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Policy and Practice Gap in Continuous Assessment System Provisioned Under Integrated Curriculum

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Abstract

Continuous assessment system has been taken as an integral part of teaching learning process of school education in Nepal for a few decades. It is an approach used by teachers during their instructional process to strengthen students' learning as intended by official curricula including integrated curriculum proposed for grades 1 to 3. Formative evaluation enables teachers to collect, analyze, and use students' information to make teaching and learning process more effective and productive through regular feedback mechanism. But this evaluation has not been practiced by teachers in real classroom situations in spite of having rigor policy provisions. In this regard, this study entitled 'Policy and Practice Gap in Continuous Assessment System Provisioned under Integrated Curriculum' aimed at determining the understanding and practices of continuous assessment system and policy and practice gap in continuous assessment system in low performing to high performing government schools located in Bhaktapur district. This study utilized qualitative research design and interpretative paradigm. The whole research process in this study was guided by two objectives and devised under interpretive paradigm followed by basic qualitative research design. Six public schools (two high performing, two averages performing, and two low performing), six head-teachers, eighteen teachers, and eighteen teaching classes were chosen as study samples by using purposive sampling technique. Furthermore, in-depth interviews, classroom observations were used as main techniques to gather qualitative information required to answer the objective of study.

Introduction

Nepal is committed to the education for all children and to improve the quality of education since the last five decades. In spite of several efforts both the commitments have not been satisfactorily fulfilled. There are still 3.1% primary school children are out of school (Department of Education [DoE], 2016). The quality of education has also not improved properly. One of the main reason given was the defective assessment system. So, Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) through Curriculum Development Centre has plan to introduce continuous system all over the country in primary level of school education.

The notion of CAS in Nepal was introduced during the Ninth Plan (1997- 2002) to implement liberal promotion system particularly at primary schools and was implemented from grade one to three simultaneously. Later on, Tenth Plan (2002- 2007) extended it up to grade five and the School Sector Reform Plan [SSRP] took the initiative to strengthen Continuous Assessment System [CAS] in primary schools and extended it up to the secondary level (DoE, 2017a). School Sector Development Program [SSDP] (2016-2023) has also given high priority to assessment for learning based on the lessons learnt from SSRP (DoE, 2017a). Though a number of plans and policies have been endorsed by the government, CAS has not been materialized in schools as an intended manner due to the lack of capacity and conceptual clarity (SSRP). Significant number of teachers who have high responsibility in implementing CAS are not clear about its notion, policy provisions, and process of using it. Consequently, it has not been institutionalized in schools as an intended manner.

In present situation, assessment system in Nepal especially in integrated curriculum continuous assessment is taken as assessment for learning. National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2063 B.S.) has proposed CAS for

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School education up to grade-7. Liberal promotion system, basedon continuous assessment system, has been suggested for students studying up to grade 1-3. They need not to attend any external examinations for grading since CAS is aligned with their learning. It means, the decision about the grade promotion of the students of grade 1-3 is entirely based on CAS. Furthermore, in grade 4 to 5, students' grading is determined based on the performance that they made during instructional process and final examination of particular grade. Equal marks (50%/50%) have been allocated for internal and external evaluation at these grades. Similarly grade promotion of students of grade 6-7 is also based on his or her academic achievement secured during instructional process and terminal examination, 40% and 60% respectively.

Based on the National Curriculum Framework [NCF] (2076), an integrated curriculum for grade 1 to 3 has been devised by encompassing five skills namely thinking skill, intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills; information, communication and multi-literacy skills, and citizenship skills with 29 integrated soft skills and a number of key competencies. But translating these skills into the classroom level and aligning them with assessment procedures are major challenges in school level of education in Nepal. Assessment should be used as learning and for learning to inculcate these competencies within each learner with effective feedback mechanism.

There is no doubt that continuous assessment helps to provide quality education and to improve the performance of students. But the result of continuous assessment is not satisfactory till date. Similarly, National Curriculum Framework (2076 B. S.) strongly stated the continuous assessment program was not implemented properly and effectively. Supporting the fact, Nepalese Journal of Education Assessment (2021) indicate that continuous assessment is good in policy but ineffective in implementation. There are hues gap between policy and practice of continuous assessment system in school level education.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the policy and practice gap in continuous assessment system provisioned under integrated curriculum.

- To explore the understanding and practice of teachers towards Continuous Assessment System proposed under integrated curriculum.
- To investigate the policy and practice gap of continuous assessment provisioned under integrated curriculum (2076 B.S.).

Literature Review

In this research, related literatures are review in following theme:

Assessment and Continuous Assessment: Terms assessment, test, and measurement are inter-related to each other. Assessment is a general term that includes the full range of procedure used to gain information students learning and formation of value judgments concerning learning process (Linn & Miller, 2005).

Continuous assessment system continuously assessing students' performance on regular basis by using various tools, so this assessment is known as continuous assessment. It is collecting, recording, assembling and interpreting information (Bhatia & Bhatia, 1992). It occurs as a part of daily interaction between teacher and students, revealing valuable information about student learning in terms of knowledge, thinking, and reasoning. Similarly, this assessment evaluates students continuously by formal and informal tools of evaluation. Supporting the notion, Airasian (1994) defines continuous assessment as a mechanism that shows the full range of sources and enables teachers to gather, interpret, and synthesize information about the learners. Furthermore, (Bajah 1984), defined continuous assessment as the continuous updating of judgment about performance in relation to specific criteria, which allows at any time a cumulative judgment to be made about performance of these same criteria. This assessment helps to find out the strength and weakness of student's in their studies. Likewise, Niure (2074 B.S.) signified continuousassessment is conducted with the aim of discovering and improving the strength and weakness of students. Similarly, Dhakal (2019) indicated that 43. 87% of teachers conceive continuous assessment as a tool for improving students 'learning and 37% ofteachers thought CAS as a tick marking system. CDC (2076 B.S.) has clear mentioned that many teachers were unaware of or unclear about the concept of CAS. Hence, they were confused about what should be done. This type of assessment is continuous from the beginning to the end of academic session.

Assessment for learning is a mechanism whereby the final grading of learners in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes place during a given period of learning with constructive feedback on a required basis.But this evaluation has not been properly practiced in Nepalese context though policy provisions have been made for years (DoE, 2017b). Therefore, teacher should provideindividual teaching and feedbacks to the learners on a regular basis to optimize their learning. The traditional assessment techniques need to be transformed through continuous assessment system to ensure quality of education by strengthening the learning of individual learner.

Integrated Curriculum and its Structure: Recently, (CDC, 2076) theNepal Government has introduced integrated

curriculum for students studying atgrade 1 to 3 by organizing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary contents together to provide functional knowledge (CDC, 2076 B. S.). An integrated curriculum is well- organized and managed curriculum of various subjects within a single theme which enhances the students learning achievement through various activities. Integration is a systematic organization of curricular contents and parts into a meaningful pattern.' Integration focuses on making connections for students, allowing them to engage in relevant and meaningful activities that can be connected to their lives. Integrated curriculum provides integrated learning and helps to create more opportunities to build interconnected concepts. So, the learning outcomes offered in an integrated curriculum may be meaningful for learners as compared to the learning outcomes provisioned under single tract curriculum.

Integrate curriculum provides functional knowledge and skills to the learners to enable them to solve daily life activities efficiently and effectively. Considering the needs and daily life problems of students, different subject areas come to a whole to provide integrative knowledge to them. The subject areas encompassed within integrated curriculum have been depicted in the table below:

Table No. 1: **Structure of Curriculum of Basic Education (grade 1-3, CDC, 2076)**

Subject activity	Lesson hour	Annual working hours
Language Skills Development Activities (Nepali)	5	160
Language Skills Development Activities (English)	4	128
Mathematical Skills Development Activities	4	128
Science, health and physical education activities	4	128
Social Studies, Character Development and Creative Art Activities	4	128
Mother tongue skills/Local subject activity	5	160
Total	26	832

Source: Integrated Curriculum of Basic Level (grade 1-3, 2076)

The main objective of this curriculum is to make learning more relevant and interesting by interrelating learning of different subjects. This curriculum focuses on continuous assessment system to evaluate the achievement of children and to improve the achievement of children. The integrated curriculum is an effort to overcome the problems of fragmentation and compartmentalization of curriculum by combining several specific areas into a larger field. In this curriculum, students are capable of making meaningful connection among different subjects. Integrated curriculum allows students many opportunities to understand why they need to know certain knowledge or skills. Students can master the content and understand it at higher level (Watkins & Krisonis, (2011). Integrated curriculum is considered as more suited to younger learners and to those who are less able to cope with the complicated subjects and academic disciplines. Similarly, (Bolack et al.,2005), said, students in integrated curriculum courses perform better than students in non-integrated courses.

Assessment has been recognized as an integral part of everyday classroom instruction under integrated curriculum. Integrated curriculum focuses on child centered teaching learning process in which each teacher has to maintain a portfolio of every student. Portfolio of each student from grade 1-3 must be maintained and updated based on class works, project work, achievement test, behavioral changes,and attendance of learners. The curriculum emphasizes on class work than homework and considerable space has been given to authentic task in the curriculum. Students are supposed to support through formative learning to provide them ample opportunity for additional supports. There is also provision of appraising students' content knowledge through test items prepared by encompassing learning outcomes from knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis level. In addition, curriculum has also proposed clinical instruction for those students who cannot achieve minimal learning outcomes after a number of remedial instructions in CDC (2019a). Thus, greater emphasis has been given to assessment forlearning under integrated curriculum.

Techniques and Tools of Assessment Proposed in Integrated Curriculum. Evaluation result will be used to identify learning condition of learners, to construct plan for future learning, and the results will be used by school, teacher, students, and parents on a required basis. Evaluation tools and techniques should be selected and devised by considering nature of contents, age and interest of learner, available resources, student's number, teachers' background, etc. Techniques and tools provisioned under integrated curriculum are as follows:

Table No: 3: Evaluation Techniques and Tools for Continuous Assessment System

S.N.	Evaluation Techniques	Evaluation Tools
1.	Classroom participation	Observation, checklist, rubrics, and rating scale
2.	Oral activity	Questions, letter, reading, materials, context, case, audio-visual materials
3.	Written activity	Questions, short exam, case, context, reading materials, audio-visual materials
4.	Project/experimental work	Check list, rubrics, rating scale, oral questions
5.	Peers' assessment	Observation, rating scale, check list, form
6.	Self-evaluation	Check list, rating scale, form
7.	Parents' response	Check list, rating scale, form
8.	Conversation and Discussion	Observation, check list, rating scale, form

Source: Integrated Curriculum, Basic Level (grade 1-3, 2076)

Students' Achievement and Its Interpretation in Relation to Continuous Assessment System: Integrated curriculum mentions that students' achievement should be assessed and then interpreted to provide a wide range of supports to them on a required basis to make their learning more fruitful and productive. Though all students encounter same learning experiences under specific curriculum, they cannot achieve all learning outcomes to a similar extent. A significant number of students may need different types of feedback to enable them to achieve all learning outcomes offered under specific curriculum. Academic achievement of individual learner is interpreted as below under the assessment for learning provisioned under integratedcurriculum.

Table No. 4 Classification of Achievement Levels

Achievement Level	Measurement	General interpretation of achievement
Below basic	1	Could not achieve main learning achievement, need remedial learning for all learningoutcomes
Basic	2	Achieve main learning outcomes partially, and need remedial learning
Proficient	3	Achieved almost all outcomes and need not remedial learning
Advanced	4	Achieve main and higher-level learning Outcomes

Source: Integrated Curriculum of Basic Level (grade 1-3, 2076)

A specific process will be followed to use assessment for students' learning in integrated curriculum. Firstly, students learning should be improved by assessing theirlearning. Secondly, learning level of students should be determined by using different tools and techniques. Thirdly, if students are in first and second level, then remedial learning plan should be developed to uplift them for the third level and who are in third level then they should be uplifted in fourth level. Thus, assessment provisioned under the integrated curriculum does not only assess students' learning progress but also provides feedback on a required basis regularly. In this curriculum, (CDC, basic curriculum for grade 1-3, 2076) students' assessment process mostly focused on following:

- Assessment should be integrated into classroom activities and taken as an integral part of teaching and learning.
- Appropriate tools and procedures should be used to evaluate students learning.
- All students should be given opportunity for further learning by ensuring the minimum learning determined by the remedial learning process.
- Appraise the student's behavioral skill and competency in assessment.
- If a student is unable to achieve expected results after the assessment, the expected learning should be ensured by improving the student's learning by providing remedial teaching and learning.
- The results of the assessment should be maintained properly in portfolio.
- The records of assessment results help to identify student learning conditions and plan for future learning, and progress of achievement.
- Teachers should motivate students to self-evaluation and reflective learning.

Continuous Assessment and Feedback Delivery System: Feedback shouldbe provided to the learners on regular basis to shape their learning while usingcontinuous assessment system. Different types of feedback can be used (Hattie & Temperley, 2007) to strengthen cognitive and motor skills of each learner as intended by the curriculum. The first type is task-level feedback, which focuses on faults in the interpretation of the task. The second is about the main process needed to understand/perform a task, and the third focuses on the self-monitoring, directing, andregulating of actions. Unclear and negative feedback can lead to poor performances (Black and Wiliam, 2009). Constructive and meaningful feedbacks are essential for students to improve their academic performance. Schraw and Moshman (1995) point out that environmental factors such as quality of instruction, teachers' feedbacks, access to information, and helps from peers and parents are very influential. Every level of students needs to be self-regulated for theirlearning to succeed in their academic career. Learning is driven by what teachers and pupils do inside the classrooms. Teachers have to manage complicated and demanding situations, channeling the personal, emotional, and social pressures of a group of learners in order to help them learn immediately and become better learners in the future. Research studies have shown that if pupils are given only marks or grades, they do not benefit from the feedback. It has been shown to improve learning when teachers give each pupil specific guidance on strengths and weaknesses, preferably without any overall marks (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Therefore, feedback should be provided on regular basis to make the teaching and learning process more effectiveand productive.

Challenges of implementation of Assessment for Learning: Despite different plans and policies provisioned by the side of government, CAS has not been materialized in all Nepalese schools due to the lack of capacity and conceptual clarity to implement assessment for learning as envisioned. Learner absenteeism, managing time for diagnostic testing of students' performances, ensuring regularity of record- keeping of student's performances, and the lack of seriousness from the major stakeholders in the implementation of CAS are the major challenges of CAS implementation in Nepal. There is almost no provision to reward schools and teachersdoing well in implementing assessment for learning and no provision to punish schools and teachers ignoring the provisions. Training teachers is inadequate bothin number and duration. Subject teachers identified assessment as learning as a mere additional load to them (Curriculum Development Center, 2019a). Most of the teachers working in public schools are unable to conduct portfolio evaluation of students and teachers are not familiar to CAS program. Large class size, lack of commitment, lack of clear guidance and orientation (DoE, 2017a;) inadequate training, priority on traditional methods of teaching, limited awareness of teacher towards CAS, high workloads, weak policy for quality assurance (Asefa, 2015; Abera, 2012; Ugodulunwa, & Musatapha, 2005; Gautam, 2011), broad course contents, lack of proper support and monitoring from higher authority and school administration, lack of essential materials, bias of teacher based on sex, race, and personality, teachers' work load and attitudes, parental involvement, CAS dissemination, instructional leadership (Abera, 2012), variation of standards among schools, lack of qualified personnel, lack of proper strategies for qualityassurance, (Ugodulunwa & Mustapha, 2005), etc. are main challenges of practicing CAS at classroom level. Similarly, according to CDC (2076), major challenges of implementing assessment for learning in our country are resistance from teachers, inadequate preparation, weak support mechanism, overloaded tasks, difficulty in managing time, and assessment for learning is taken as burden, teachers' inability to handle even the basic mathematics, parents mistrust, etc. These challenges should be reduced to implement integrated curriculum effectively.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out his or her research. According to (Kothari and Gaurav, 2019), research methodology is way to systematically solve the research problem. This study utilized ethnography design and interpretive paradigm. The area for study purpose was Bhaktapur district. All the schools runnning in Bhaktapur district, all teachers and head-teachers working there, were taken as population of this study. Altogether, six public schools (two high performing, two average performing, two low performing), six head teachers, eighteen teachers who taught in grade 1-3, teaching classes were chosen as study samples by using purposing sampling technique. Furthermore, in-depth interviews, classroom observation were used as main techniques to gather qualitative information.

During the interview and class observation time, I tried to maintain natural environment and close relationship with the participants. I used recording device during the interview and I took field notes during the class observation. I analyzed the collected data from thematic method. In this method, first, all of the data collect from the multiple sources were transcribed, edited, coded and thematized. Finally, these themes are analyzed narratively.

Finding and Discussion

On the basis of my field visit to the different level of public schools (high performing school 'A' and 'B', average performing school 'A' and 'B', and low performing school 'A' and 'B') in Bhaktapur, I discussed with teachers and head teachers about their understanding and practices of continuous assessment provisioned under integrated curriculum. I hope this attempt become a milestone to meet the objective of my study.

In integrated curriculum, continuous assessment system is taken as ongoing process of gathering and interpreting information about students learning, providing the student with constructive feedback, identifying learning difficulties and providing remedial support to needy students. Study findings showed that teachers of high performing 'A' and 'B' schools, and teachers of average performing 'A' school in this study understood and practice continuous assessment system as it is provisioned in integrated curriculum better than other teachers. They used various tools and provide

suitable feedback promptly. They used activity centered teaching methods but teachers in average performing school 'B' and low performing schools had less knowledge about continuous assessment system.
The study results also revealed that none of schools had completely left the traditional terminal and final examination system. All schools provisioned grade promotion based on both continuous assessment system and summative evaluation process. It means, 50% summative assessment based on written test and 50% formative evaluation based on continuous assessment system.

Policies provide guidance, consistency, accountability, efficiency and clarityon how objectives achieved. In this study, I used Integrated Curriculum of basic level grade1-3 (2076) as policy. After analyzing the information related to teachers 'understanding on CAS provision under integrated curriculum, following policy and practice gaps had been noticed. Which are given below in table

Policy and Practice Gap in Continuous Assessment System Provisioned under Integrated Curriculum.

Policy	Practice
Provision of various types of assessment tools for assessment as learning.	Most of the teachers of High performing schools and Average performing school A used various types of assessment tools for assessment for learning and assessment as learning but other schools used less assessment tools.
Assessment is taken as an integral part of learning activities and it should be integrated with classroom activities.	All sample schools had used AFL as an integral part of classroom teaching.
In class 1-3, homework is not compulsory; more emphasis is given on class work.	Almost all sample schools have given emphasis on homework.
Portfolio of each student of class 1-3 should be maintained.	Most of schools not maintained portfolio.
Every month or after completing the study of certain subject areas, the parents should be informed about the achievement of their child.	In all sample schools, normally teacher informed parent about their children's academic achievement while publishing the result of terminal exam. If any students have a problem, they call parents after school time.
Emphasis has been given on feedback to reduce the error and offer better achievement.	The teachers of high performing school 'A', average performing school 'A' provided constructive feedbacks than others teachers. ways.
Motivation improves the efficiency of learners.	Most of teachers used participatory methods of teaching to motivate students in learning.
Students can be assessed by analyzing behavior and actions included within anecdotal record.	All of the sampled schools had not maintained anecdotal record.
Self and peer evaluation is also included as a part of continuous assessment system in integrated curriculum.	In practice, self-evaluation and peer assessment were limitedly used as compared to other tools.
Parents' feedback helps for improving the teaching and learning.	Higher performing and Average performing sample schools were using parents' feedbacks for the improvement of learning and solve the problems of the students.
In integrated curriculum, the grade promotions of students are based on CAS and short test.	In all sample schools, grade promotions of students were based on 50% marks from CAS and 50% marks from terminal and final examination.

Moreover, study results showed that most of the teachers in government schools have heavy workloads. In one sample school, there is multi-grade teaching due to lack of teachers. It created difficulty to give individual and meaningful feedbacks, individual support, and remedial teaching. Teachers' work load effect on practicing CAS properly in school.

It was also found that CAS was practiced properly in those schools where head teacher and coordinator were regularly

monitoring and supervising the classroom teaching. Especially High performing school 'A' school and 'B' school were monitoring and supervising teachers and students activities regularly. Practice ofCAS in these schools was found better than other schools.

Conclusions

The general purpose of this study was to explore understanding and practice of teachers towards continuous assessment system. This study focused on policy and practice gap of in CAS provision under integrated curriculum. For this purpose, six schools: two High performing, two Average performing and two Low performing schools of Bhaktapur municipality was identified as the field of the study. I used interview and classroom observation, as methods of information collection to address the above mentions research objectives. After collecting the information, I analyzed and interpreted it.

Continuous assessment system is a main part of classroom teaching. In finding of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of CAS in sample schools inbasic level grade (1-3) is not satisfactory. In this assessment system teachers give meaningful feedbacks frequently for the students and teachers used remedial teaching according to achievement of students. There is no doubt, effective and successful implementation of CAS will lead to positive outcomes in school education.

To effectively and successfully implement CAS in basic level of school education; central government, Ministry of education, local government, school management committee, teachers 'and parents should take initiative actions. Otherwise, the CAS in integrated curriculum would be is just like in above mentioned statement –CAS is good in policy but need to do more for better implementation."

Implications

The implications drawn from this study are presented in following points:

- Implications for the Teachers
- Implication for Head Teachers
- Implications for Policy Makers
- Implications for teacher preparation institute
- Implications for Further Research

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