

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: ENGLISH AND NEPALI SUBJECT TEACHERS' PERCEPTION AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Formative assessment is a feedback-oriented evaluation in teaching-learning processes. Though distinct, the other closely related concepts that are being used in the Nepalese classroom practice are internal assessment and continuous assessment system (CAS). Although these assessments are purposeful for improvement of learning in the academic institutions of Nepal, in general observation, neither the teachers have a good perception on it nor the students have a meaningful improvement in language learning. Thus, this paper explores the English and Nepali (the two dominantly used languages in the education system of Nepal) subjects teachers' perceptions and perspectives about formative assessment in the classroom practices. Based on qualitative narrative inquiry design, in-depth interviews were carried out with the purposefully and conveniently selected four (two English and two Nepali subjects) teachers for the collection of information. By analyzing the information from general inductive way, it was concluded that the teachers were terminologically taking the formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment system synonymously, which was not exactly true. Likewise, they were engaging their students in

assessment to fulfil the curriculum requirement; a kind of formality. Moreover, they observed that the students were active and regular in learning with the implication of formative assessment. In addition, they felt lack of updated input from the responsible authorities for the implementation of formative assessment in their teaching learning context. Thus, it required timely engagement to get knowledge of recent strategies for implementing formative assessment to make teaching -learning meaningful.

Keywords

formative assessment; language teaching-learning; improve; perception; perspectives

1. INTRODUCTION

In Etymology and common use, Sadler (1989) explained that 'formative' is *forming* or *moulding* something purposefully. So, in course of teaching-learning, the formative assessment is to make a judgement of the learners' performance, purposefully providing feedback, which helps to reach the goal of teaching-learning.

In this regard, by studying the history of formal ways of learning, we perceive that the behavioristic psychological theories heavily influenced teaching and learning during and before the 1940s. According to Komorowska (2019), the teaching-learning was influenced by the behavioristic thoughts until the late 1950s, i.e. language learning was not taken different than that of learning other general skills i.e. cycling, cooking etc. In this sense, the development of habit formation was regarded as learning skills, and language habit formation was taken the learning of language. Moreover, learning was not taken as the creativity, it was perceived as an outcome of a mechanical repetition that made learning possible, and individual differences was not counted for learning. As a consequence, the idea of evaluation was also influenced by the behavioristic concepts of testing, i.e., errors were not expected, thus the ways of correction and feedback were not valued in language learning. Moreover, final examination was implemented as the means of evaluation in learning, and alternative ways of the assessment were not illustrated during that time.

Likewise, before the 1960s, formative evaluation was understood under various terms. The terminology 'formative evaluation' was implemented in the early past in different names, 'developmental testing or tryout,' Similarly, after the 1960s, some theorists, for example, clarified the two different ideas of testing in terms of 'formative' and 'summative' evaluation (Lumsdaine, 1965; Scriven, 1967). The concept of formative evaluation was similar to the concept of the 'developmental' testing, i.e., to improve, not to prove the instructional procedures.

Later on, learner evaluation was conceptualized as a part of the performance improvement procedure (Markle, 1989). Keeping this essence, the idea used to refer to the procedures for instructional improvement was named variously - e.g., 'read-think-aloud,' or

'read-aloud-think-aloud' (Smith & Wedman, 1988), 'programmed instruction,' (Geis, 1989), 'learners verification,' (Komoski, 1974).

Moreover, Popham (2011) as cited in Remmi and Hashim (2021) explained that formative assessment as the process of teaching, and testing in which teacher improves instructions and provides non-evaluating feedback specific teaching and learning area to make the learners able to improve performance in learning. Further, it was conceptualized broadly i.e. teachers use formative assessment as an instrument to identify level of the students, monitor progress, give feedback, make instructional decisions, and planning more purposeful lesson (Olagunju, 2015).

Regarding the time and duration of formative assessment, various factors play role in determining it. Formative evaluation can take different time based on the nature of formality. The formal nature of formative evaluation can be carried out in a certain temporal gap, and informal formative evaluation can be conducted in any time. As Shavelson et al. (2008) explained, a continuum of formative assessment can range from informal to formal, and varies relative to specific pre-planning.

In this regard, the temporal gap can be different for the implementation of formative evaluation. There can be various perspectives based on practice; it is a continuous and iterative process during teaching and learning activities (McAlpine, 1992). Likewise, it is used during the stage of instruction and at the drafting stage of the program (Dick & Carey, 1990), it is continuous throughout teaching and learning processes i.e. to design, to verify, and to revise the instruction (Komoski & Woodward, 1985).

Similarly, Wiliam and Thompson (2007) explained the possible duration (short, medium, and long cycles) of the formative evaluation that can be implemented while teaching students in academic sessions. Here, short cycle was explained as the minute-by-minute, and/or day-by-day assessments. This cycle emphasizes on students' learning within, and between lessons. Likewise, medium cycle focuses on the assessment within and/or between instructional units within four weeks' time. It is mostly covering the measurement of the students' learning a 1- to 4-week sequence of instruction, which teaches and assesses the learners' achievement in a certain week's duration on a specific unit or content. Likewise, long cycle is the assessment of the learners' after four weeks' teaching-learning. It focuses on quarterly, semester, annual, or other longer time period progress. More specifically, this is the measurement of learners' progress over the 4 weeks to 1-year duration of instruction.

With this theoretical scrutiny, we have also audited empirical studies related to formative assessment in the context of Nepal. In this connection, the term formative assessment is a popular word than that of summative assessment in the context Nepalese education system in these days. Although, it is a buzz linguistic unit, studies based on the perception and perspectives of teachers are not well explained in the context of Nepalese school level education system. Moreover, we are convinced with Herman (2013), 'yet, despite its popularity, formative assessment remains an elusive concept'. Thus, we attempted to collect

the literature related to the formative assessment in the Nepali context, and analyzed to set a path for this particular study.

Most of the empirical studies are focusing on mathematics and geography learning rather than language learning in the context of Nepal. For example, Acharya (2023) concluded that the use of formative assessment plays an important motivating role in the ways of improving students' mathematics learning where experimental group excelled controlled group after the intervention. Similarly, Dahal (2019) explained from a survey study that formative assessment creates learning by doing situation and improves learners' performance in mathematics. Alike mathematics learning, the classroom-based assessment can be meaningful and effective when the teachers are specialized in that particular subject, here geography for an instance (Khatiwada, 2019). Likewise, Kafle and Neupane (2025) concluded though the teachers faced a lot of challenges in English language classroom, where the formative assessment positively impacted students' learning with the enhancement of students' engagement and individualized learning experiences.

Neither the teachers nor the students are satisfied with the use of summative kinds of assessment in the school level education system of Nepal, and realized a need of collaboration among the stakeholders for the better implement of formative assessment. In this regard, the existing pass and fail-oriented tests created some kinds of fear and hatred to the students (Sigdel & Sherpa, 2024). Moreover, the lack of trustworthiness, validity, and consistency in the traditionally existed examination, and suggested to design classroom activities in such a way that students' engagement is enhanced. Alike situation is explained in Neupane (2023), the students were not satisfied with summative assessment and favored project-based assessment. Moreover, they reported that these internal assessment activities provided the learners a lot of opportunities to learn from each other among the learners. Further, it was suggested to make policy and implement accordingly to balance between summative and formative assessment system. Further, it is realized a need of collaboration among the teachers, students, and guardians too for the meaningful implementation of the formative assessment in leaning. In this regard, Chongbang (2021) explored a need of collaboration of stakeholders for formulating assessment policy using teachers' expertise and professional disposition.

The university level teachers have various experiences and perceptions about the implementation of the formative assessment in the context of Nepal. In this connection, Adhikary (2023) remarked that the students' progress was observed in implementing the internal assessment. Moreover, the bias free process of internal assessment can increase the degree of satisfaction among the students. Likewise, teachers, first should have sufficient comprehension about different tools of assessment, specifically, formative assessment. As a result, they can better implement in teaching-learning process. The faculty members not only had a limited understanding of assessment for learning but also their practices were not sufficient for efficacious teaching-learning (Acharya & Poudel, 2025). In this study, they recommended to adopt formative assessment for improved learning.

As above explanation, the formative assessment was undoubtedly illustrated that it supports in practical and meaningful leaning. Thus, a requirement of a convenient policy for the balanced use of assessments for the purposeful teaching-learning. In this connection, Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) mentioned formative assessment significantly contributed to identify weakness, and motivate the students towards successful learning. Moreover, they pointed a need of good policy for the better practice of formative assessment. Likewise, Awofala and Olaniyi (2023) remarked, formative assessment plays a vital role for the better achievement in learning. Thus, they recommended education planners to make policy so that the teachers often use formative assessment, specifically continuous formative assessment as the tool to improve teaching and learning goals. Moreover, they suggested to use formative assessment as the feedback tool as well.

Almost all of the theoretical and empirical studies presented that the formative assessment in various terminologies (internal assessment, classroom assessment) plays a positive role in increasing the rate of learning. In fact, formative assessment has a valuable role in learning to take place, thus, it is termed as an 'assessment for learning' (Herman, 2013).

Although there are various studies that explored assessment related issues, from the observation and the study of previous literature, we were curious to what extent the studies are specifically related to the formative assessment perception and perspectives of secondary level English and Nepali language teachers. In this regard, when we analyze studies school level course-wise in the context of Nepal, it reflected that the studies were mostly carried out in mathematics classroom and very few in other subjects regarding the role of assessment in learning. It shows that very few studies in English and Nepali languages though they are dominant in use in the education system of Nepal. Thus, the need of carrying out study in language (Nepali and English) teaching and learning is necessary. Since teachers are the change agents, we eagerly engaged to explore their perception and perspectives about formative assessment. Though very few, the studies that were conducted in at school level shows that not only the students but also stakeholders were willing to make formative assessment more practical by requiring a reasonable policy so that the learning opportunity increased and assessment gets further validation in academia.

Regarding the studies related to perception and perspectives of teachers, no study is found in school level, only very few are identified at the university level. in this regard, an interesting notification from those university level studies reflected that even in the higher level of education, the teachers did not have sufficient understanding about internal assessment theoretically. As a consequence, there was lacking a better implementation in teaching-learning. This made us to think seriously about the need of carrying out study in the context of school level.

On the one hand, the review of the related literature reflected that there have been various studies related to assessment, internal assessment, and summative assessment; but there is a lack of study on English and Nepali language teachers' perceptions and perspectives towards formative assessment specifically in the context of Nepal. On the other hand, very

little research has been done to explore the teachers' perception and perspective about formative assessment, which shows the unawareness of authorities from the teaching learning perspective. Similarly, not much this kind of research has been done in the context of Nepal and more specifically language teaching and learning. So, what the teachers do while carrying out formative assessment, and also what they do after formative assessment is area needs to be explored. This situation created a kind of curiosity to explain about the teachers' knowledge and their views on formative assessment in the context of Nepal. Moreover, we did not find any research regarding secondary level English and Nepali subject teachers' perception and perspective in the use of formative assessment. Thus, we realized a need to work in this area.

Thus, the major objective of this paper is to explore the English and Nepali subject (teaching at secondary level) teachers' perception and perspectives in the use of formative assessment. To achieve this objective, the research questions attempted to be answered are:

- How are the teachers (teaching Nepali subject, and English subject at secondary level in Nepal) perceiving about the formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment?
- To what extent the Nepali subject and English subject teachers are taking the role of formative assessment in teaching learning practices in their classroom?
- What do the selected teachers in this study have expectation from the authorities and colleagues?
- What barriers are the teachers experiencing while implementing formative assessment in teaching-learning processes?

2. METHODOLOGY

To explore the English and Nepali subject teachers' perceptions and perspectives in the use of formative assessment, qualitative approach was used which was based on the narrative inquiry. This design is suitable to the objectives of this study to understand the experiences of the participants. (Connelly & Clandinin 2016; Creswell, 2014; Tubey et al., 2015).

As Khatri (2024) illustrated interpretive perspective as the meaning making process from the participants' narratives, this study is based on interpretivism. In this connection, regarding the English and Nepali subject teaching and learning classroom context, we were interested in exploring the teachers' perceptions and perspectives about formative assessment, and interpret the meaning from their narratives. In this regard, we designed the methodology to interpret the teachers' perception and perspectives in terms of their thoughts, beliefs, values, and associated social norms (Taylor et al., 2012). As Scotland (2012) mentioned, to understand the participants' world view, we made meaning of the information collected from the participants' narratives.

Specifically, alike to Creswell (2014) explanation, we followed ethno-narrative of four teacher participants who were selected purposefully, and conveniently. For the collection of

information, in-depth interviews were carried out with those four teachers (two English subject and two Nepali subject teachers).

To analyze the collected information, we derived the findings from the general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). In this regard, we transcribed, read, coded, and categorized iteratively (Murray, & Moore, 2006) and made themes as the outcomes of the study.

Moreover, we maintained quality standard and trustworthiness by following Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in (Thomas, 2006) the four strategies for trustworthiness as credibility: we did peer debriefing, and cross-checked their statements, and our analysis, for transferability: we tried to generalize the result of this study with other literature from similar context, for dependability: we conducted the research audit i.e., compared the data, findings, and interpretations, and for the confirmability; we asked other colleague researchers to confirmed the processes and results aligned with objectives of the study. In this connection, we used the pseudonyms NT₁ (Nepali Subject Teacher₁), NT₂ (Nepali Subject Teacher₂), ET₁ (English Subject Teacher₁), and ET₂ (English Subject Teacher₂) in place of the real names for the ethical consideration. Further, as Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016) suggested, all the interpreted text was read for the participant teachers and reconfirmed by them.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To explore the English and Nepali subject teachers' perceptions and perspectives on formative assessment, the in-depth interviews with the four participants were conducted to collect information. The narratives were recorded, and an iterative process was used to collect, transcribe, (re) read, code, categorize, and develop themes (Murray & Moore, 2006). Thus, a general inductive approach was used to analyze the information (Thomas, 2006). The results are presented on the following themes along with discussions:

3.1. Teachers' Confusion and Misunderstanding of Formative, Internal, and Continuous Assessment

The participant teachers were confused with the terminologies: internal assessment, formative assessment, and continuous assessment system (CAS), and conceptualized them identically. They understood all the differences in their use and purpose in a general sense, not specific implementation. The NT₁, ET₁, ET₂, and NT₂ expressed alike ET₁'s remarks:

I think the formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment are used synonymously. The purpose of all is the same, i.e., to evaluate the students. The students' all aspects of learning behavior are observed and formally kept as the record of the students. The overall record can also be used in the final exam to upgrade class.

Formative assessment makes learning contextualized and effective in understanding the abstract concept (Dahal, 2019). Thus, the concept and use of the formative assessment should be made clear to the teachers. As a result, they can implement effectively in teaching and learning languages. Moreover, there should be compatible between curriculum guidelines, and clarity in the formative assessment. Likewise, a recent study by Acharya and Poudel (2025) reported that the teachers had limited understanding about formative assessment and its use in learning improvement, the teachers in this study also reflected thier findings. They had not sufficient knowledge about the formative assessment, internal assessment and continuous assessment.

3.2. A Formality or a Tool for Learning?: Exploring Formative Assessment Practices

The participant teachers reported that they use formative assessment to fulfil the formal requirement of curriculum. It is used because the curriculum requires, as ET1, expressed:

Formative assessment is carried out to keep a record of the students. It is a requirement of the curriculum. In the past, only final exams were taken to upgrade the students. But now there is a provision for the formative evaluation. It is compulsory these days. Yes, we are unbiased to implement the assessment but sometimes the students show dissatisfaction on the results.

The teachers in this study did not use the formative assessment for improvement of learners' achievements. They did not perceive it as Sadler (1989) mentioned formative assessments are used to form the purposeful learning. But the teachers in this study used formative assessment for formality purpose. In fact, it should be used to improve procedures in learning (Markle, 1989). Moreover, it helps to verify the learners' performance (Komoski, 1974). Further, Popham (2011) as cited in Remmi and Hashim (2021) explained it is non-evaluating feedback for instructional improvement. It is used for planning lessons more purposefully (Olagunju, 2015). As Khatiwada (2019) mentioned the teachers are habituated on the formal assessment system that only records the progress, thus it should play a role to improve learning. Further, the teachers should be trained to use formative assessment for its genuine goal i.e., to improve both teaching and learning.

Moreover, the teachers in this study were not reporting their bias to the students' assessment but other similar research from the students' perspective reflected that the teachers are bias in marking the students' responses (Adhikary, 2023). Thus, it is necessary to triangulate the data from the teachers and students' perspectives. Moreover, the teachers did not suspect the consistency of the internal assessment, ET 1 said:

I know, we should not be bias to the students. We should treat them equally to their performance. I find it trustworthy. I find it fair.

Sigdel and Sherpa (2014) carrying out the study from the students' perspectives mentioned that the internal examinations lacked trustworthiness, validity, and consistency. But this study from the teachers' perspectives did not reflect such a biased space in assessment.

3.3. Formative Assessment: A Catalyst for Active Learning and Improvement

When the teachers are implementing the formative assessment, the teachers in this study experienced that the students are active in learning and they are regularly attending classroom activities. Participants NT1s, NT2 and ET2s expressed similarly as ET1 remarked:

I see students are active in the classroom. They want to engage in the classroom because they believed that they will get good grades in the exam. After the use of the formative assessment, the presence of the students in the classroom is increased than the past. Moreover, formative assessment is used to improve the ways of teaching and learning, not to prove what has been learned. It gives space for feedback, achievement and progress in learning.

More importantly, the participant teachers' explanation was to improve the learning; it does not prove processes of instruction (Lumsdaine, 1965; Scriven, 1967). Thus, formative assessment increased leaning. Moreover, it was similar to Acharya (2023), the formative assessment helped the learners to be motivated, active, and creative in learning. It was also similar to Kafle and Neupane (2025), the formative assessment enhances students' activeness, experiences and positivist in learning. Likewise, as Sigdel and Sherpa (2024) mentioned that the activeness of the learners' lead them to reach the desired purpose, the formative assessment makes the students active.

Further, as Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) mentioned the formative assessment recognizes the gap of learning, creates feedback, motivates learners and readjusts the teaching strategies for the progress of the learners. The formative assessment enhances the achievement in learning (Awofala and Olaniyi, 2023; Herman, 2013). This is somehow realized by teachers in this study which is good. Moreover, similar to Neupane (2023) students preferred the balanced use of formative assessment with summative evaluation as formative assessment provides opportunity to learn from each other and tested live engagement in the task which is observed in this study.

3.4. Lack of Updated Input and Collaboration: Barriers to Effective Formative Assessment

The participant teachers did not get updated information from the concerned authorities about meaningful implementation of the formative assessment. As others, NT1 expressed:

I am not getting any updates, better ways of implementation of formative assessment. Yes, there are training, but I have not experienced they are timely and updated. They are not sufficient opportunities for all the teachers. A few teachers get chance to take training. Most of the training are related to the teaching and very few about the assessment.

Although there are various teacher training programs conducted, they are mostly focused on strategies in teaching to improve the teaching methods. But very few are focusing assessment improvement training programs.

Similar to Kafle and Neupane (2025) the teachers in this study also faced the challenge of limited resources for the updated information. Moreover, as Khatiwada (2019) reported, this study also reflects lacking properly trained teachers in the use of formative assessment. Like Acharya and Poudel (2025), the teachers in this study felt lack of suitable input related to policy, and capacity of faculty. Thus, formative assessment related update should be given to the teachers. Likewise, there should be stakeholders' collaboration for better use of formative assessment (Chongbang, 2021). But this was not found in this study, NT2 expressed as other participants:

I do not see the teachers are making rapport with guardians and other experts in terms of effective use of formative assessment in teaching-learning. Moreover, the guidance in the curriculum and time given to use in the classroom are not sufficient.

Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) mentioned, this study also reflected not enough support from and among the stakeholders, policy, curriculum, and time to implement the formative assessment. It needs to make a good sharing among the teachers, guardians, students, and other experts about a better use of the formative assessment.

4. CONCLUSION

To explore the English and Nepali teachers' perceptions and perspectives in the use of formative assessment, a qualitative study based on narrative inquiry was used. From the in-depth interview of two English and two Nepali subject teachers who were teaching in secondary-level schools, the information was collected. With the objectives to evaluation process of analysis, it was concluded that the teachers conceptualized formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment system same way; they did not define them differently. In fact, they are not same. Although formative assessment is feedback oriented to improve teaching-learning, the teachers (in this study) were using formative assessment to fulfil the curriculum requirement rather than helping the progress of the students in learning. Further, the use of formative assessment makes students active in learning and regular in the classroom. We realized as Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) claimed formative assessment enhanced the students' achievement by identifying their learning gap and

encouraging the required feedback for learning improvement. Moreover, it is observable that the formative assessment strategies create self-regulated learning environment where the learners embraced a strong sense of self-efficacy, which supports the development of effective study habits: the learners themselves make plan and monitor their time and process; they can design a structure a productive work environment; and can use social resources effectively (Clark, 2012). As a consequence, effective teaching-learning takes place.

In a summary, the teachers were expecting recent inputs for the updated use of formative assessment, the concern authority should be aware of this fact and act accordingly. Thus, the training on teaching and processes of a better implementation of assessment should be taken simultaneously, not the training on teaching only but for assessment too. As Sigdel and Sherpa (2024), we concluded that the classroom activities in teaching-learning, and assessment should be designed in such a way that they support each other to reach the desired destination of leaning language via the comprehensible understanding and implementation of formative assessment in the formal educational system of Nepal.

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