforts in the study area such as barriers that prevented indigenous language groups from participating in language activities and ways that can preserve and promote such dying languages in the study area.

Keywords: *Indigenous Languages, Language Barriers, Language Endangerment, Language Revitalization, Linguistic Diversity, Preservation Strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

As biodiversity plays an important role in protecting our environment, it is equally important to preserve and promote linguistic diversity in the world ([Krauss, 1992](#); [Hale, 1998](#); [Romaine, 2007](#); [Regmi, 2011](#); [Upadhyay & Hasnain, 2017](#)) because languages are part of our history and culture. When a language dies, it dies with its history and culture. So languages, no matter how big or small they are should not be forgotten or neglected. Despite the fact that all sorts of languages can be a valuable asset for the benefit of future generations, the importance of linguistic diversity is neglected and, in many cases, it is "othered" ([Iseke-Barnes, 2004, p. 45](#)). In many countries of the world where a language is adopted by the government as the ruling language, other languages become ignored. In such a situation, instead of seeing linguistic diversity as a valuable learning resource, it is rather seen as a problem ([Romaine, 2007, p. 118](#); [Saud, 2019, p. 79](#)). Thus, in this paper, our emphasis is to save indigenous languages because they can play vital roles in the overall development of a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural nation like Nepal ([Pun & Gurung, 2020, p. 504](#)). In particular, this paper focuses on the decline and death of indigenous languages with special reference to the sampled languages used by the indigenous language communities in the study area.

Almost in each country in the world, the issue of language endangerment is associated with the national policy of linguistic assimilation by undermining and even driving out the minority languages. In Nepal's case too, it has become "a political battleground" and this "invisible politics of 'unplanning' of languages has been responsible for the loss of scores of languages" ([Giri, 2011, pp. 197-198](#)) and, for [Phyak and Ojha \(2019\)](#), it is "a critical socio-political issue" (p. 342). Seen from this perspective, discourses on the issues of language endangerment and language planning policies have created a new debate for linguists and language activists. For instance, as for [Piller and Takahashi \(2011\)](#), this process of linguistic assimilation is connected with "social exclusion" (p. 375). [Pun and Gurung \(2020\)](#) also argue that this is an unfair treatment of the government, which is based solely on the use of language and is most severely felt by the indigenous language communities around the world including Nepal. This will result in the "irrecoverable loss of unique knowledge that is based on specific cultural and historical experience" and the speech communities suffer from the loss of languages as "a crucial setback of ethnic and cultural identity" ([Brenzinger, 2008, p. ix](#)). In most cases, these communities are not given the opportunity to be familiar with "their own traditions, knowledge, history, or contemporary issues" ([Jacob, Liu, & Lee, 2015, p. 42](#)). The paper, therefore, aims to suggest a more inclusive language policy of the

government that can accommodate indigenous languages of Nepal and contribute to the preservation and promotion of the world's linguistic diversity.

Though Nepal is a multilingual country with over 123 languages spoken by 125 ethnic groups as their mother-tongue (CBS, 2012), many of them are on the endangered list. The past few decades have seen the decline and death of these languages as the linguistics discipline is in the process of losing the world's languages (Baez, 2018, p. 24). Linguistic diversity is, therefore, being threatened by this trend around the world, and this threat is, in particular, severely felt by Nepal's indigenous communities. In Nepal, many languages of these communities, particularly the Tibeto-Burman language families, are in danger of disappearing (Yadava, 2014). Many linguists have agreed to group languages according to levels as safe, at risk, endangered, and extinct (Crystal, 2000, p. 20), and most of Nepal's indigenous languages are believed to be endangered. Many linguists have also agreed with the idea that the level of languages is measured according to the number of children who learn it as opposed to the number of people who speak it. For instance, Wigglesworth and Simpson (2018) argue that once the indigenous children enter the school system, they start learning languages other than their mother-tongue, facing an additional challenge in their education (pp.1-2).

One of the main threats to indigenous languages is the conscious and unconscious desires of parents not passing on their languages to their children. In some places, indigenous language speakers who fluently speak the Nepali language, which is considered the lingua franca of Nepal, are looked upon more favourably than those who use indigenous languages fairly well (Giri, 2011, p. 201; Yadava, 2014, p. 53). Similarly, the Nepali language is used as the only medium of instruction in all types of educational institutions that minimizes the active use of indigenous languages. In this sense, the Nepali language is considered "the language of a long-time repressive government" (Eagle, 2010, p. 292). One of the reasons is that native children get little or no incentive to learn their indigenous languages. Their parents and communities around fail to make them understand the value of the language and the consequences of its decline and loss (Pun, 2019, p. 20). If this sort of language situation persists over a long period of time, as Hale (1998) claims, the "loss of a language is a loss indeed, and the loss of many is a disaster" (p. 193). So this study investigates whether the national language policy is responsible for the decline and death of indigenous languages and if so, explores the socio-political elements that led to the decline and death of languages and ways to preserve and promote linguistic diversity in Nepal.

To address the language issues raised in this study about language endangerment, language policy, and preservation of linguistic diversity in Nepal, the notions of 'language prevention barriers' and 'language preservation strategies' have been elaborated with the help of the data collected from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and secondary sources that are available from both print and online sources. In this paper, the term 'language prevention barriers' refers to the factors, which are related to language planning and policy, that prevent indigenous language speaking groups from participating in their language activities such as handing down indigenous languages from one generation to another, and using such languages for official and educational purposes. One of the major barriers to the active use of such languages is the government's language policy. But different linguists have suggested different factors that are considered language prevention barriers. For instance, Driem (2008) has suggested "economic, ecological, and demographic factors" that prevent the active use of indigenous languages (p. 303). Eagle (2010) has elaborated on the factors mentioned by Driem that prevent indigenous language groups from using their mother-tongues. They include "geography and ecological variables, economic alternatives and limitations, migrations of people, religion, social stratification and the political history of the region" that directly affect the active use of indigenous languages (p. 272). Another major terminology used in this paper is the phrase 'language preservation strategies' that deals with the ways to preserve and promote indigenous languages as they are threatened by preventing these communities from participating in the language activities. Even after the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990, the Nepal government language planning policies turned into "highly political and controversial issues" (Eagle, 2010, p. 293) that created "a significant space for the voices of minoritized language speakers" (Phyak & Ojha, 2019, p. 345). As a result, indigenous language communities formed various ethnic organizations and advocated for language policy change, starting a process of reclaiming their languages through revival and preservation strategies (Giri, 2011; Phyak & Ojha, 2019).

In this paper, the issues of language endangerment, language policy, and preservation of linguistic diversity in Nepal have been discussed from the sociolinguistic perspectives on language prevention barriers and language preservation strategies. These issues have been discussed in the subsequent sections below.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout human history, languages of powerful groups have spread while the languages of powerless groups have become extinct. The extinction of minority languages in today's world has become an issue which has been long discussed by previous researches, reaching at alarming stage mainly due to globalization, world social changes, and changes in the world's global community; and Nepal is no exception.

In Nepal, a few linguists have made empirical studies about the languages of Nepal, presenting a complex linguistic situation. Such attempts made by individuals and institutions are unable to present the comprehensive picture of languages of Nepal. In his study, Regmi (2011) has examined attempts made to survey languages of Nepal and explored the progress, challenges, and prospects of the new attempt made by the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LinSuN), surveying

languages of Nepal since 2009. The findings suggested that the concerned authorities at home and abroad should help the LinSuN to complete the survey of the languages of Nepal.

In 2005, in Kathmandu, there was a seminar on the situation of indigenous languages that formulated policies and planning for their preservation and promotion, and established coordination among various language-related national and international agencies to revive the linguistic situation. The seminar was organized by National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), Kathmandu. There were three research papers presented in the seminar. [Yadava and Turin \(2005\)](#) presented a paper to set the scene for the seminar on indigenous languages of Nepal that examined two aspects of these languages: language situation and contemporary language issues. The paper concluded that there are the prospects for promoting indigenous languages of Nepal and launching language revitalization campaigns that increase the prestige, wealth, and power of speakers of endangered mother-tongues, give the each language a strong presence in the education system and provide the each language with a written form to encourage literacy and improve access to electronic technology. The second paper was presented by [Watters and Rai \(2005\)](#) that dealt with the nature and scope of language and focused on the use of indigenous languages in education including literacy, arguing that mother-tongue education is not just a right but also a bridge to participation in the wider world as cognitive linguists are in favour of spontaneous language-in-use that can bring a language alive ([Rice, 2018, p. 58](#)). The third paper of the seminar was presented by [Watters and Tuladhar \(2005\)](#) that focused on a framework for establishing coordination among diverse existing national and international agencies, carrying out campaigns related to the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages and their use in education and other everyday businesses.

A study on the preservation of linguistic diversity conducted by [Turin \(2007\)](#) provided a wide range of information on language diversity, endangerment, and preservation, bringing together the debate in the social context of Nepal. The findings of the study illustrated the interrelatedness of language, culture, knowledge, and ethnicity that dealt with questions of minorities, political orientation, and ecological sustainability. The findings suggested that there need successful efforts to keep languages from extinction and combine mother-tongue literacy and education, improving the socio-economic and political status of minority language communities.

Many linguists and education planners agree that the future of nations depends on their education systems. For instance, the languages used in learning and instruction in schools and colleges contribute to the quality of education ([Kadel, 2017, p. 190](#)). This debate is associated with the implementation of a bilingual or multilingual education system in Nepal. Discussing this matter, [Kadel \(2017\)](#) reviewed the background to education policies addressing minority language use in basic education in Nepal, arguing that each Nepali community living in Nepal has the right to preserve and promote its mother-tongue, script, cultural civilization, and heritage.

A similar study is done by the [Department of English Education \(2011\)](#) that tested the realities of multilingual education programs being practised in seven schools from six different districts. The findings showed that due to the unrealistic implementation of multilingual education, the multilingual education program might not be sustainable. The findings also showed that the teachers needed support to run the program effectively because the support provided by the state government was insufficient.

A study on bilingual education conducted by the [Department of Education, Government of Nepal \(2001\)](#) admitted that education through the mother-tongue helps minimize the learning difficulties of the children. With this vision, the government adopted a policy to teach mother-tongue as an optional subject in schools and the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) developed ten exemplary curriculum and textbooks in different languages, but the use of these materials did not have any impact on the school education. Similarly, due to the lack of mother-tongue teachers, the Nepali language was widely used as a medium of instruction in schools. In a similar study on education policy, [Regmi \(2017\)](#) indicated that Nepal required a multilingual language policy which could motivate the indigenous language communities to use their native languages (p. 139). So to preserve endangered languages, the speakers of endangered languages should be given education in their mother-tongues.

Following the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, many linguists and ethnic groups advocated mother-tongue literacy in Nepal such as many of ethnic organizations even took initiatives, developing literacy materials, and implemented mother-tongue literacy programs in many parts of the country. In the issue of the mother-tongue education campaign, [Phyak \(2016\)](#) discussed the government of Nepal's efforts "to increase ethnic-minority children's access to basic primary education through mother-tongue education" (pp. 199-200). Similarly, the post-1990 constitutions of Nepal have also advocated mother-tongue education. On the subject of mother-tongue literacy, [Khadka, Chaudhary, Magar, Chaudhary, and Pokhrel \(2006\)](#) made a comprehensive study to investigate good practice in the development and promotion of mother-tongue literacy and ways in which this might be shared at a national level. They tested four languages: Tharu, Tamang, Newar, and Limbu as having their literacy programs. The findings of this study of these languages suggested that the state government and the mother-tongue communities should develop bi/multilingual materials to run the mother-tongue literacy classes.

An important contribution to the study of languages of Nepal is a chapter by [Yadava \(2014\)](#) that analyzed the linguistic diversity and the use of languages as mother-tongues and second languages in Nepal based on the 2011 census. His

study categorized mother-tongues into two main groups: the major language group consisted of 19 mother-tongues spoken by almost 96% of the population and the minor language group consisted of more than 104 mother-tongues spoken by about 4% of the total population. The findings recommended using mother-tongues in multilingual education as a medium of instruction in both formal and non-formal education.

A review of the literature on the preservation of linguistic diversity in Nepal showed that most of the studies focused on the available data of languages from the census taken in different periods, the current situation of languages, and revival efforts made by the subsequent governments of Nepal. Some studies dealt with the awareness of linguistic diversity, bi- and multilingual education programs, and mother-tongue literacy programs. Very few studies covered selected areas in the use of indigenous languages and language revival efforts in Kaski District such as the attitudes towards the use of indigenous languages and ways to preserve and promote indigenous languages in Nepal. In the Nepali context, such studies have been rarely found. More specifically, no studies were found on the factors that caused the decline and death of indigenous languages elsewhere in Nepal. This study has attempted to fill this gap using the qualitative research method, using the data collected from the FGD, and drawing information from secondary sources.

METHOD

This study attempts to fill the above research gap using the qualitative research method, such as using the data collected from the FGD and secondary sources for analysis. Both primary and secondary data were used: the primary data were collected from the FGDs and the secondary data were collected from different published and unpublished books, seminar papers, journals, dissertations, and official reports. The study was conducted in Kaski District, which is one of the 77 districts of Nepal and lies in Gandaki Province. It was selected as the study area that was within reach of these researchers who belong to the study groups such as to the Gurung and Magar language speaking communities and, according to [Gerds \(2017\)](#), if indigenous language specialists become linguists, they can "serve their communities better" (p. 607). In addition, both the researchers work in a university that is located within the study area. Since this paper is based on the research project funded by the University Grants Commission (UGC), Nepal, the project had to be completed as per the limited grant amount provided by the funder. In addition, the study area is densely populated by indigenous language speaking groups, so the data that were necessary for the study were easily available for the study.

Two indigenous language groups, namely Gurung and Magar belonging to the 'major' language groups and other three language groups, namely Bhujel, Hyolmo, and Dura belonging to the 'minor' language groups have been randomly selected as the sampled population for the study ([Yadava, 2014, pp. 57-60](#)). The sampled population was selected based on the language group, age group, religion, gender, marital status, educational status, and occupation to maintain reliability and validity of the collected data. Out of a total of 70,033 indigenous language speakers (about 44 different language groups) in the study area ([CBS, 2012](#)), a total of 42 speakers from the five indigenous language speaking groups participated in the FGD. The selected participants were informed and given the discussion questions and tasks prior to the appointed group discussion time. Each participant in for each FGD was given the code number starting from Code No. P-01 to Code No. P-42.

Thus, the study used the qualitative analysis through the opinions drawn from FGDs and secondary sources such as the existing literature through print and online sources. The results were thematically presented and discussed for qualitative analysis that dealt with the issues of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity in Nepal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the presentation of the results and discussion that aims at fulfilling the objectives of the study. It mainly presents the results drawn from the FGD supported by secondary sources, dealing with the demographic characteristics of FGD participants and the thematic presentation of FGD results through the qualitative perspective. Qualitative data were displayed in five themes for discussion. These themes range from the importance of indigenous languages to strategies for preserving and promoting indigenous languages.

Figures 1 and 2 describe the demographic characteristics of FGD participants demonstrating the distribution of FGD participants by gender and language group. Out of the sampled respondents, demographic characteristics have been shown to result in frequency. This demographic representation highlights different segments of the participants in the discussion on topics related to preserving and promoting linguistic diversity in Nepal.

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of FGD participants by language group, representing the number of participants in the survey. As shown in the figure, there were 42 FGD participants in total: the Gurung language group comprised of 17 participants, the Magar of five, the Bhujel of four, the Dura of seven and the Hyolmo of nine. The Gurung language group had the highest number (17 out of the total of 42 participants) of participation in the survey and the Bhujel language group had the least number (only four out of the total of 42 participants) of participation in the survey.

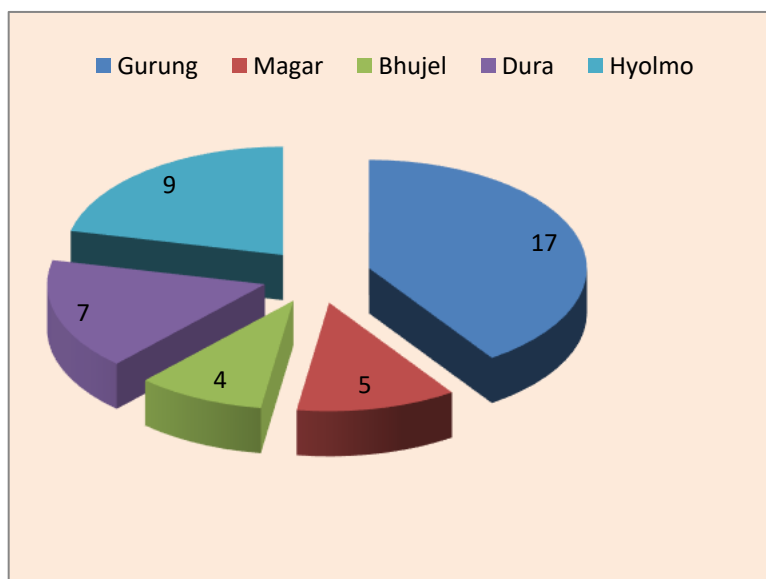


Figure 1: Distribution of FGD participants by language group

Source: Field visit by the researchers, 2019

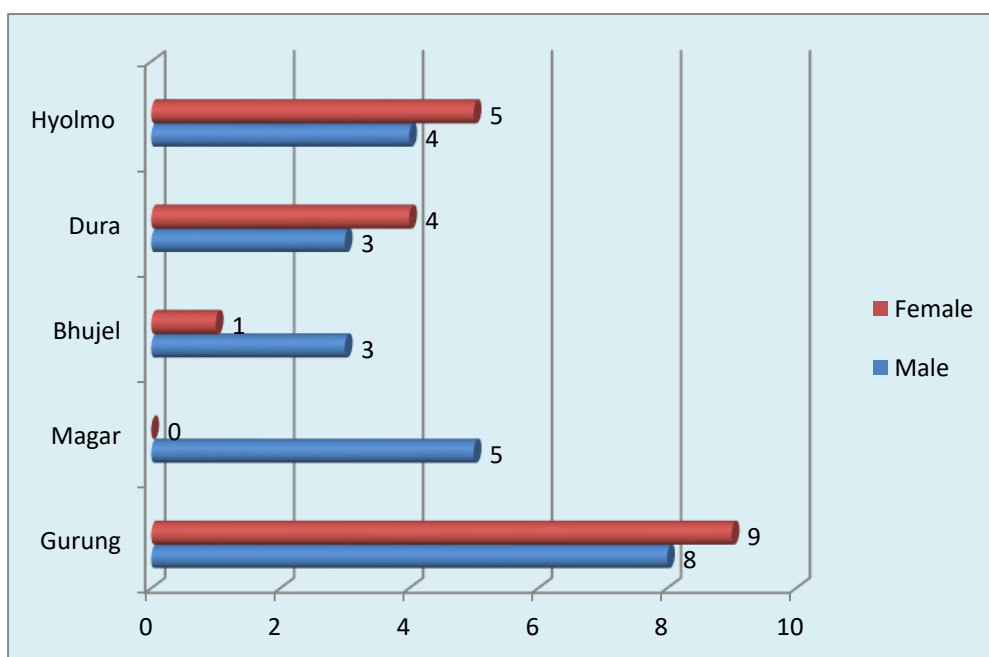


Figure 2: Distribution of FGD participants by gender

Source: Field visit by the researchers, 2019

Figure 2 shows the distribution of FGD participants by gender, representing the number of males and females participating in the survey. As shown in the figure, there were 42 FGD participants in total: 19 males and 23 females. The Magar language group had five male participants only; there were no participation of females. The Hyolmo language group had four male participants and five female participants whereas the Dura language group had three male participants and four female participants.

The thematic presentation of FGD results, supported by secondary sources for qualitative analysis, dealt with the issues of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity in Nepal. The selected indigenous language groups were taken for the group discussion. Each language group was assigned to discuss questions to obtain information for identifying strategies for the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages, maintaining linguistic diversity in Nepal. The following are five FGD questions that make five themes for qualitative analysis of the study.

FGD questions:

- 1) Why is it important to keep the indigenous languages?
- 2) Does the use of indigenous languages improve the life of indigenous people?
- 3) What are the main barriers that would prevent you from participating in indigenous language activity?
- 4) How can we prevent the indigenous languages of Nepal from becoming endangered?
- 5) What are the strategies to preserve and promote indigenous languages of Nepal?

Each focus group was noted down and then prepared verbatim by the researchers. Based on a qualitative analysis of the data, five primary themes emerged between five FGDs. These themes ranged from the importance of linguistic diversity to indigenous language use to language revitalization strategies. These themes were also supported by secondary sources such as past studies by linguists and language activists. In addition to information made within five themes, participants also had an opportunity to offer general advice and suggestions to the researchers as they were the key informants for the survey as well. Five themes, as well as FGD participants' advice and suggestions, have been listed and described below with verbatim samples of participants' representative responses:

Theme #1: Importance of linguistic diversity

The FGD participants unanimously reported using their interaction in the discussions as the main method of collecting data for the survey. When asked about the importance of linguistic diversity in Nepal, they generally preferred indigenous languages to be used at home and in schools so that they could learn their mother-tongues. All FGD participants agreed that indigenous languages are important for shaping their identity as one of the participants opined,

All people can communicate clearly and effectively when they use their mother-tongues, so it is important for all people. I think that the mother-tongue will connect a person to his or her ethnic group that helps to shape his or her identity. That's why it is important to keep the indigenous languages. (P-18)

Many agreed with this participant (P-18), saying that indigenous languages should be preserved and promoted to ensure the identities of indigenous peoples. Adding to this statement, [Melton \(2003\)](#) argues that when a language survives, it strengthens the survival of individual cultural identity, strengthening each culture's sovereignty (p. 69). Thus, keeping a language is so important that contributes to this individual sovereignty status by helping to give each indigenous language group its nationality.

Similarly, language is also related to the cultural heritage and knowledge through which it is passed from one generation to another as [Xotta \(2018\)](#) states, "...the recognition of the close connection between indigenous peoples' cultural and language rights and their lands, territories, and resources is necessary for the preservation of indigenous people's rights" (p. 43). This scholar is trying to say that the preservation of indigenous languages is important and a language contributes to the construction of ethnic identity. Another participant has this to say in one of the discussions:

Language communities pass their cultural heritage and knowledge to the future generations through their language. It is language that maintains a strong sense of identity and knowledge of their culture, connecting with their history, land, and people. Therefore, indigenous languages are important to keep people connected to certain people of the same language. (P-14)

During the discussion, the researchers found that all participants felt important to preserve and promote their mother-tongues because languages are important to shape their identity and connect them to their past. In this connection, yet another participant (P-27) said, "Language is an important part of indigenous peoples' everyday life since a language contains many indigenous values and concepts. So they are the basics of indigenous peoples' characteristics as human beings." Thus, according to P-27, it is important to preserve and promote indigenous languages to live in a community as human beings, feeling a sense of togetherness and belonging to a group for continuity of life.

In sum, the data drawn from the FGD and secondary sources reveal that indigenous languages are key to connecting one generation to another, passing with them their history, culture, and ancestors. Since indigenous languages are important, it showed that indigenous language communities need to show their responsibilities to protect the heritage languages and use them for the survival of future generations.

Theme #2: Language use and life improvement

It is still debatable that the use of an indigenous language can improve the lives of its speakers. A question was set for the discussion: Does the use of indigenous languages improve the life of indigenous people? The question was related to the government's language policy and the motivation of the concerned language speakers. Many FGD participants agreed with the idea and many did not. So did the linguists and language activists. The following is the response by one of the FGD participants,

If we value and support the use of indigenous languages, it will reduce the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous speakers. In this way, this will have a huge impact on all areas of life for indigenous communities such as the economic, social, and political empowerment of indigenous peoples. (P-20)

According to P-20, the use of indigenous languages certainly improves the life of indigenous peoples. A similar view is argued by [Magwa \(2015\)](#) as he reported that there is a relationship between language and socio-economic development, stating that participation in economic and scientific development can only be meaningful through language (p. 9).

The language use is also associated with other opportunities such as access to employment and business because a language has the power to create opportunities. Here is an opinion of an FGD participant regarding the relationship between language and opportunities:

There are always a lot of opportunities for the Nepali language because it has given power by the government. In contrast, indigenous languages are always neglected by the government and are powerless. Even indigenous language speakers are not interested in using their language because they will be looked down upon by non-indigenous peoples. As a result, people who speak indigenous languages are deprived of the opportunities. (P-29)

As it is expressed above by P-29, language is a means to achieve life opportunities. But these opportunities are not available for language groups whose mother-tongue is other than the Nepali language because, in the words of [Eagle \(2010\)](#), it is "the language of the ruling castes, it re-enforces a stifling, oppressive, and fatalistic caste system" (p. 292). This revealed that indigenous languages should be given the power to improve the life of indigenous peoples. In doing so, they can be encouraged to learn their mother-tongues as [Gorter, Cenoz, Nunes, Riganti, Onofri, Puzzo, and Sachdeva \(2006\)](#) state, "Linguistic diversity can be regarded as an economic good and to this extent can be valued" (p. 31), adding that the concepts of supply, demand, and the market for any goods or service also apply to language goods (p. 20). It shows that indigenous languages create opportunities for indigenous language speakers if a favorable situation is created for indigenous language communities.

In this way, language is a cultural asset that establishes the relationship between linguistic diversity and human welfare from an economic perspective. This study revealed that language might improve the lives of people. So might indigenous languages if they are given value by the government and the concerned speakers.

Theme #3: Barriers to indigenous language activities

In Nepal, despite several attempts by individuals, governments, and stakeholders, indigenous language teaching-learning and language use have suffered serious problems. There are several factors that hinder effective teaching-learning and the use of indigenous languages. They include the non-availability of trained and qualified language teachers, the negative attitude of education administrators, indigenous language speakers' disinterest, political domination, and the like ([Ogunlola, 2015, p. 475](#)).

One of the major problems is that many schools do not implement the bilingual and multilingual education program provisioned by the government. Here is the response by one of the FGD participants:

In our school, the majority of teachers come from non-indigenous language groups, including the principal of the school. So despite having the majority of students belonging to indigenous language groups, they are not interested in implementing the bilingual education program provisioned by the government. (P-04)

The response by P-04 indicated that the attitude of education administrators is negative towards the implementation of the bilingual education program for indigenous language children. In the same way, [Ogunlola \(2015\)](#) notes,

When a group of people is politically dominated, they take orders from their political lords. They cannot refuse such orders. In the learning and the use of a language, they readily give ascent to whatever their political lords say or wish. In such a situation, their local languages are adversely affected. (p. 480)

According to Ogunlola, political domination is the main barrier to indigenous language activities, adversely affecting the teaching-learning and language use of indigenous language groups.

There are also lack of trained and qualified indigenous language teachers to teach indigenous languages in a formal and informal situation. It is expressed by one of the FGD participants,

I speak my mother-tongue well but I cannot write. So I want to learn my mother-tongue more and learn to write. But the qualified language teachers of my native language are not available. There are some, but they are not interested in teaching. (P-20)

It is clear from the above expression that there are lack of indigenous language teachers, preventing indigenous peoples who wish to learn their mother-tongues. In the same case, [Ogunlola \(2015\)](#) argues, "...a native speaker should be able to handle the subject. This view is wrong because teaching the a language involves more than being a native speaker" (p.

476). Here, the concern of a teacher in teaching is to make students learn, but, in Nepal, even the indigenous language teachers are ineffective to teach their language.

From the above FGD responses and past studies, it is evident that there are many barriers to effective teaching-learning and language use for indigenous language communities in Nepal. This situation can be described as a socio-cultural problem that creates a feeling of cultural and linguistic inferiority, preventing indigenous children from effective learning and personal development. So the indigenous children should be allowed to learn his or her language and learn in it.

Theme #4: Prevention of indigenous languages from becoming endangered

In response to the challenge of indigenous languages from becoming endangered, indigenous language groups are increasingly trying to preserve and revitalize their native languages. In Nepal, efforts have been made to ensure that future generations learn and preserve their native languages. During the discussion, the participants seriously discussed the issues of protecting indigenous languages from becoming endangered and extinct. A response given by one of the FGD participants was this: "It is important to save indigenous languages. Linguists need to interview, record, and document such languages through recorded and printed resources. They can be published and preserved in libraries, academic institutions, museums, or cultural places" (P-41). Here, documentation of language resources is important to protect the further loss of indigenous languages. For [Thorpe and Galassi \(2014\)](#), engaging an expert linguist to conduct research and archival discovery of material in the collections is one way of preserving indigenous languages, adding that each of the items and collections has to be prepared for digitization, with some requiring preservation work to ensure the long-term care and preservation of the collections. In this way, the language materials would exist in the collection and be identified in the future.

Another way of protecting indigenous languages from becoming endangered and extinct could be teaching and taking language classes. In this regard, during the discussion, one of the FGD participants was saying,

In my view, conducting language classes for indigenous peoples is the best way to save the native languages. Both formal and informal language classes can be arranged for language teaching and learning. For instance, bilingual and multilingual education programs can be arranged in schools for children as formal classes and evening or holiday language classes can be conducted for elders as informal classes. (P-32)

So conducting language classes for indigenous peoples is an excellent way to keep a language alive. This is enough to give value to indigenous languages and protect them from becoming further endangered as [Majzub and Rais \(2011\)](#) state, "Policymakers and implementers need to develop educational and social programs to enhance the use of endangered languages through the curriculum and the co-curriculum" (p. 1682). Further, [Henne-Ochoa \(2018\)](#) suggests that "teaching a language's structure or code alone" does not guarantee the learning of an indigenous language, but it should be taught "according to culturally prescribed conventions" (p. 15). In this way, these linguists emphasized that it is necessary to design good courses as well as to adopt good indigenous teaching methods for effective language classes.

Recently, linguists and language activists have started using technology to revitalize indigenous languages. [Eisenlohr \(2004\)](#) claims that the use of new technology that "both shape and are informed by linguistic ideologies, which in turn crucially influence the possible revived use or abandonment of linguistic varieties" (p. 21). Similarly, [Miyashita and Moll \(1999\)](#) claims that language revitalization effort for indigenous communities must "benefit from more active use of computer resources" (p. 113). He further argues that with the help of new technologies, the production of new cultural objects such as indigenous languages can be stored, displayed, and circulated for future generations. According to these linguists, it is possible to revive endangered indigenous languages through the use of technologies. The same issue was raised during the discussion as P-26 says,

In the age of information technology, new technologies should be utilized to preserve and promote indigenous languages for future generations. New technologies such as computers can be used to store language materials and to invent scripts for indigenous languages. Similarly, new technologies such as social media can be used for communication among indigenous peoples through their native languages. (P-26)

As P-26 said, computers and social media platforms can be used to prevent indigenous languages from becoming endangered and further loss of cultural heritage.

On the one hand, digital and social media outlets are major players in endangering indigenous languages such as English has become a dominant language to endanger other languages in the world. On the other hand, the same outlets can be utilized to save endangered indigenous languages as another FGD participant opines,

If we want to preserve indigenous languages, the same digital and social media outlets can be the major means of sharing information. For instance, we can utilize social media channels like YouTube and other mediums to create courses for language learning, share expressions and record audios, videos, and texts of the target language. (P-01)

Thus, the use of new technologies is one of the effective ways to revitalize lesser-used languages such as the indigenous languages of Nepal.

Until and unless individuals, families, and communities speak their native language, a language cannot be preserved and promoted for future generations. In this case, [Hinton \(2011\)](#) found that there are many families across the world who are willing to teach their mother-tongue to their children at home, but they did not get any help from either the government or communities (p. 317). Perhaps one of the most important things to do is to insist on speaking their native language, urging them not to use a dominant group's language. During the discussion, an FGD participant has to say about this issue:

This is sad! We do not feel pride in our native languages because we are accustomed to the Nepali language and the English language. We need them as the Nepali language is lingua franca in Nepal and English as being an international language, but we also need to learn and use our native languages because they build cross-generational interaction and help our children master reading and writing in their foreign languages such as Nepali and English. (P-23)

Thus, it is necessary to insist indigenous peoples on speaking their native languages. In doing so, indigenous languages can be protected from becoming endangered and extinct. Another FGD participant added to P-23's saying, "In our community, our children do not hear, read, or understand their native languages. They only use Nepali and English at home, schools, and in the community. I think that they should be encouraged to use their mother-tongues" (P-38). Here, P-38 is right to say that the motivation to use native languages for indigenous peoples can be one way to protect indigenous languages.

In summary, not using indigenous languages by their speakers is one of the serious concerns for linguists and language activists. They should be encouraged to know the value of having indigenous languages and to use their native languages for everyday communication as well as for medium of instruction in schools.

Theme #5: Strategies for the preservation of endangered indigenous languages

In Nepal, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, indigenous peoples began a process of reclaiming their native languages and working towards the language revival and use in communities. There are examples that many communities have become successful in the methods of the revival of their native languages while there are many whose native languages are dying slowly. The data on indigenous language revitalization strategies are drawn from the FGD and secondary sources. In principle, as suggested by [Penfield and Tucker \(2011\)](#), these language preservation strategies involve "language documentation, language rebuilding, language maintenance, language conservation, and language sustainability" (p. 292). At the same time, we need to recognize dangers hidden in the multicultural agenda of the government if we want to employ effective language preservation strategies ([Yoshioka, 2010](#)). The following paragraphs present key strategies to meet the goals of language revitalization and preservation of endangered indigenous languages.

During the discussion, a question was asked: what are the strategies to preserve and promote indigenous languages of Nepal? The majority of FGD participants agreed with three language revitalization strategies: the first was the protection by the government; the second was the formulation and implementation of educational policies; and the third was the participation of the target language communities. The first response was by an FGD participant, "Indigenous languages must be given official status by the government of Nepal and then given power and prestige to use them in schools, families, and communities" (P-18). As compared to the Nepali language that the status of it remains what it is because most governments do not put in place mechanisms of seriously promoting indigenous languages. In the case of protecting indigenous languages of Nepal, [Yadava and Turin \(2005\)](#) state,

Given the disjuncture between the legal and constitutional provisions for linguistic equality on the one hand, and the reality of the overwhelming strength of Nepali on the other, the despair of activist groups representing minority ethnic and linguistic communities is quite understandable. We suggest that the crisis lies less in the formulation of policy, and rather more in the desire of governing classes to change the status quo. Since many obstacles relate to implementation, concerned groups need to focus their energies on providing a clear roadmap for achieving their present goals alongside formulating new bills, acts, and amendments. (p. 36)

It is clear from the above statement that the government of Nepal is not in favor of indigenous peoples because non-indigenous peoples are in power to handle the government.

It has always been felt by many educationists in Nepal that the indigenous children's major learning problem is the linguistic one. Since the unification of modern Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah, indigenous language speakers in Nepal have been receiving very little attention towards their use for educational purposes. The FGD participants were further asked whether there was any government in the past to formulate and implement language policies that favor the use of indigenous languages in education and the answer was in the negative as P-25 was saying,

The subsequent governments of Nepal since the unification of modern Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah have been dominated by non-indigenous peoples, especially Khas-Aryan peoples. So government officials and

polymakers have been against the implementation of language policies although there are provisions for indigenous languages such as 'Education for All' and 'Multilingual Education Program'. (P-25)

In Nepal, as P-25 said, language policy in education is not favorable for indigenous language groups. Such language policy documents on education hardly discuss the language issue at all. In this case, [Yadava \(2014\)](#) suggested that the government of Nepal should devise national language policy in the use of mother-tongues in multilingual education as medium/subject of instruction in formal and non-formal education. At the same time, the studies showed that formal educational situations are more successful, but it is also equally important because informal learning of skills, knowledge, and competencies are considered as lifelong learning ([Wotherspoon, 2015](#); [Becerra-Lubies, Mayo & Fones, 2018](#)). So these linguists are in favor of the education language policy change as this may might be one way to preserve the indigenous languages of Nepal.

Even the subsequent governments of Nepal in the past were the ones that sabotaged their indigenous languages by giving more attention to the Nepali language although indigenous languages were called national languages as one of the FGD participants, (P-31), emphasized, "There should be a linguistic revolution that calls for a change in education policies to avoid the exclusion of indigenous languages from educational use, development, and other issues of national integrity." P-31's statement is the revolutionary one that demands policy changes, focusing on the implementation of education policies. During the same group discussion, another participant had to say this,

In Nepal, indigenous languages are given little attention in terms of being used as a medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities. This happened because these languages are given little validity in the educational system. As a result, indigenous children do not know their languages and ignored using the native languages. (P-38)

Here, well-implemented education policies in favor of indigenous languages could be an important contribution to language revitalization strategies in indigenous language groups in Nepal.

The third strategy for the preservation of indigenous languages is the most important of all other strategies. Unless the concerned language groups come forward in language revitalization activities, a language cannot be preserved and promoted. Here, [Jacob \(2015\)](#) claims that despite the fact that government policies and education reform efforts are helpful in indigenous language preservation efforts, the family context is ideal for language preservation for future generations (p. 127). To add to this, [Littlebear \(1999\)](#) suggests that language groups should speak their languages as he states, "If we just spoke our languages, all of our languages would be healthier, but I know that is not what's happening. We do not speak our languages and our languages are dying" (p. 1). Discussing on the third strategy in group, an FGD participant expressed this concern, "A language dies when its speakers stop using it. I think that the speakers of the target language should be encouraged to speak more" (P-30). So the main threat to indigenous languages is the lack of desire of elders not passing on their native language to their children as [Pun \(2014\)](#) argues,

Language death and decline is one of the major issues in indigenous language communities. It can occur at two levels. First, it may be on a personal or familial level, which is often the case with migrant communities in Nepal. Secondly, the entire language may be lost when it ceases to be spoken at all. The second one has become a common threat to all types of indigenous communities in Nepal. Besides, it is because many such languages are not spoken anywhere in the world. (pp. 108-109)

Now, it is clear that indigenous language speakers have the major responsibility to preserve linguistic diversity because they are the basic entity of language. Without its speakers, a language cannot survive.

In short, these three strategies based on the FGD, supported by secondary sources suggest that there is always a possibility of preserving and promoting indigenous languages in Nepal. The concerned language communities have the major responsibility of ensuring that indigenous languages do not die, but the government and non-indigenous peoples are also needed to ensure this outcome.

As the findings of this study showed, the main threat to indigenous languages is the unfair national policy of the government of Nepal towards the indigenous language, and the parents not passing on their languages to their children. As a result, the Nepali language is used as the only medium of instruction in all types of educational institutions that minimizes the role of indigenous languages. One of the reasons is that indigenous children see no benefits to learn their mother-tongues. Thus, as many indigenous languages in Nepal are at risk, it is now time to take bold steps and use every method to preserve and promote the world's linguistic diversity.

CONCLUSION

Language endangerment is associated with the government's language policy. This process does not help indigenous language communities to save their languages. This study, thus, suggested a more inclusive language policy of the government that can accommodate the indigenous languages of Nepal.

In this study, the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity in Nepal was discussed and examined with special reference to indigenous languages of the Kaski District. From the study area, 42 FGD participants were sampled for discussion on the issues related to protecting endangered indigenous languages of Nepal.

Qualitative data that were drawn from the FGD and existing literature indicated that indigenous language communities have positive attitudes towards preserving and promoting linguistic diversity in Nepal. But the findings showed that despite several attempts by individuals, governments, and communities, there are many barriers for effective teaching-learning and the use of indigenous languages. Non-availability of trained and qualified language teachers, negative attitude of education administrators, indigenous language speakers' disinterest, and political domination were found to be some of the barriers of indigenous language use.

Overall, the collected data showed that indigenous language communities should be supported by the government for giving official status to their native languages, focusing on the formulation and implementation of education policies, and encouraged to insist on speaking their native languages. Most importantly, the indigenous language communities need to collaborate with the government to address all the issues related to preserving and promoting linguistic diversity in Nepal.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This study has explored various aspects of language endangerment and ways to preserve and promote endangered languages such as indigenous languages of Nepal. However, the study has not covered other aspects of indigenous languages such as linguistic features and origins of indigenous languages. It has also not dealt with origins and development of a specific indigenous language, but indigenous languages of Nepal have been discussed in general. It has examined the reasons of decline and death of them due to the language policies taken by the governments of Nepal and language revitalization strategies for the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity in Nepal.

The research interest in endangered languages is the need of the time hour since many languages which have lesser power are dying each year. The findings of this study concluded that to curb language prevention barriers, language researchers need to seek answers to important questions through their research, addressing issues of recovering and maintaining endangered indigenous languages. To prevent the barriers to language activities and preserve indigenous languages, more research and theorization are needed because many revitalization efforts are associated with ethnic revival movements. So the findings of this study indicated that indigenous language communities need to collaborate with language researchers to address the issues related to indigenous language preservation strategies.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The corresponding author (the first author, or Dr. Min Pun) drafted the manuscript, which was based on the research work carried out by both the authors. The second author Mr. Kamal Gurung did the formatting of all figures. After inserting all figures into the first draft, the manuscript was passed on to the second author who thoroughly read the draft, providing feedback to the first author. The first author then revised the first draft as per the feedback received from the second author.

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