

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Classroom Assessment in an Integrated Curriculum

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores basic level teachers' perceptions and experiences of classroom assessment within Nepal's integrated curriculum for Grades 1 to 3. Using a phenomenological design, the research investigates how teachers interpret, implement, and respond to assessment practices in the context of policy expectations and classroom realities. Data collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis revealed five major themes: insufficient institutional support and training, community resistance to continuous assessment, inconsistencies between early and upper-grade assessments, administrative workload, and varied perceptions based on teaching context. Despite the curriculum's constructivist foundation and alignment with assessment for learning (AfL) principles, findings indicate that teachers often lack the training, resources, and systemic support necessary to implement formative assessment effectively. The study concludes that to bridge the gap between policy and practice, greater emphasis must be placed on context-sensitive training, simplified assessment tools, and inclusive policy reform that acknowledges the lived experiences of teachers. These insights contribute to the growing discourse on sustainable implementation of integrated assessment models in developing education systems.

Key words: Integrated Curriculum, Classroom Assessment, Teacher Perceptions, Basic Education, Continuous Assessment System, Assessment for Learning

Introduction

Assessment plays a vital role in shaping effective teaching and learning, particularly at the foundational stages of education. In recent years, Nepal has introduced an integrated curriculum for grades 1 to 3 with the goal of promoting holistic development, reducing content overload, and making learning more meaningful and connected to real life. Classroom assessment is expected to shift from traditional, summative evaluations to more formative, child-centered approaches that align with the integrated nature of teaching and learning. However, this shift demands not only technical changes in tools and practices but also a deep transformation in teachers' understanding, perceptions, and everyday assessment decisions. Sapkota (2022) Only a few types of evaluation,

such as final and terminal exams, are utilized to evaluate students' learning progress. In Nepal's public schools, formative assessment methods including portfolios, projects, and classwork are infrequently used during teaching-learning activities, despite the fact that both formative and summative assessments equally improve students' learning.

In the context of an integrated curriculum, classroom assessment is meant to be continuous, process-oriented, and supportive of student growth across cognitive, social, and emotional domains. Yet, research and anecdotal evidence suggest that teachers often struggle to interpret and apply these expectations effectively. Marcotte and Gruppen (2022) argue that a highly interconnected world where knowledge cannot be separated into discrete silos or applied in predetermined ways is reflected in integrative learning. Innovative curriculum design is necessary to meet the complexity of integrative learning, but so is innovative learner assessment. Evaluation must be as synthetic and multidisciplinary as the underlying education. One practical model for curriculum and assessment is competency-based education.

Many rely on conventional subject-based testing methods, even when working within integrated curriculum guidelines, due to constraints such as limited training, lack of clear guidance, time pressures, and inadequate resources. These challenges are particularly critical at the basic level, where early assessment practices can significantly influence children's learning experiences and self-concept as learners. Oh et al. (2007) instructors must use a range of teaching-learning strategies, provide holistic and integrated evaluations, engage students in active learning, and teach cohesive content in order to reinforce integrated curriculum. In conclusion, it is advised that integrated curriculum be improved by facilitating an integrated curriculum committee, creating teaching-learning strategies, and directing student involvement.

This study is grounded in the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through active engagement with their environment, supported by meaningful feedback and scaffolding. Acosta-Gonzaga and Ramirez-Arellano (2022) say cognitive engagement is directly influenced by metacognitive engagement. Motivation is the driving force behind all of these factors, and cognitive engagement affects learning engagement. Scaffolding also increases emotional engagement. Students who receive support from their teachers are more likely to feel enthusiastic, involved in class, content during learning activities, and proud of their academic achievements.

In alignment with this perspective, the study also draws on the concepts of assessment as learning and assessment for learning, which view assessment not as a separate act but as an integral part of the learning process. These approaches call on teachers to use assessment to guide instruction, support student reflection, and enhance learning outcomes rather than merely measure achievement. Atuhurra et al. (2023) the prescribed curriculum for grades 1 to 3 is highly aligned, with similar content coverage. This could indicate a spiral pattern or unnecessary repetition. Examining content overlap

across grades could identify opportunities for streamlining the curriculum and ensuring appropriate repetition and depth for priority areas. The classroom-based early grade reading assessment (CB-EGRA) covers a narrower set of topics at different cognitive demands than the IC, leaving teachers without information on student performance. This presents an opportunity for CB-EGRA topics to be expanded or supplemented with other forms of assessment.

Despite the theoretical alignment between integrated curriculum principles and constructivist assessment approaches, there is limited empirical understanding of how teachers perceive these roles and the challenges they face in implementing them in real classroom settings. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring teachers' lived experiences, focusing on their perceptions of classroom assessment and the obstacles they encounter while implementing it in the grade 1 to 3 integrated curriculum.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions. How do teachers perceive the role and effectiveness of classroom assessment in the context of an integrated curriculum for grades 1 to 3? What are the challenges faced by teachers in implementing classroom assessment in a grade 1 to 3 integrated curriculum?

Literature review

Research from countries such as Finland, New Zealand, and South Africa reveals consistent challenges faced by teachers in implementing effective classroom assessment within integrated curricula. These include unclear policy guidelines, heavy workloads, inadequate training, and a lack of practical resources. For instance, Heikkilä (2020) reported that in Finland, the 2016 national curriculum reform required all grade levels to adopt curriculum integration (CI). This posed significant difficulties, particularly for subject-specialist teachers who were unprepared to design interdisciplinary modules. Teachers cited limited collaborative planning time, insufficient pedagogical training, and weak support systems as core barriers, which increased stress and uncertainty. In New Zealand, where curriculum development emphasizes local autonomy, Hood (2020) noted that while teachers appreciated the flexibility, they struggled due to a lack of exemplar materials and clear assessment tools. Teachers expressed a need for more professional development in inquiry-based learning and integrated assessment strategies. Similarly, in South Africa, the PPTA (2017) found that large class sizes, administrative burdens, and limited instructional time constrained teachers' ability to engage in meaningful assessment within integrated classrooms. These studies suggest that even in progressive education systems, the effective implementation of integrated assessment remains challenging without sufficient systemic support.

In South Asia, particularly Nepal, the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities remains a pressing concern. Teachers at the early primary level often lack contextualized assessment tools suitable for integrated learning. As a result, many

revert to traditional, subject-specific assessments, undermining the goals of curriculum integration. Prajapati (2024) investigated the implementation of the continuous assessment system (CAS) in Bhaktapur district schools, highlighting the disconnect between national policies and school-level practices. Despite policy mandates promoting formative, process-based assessments, teachers continued to use summative tests due to insufficient training and institutional support. Kuwar and Acharya (2024) emphasized the principles of integrated curriculum—cross-disciplinary understanding, authentic assessment, and holistic learning—yet pointed out the absence of practical frameworks to guide teachers. Their findings align with regional evidence suggesting that while the integrated approach is theoretically endorsed, classroom implementation remains weak. Teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment in integrated curricula are shaped by their pedagogical beliefs, professional development opportunities, and the support systems within their schools. While some teachers recognize the value of integrated assessment in supporting student-centered learning, many perceive it as vague, time-consuming, and difficult to manage in large classrooms. Akoyt (2024) in a study on Timorese teachers, found that although teachers viewed formative assessment positively, its practical use was minimal due to large class sizes, limited pedagogical knowledge, and weak internal support systems.

Similar concerns are echoed in the Nepalese context, where teachers often lack clear guidance on integrating assessment effectively. Education policies in many countries, including Nepal, advocate for integrated curricula at the primary level. The CDC (2020) emphasizes child-centered, experiential learning approaches and encourages continuous assessment as a strategy to reduce exam pressure and enhance formative feedback. The CDC policy outlines that assessment should be informal, ongoing, and aligned with learning objectives. Evaluation is expected to be a tool for improving learning rather than just measuring achievement. However, the implementation of these principles varies widely, with many teachers struggling to apply continuous assessment practices consistently. Dhungel (2024) highlights the systemic challenges posed by traditional evaluation methods and the need for reform. His study calls for stronger interventions to bridge the implementation gap, advocating for teacher training, adaptable assessment models, and clearer guidance on continuous assessment procedures. While national policy documents promote competency-based evaluation, portfolios, and checklists, schools often face shortages of resources, unclear assessment models, and limited institutional support, undermining effective policy execution.

The integrated curriculum and classroom-based assessment are strongly grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory, as proposed by Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction, experience, and reflection. From this perspective, assessment is not a separate event but an integral component of the learning process. In this view, assessment should emphasize formative techniques such as observations, portfolios, performance tasks, and reflective dialogues.

Nyantakyi et al. (2024) in their study in Ghana, underscore the significance of social interaction and cultural context in learning, reinforcing the relevance of integrated, context-aware assessment practices. The Assessment for Learning (AfL) framework supports the use of assessment as a continuous process embedded in teaching and learning. It stresses student engagement, timely feedback, and the development of self-regulation skills. AfL aligns closely with the principles of an integrated curriculum, where assessment serves not only to monitor progress but also to deepen learning through reflection and active participation. Wiliam (2006) outlines the importance of building assessment capacity through flexible, supportive, and accountable systems. Yildirim and Demir (2022) found that a lack of confidence in students' ability to assess themselves limited the implementation of self- and peer-assessment in classrooms. Likewise, Muchlis et al. (2020) demonstrated that "assessment as learning" approaches led to better learning outcomes than traditional assessment methods. According to MoEST (2019) in 2076 BS, the National Education Policy was created by the Nepalese government to raise the standard of education at the school and university levels. The basic and secondary levels of the school curriculum were separated by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), which was created to organize and suggest the curriculum. The updated curriculum was put into effect in 2077 BS and will be finished by 2080 BS. Koirala & Neupane (2023) argue that the basic level curriculum design incorporates four approaches: formative assessment, integrated curriculum based on STEAM, thematic approach, and four subject curricula. The Curriculum Development Centre created four subject curricula, and the foundational level curriculum is based on an integrated STEAM curriculum with 19 themes. Given the sociocultural, economic, geographical, cultural, and linguistic circumstances, a local curriculum and language were suggested as a means of preparing for the local government.

These studies reinforce the need for assessment models that reflect authentic, process-based learning, especially in early primary grades, where integrated curricula aim to foster foundational skills across multiple domains.

Methodology

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding human experiences, perceptions, and social realities from the perspective of those who live them. As Flick (2014) notes, qualitative research enables researchers to explore the "how" and "why" behind complex social phenomena—insights that are often beyond the scope of quantitative methods. It allows for an in-depth, context-rich understanding of human behavior and social processes, particularly valuable when studying subjective experiences like teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. Lincoln (2018) also supports this view, stating that qualitative research takes a naturalistic and interpretative approach to making the world visible. Within this paradigm, the study seeks to understand how primary teachers perceive and navigate the challenges of classroom assessment within an integrated curriculum, shaped by their cultural and institutional contexts. To align with the interpretivist paradigm, this study adopts a

phenomenological design, which focuses on capturing and describing participants lived experiences. Dukes (1984) discusses a phenomenological researcher seeks to "see" the meaning or logic of an experience. Due to the nature of the assignment, a small sample needs to be carefully examined to allow the participants to express themselves and show how their lived experiences make sense. In addition to discussing the constraints of phenomenological research, the author looks at verification methods that are relevant to phenomenological investigations.

This approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it aims to explore the perceptions and challenges experienced by teachers when implementing classroom assessments in an integrated curriculum setting. According to Palinkas et al. (2015) deliberate sampling is particularly useful when researchers wish to investigate certain cultural domains with specialists or obtain a deeper grasp of particular regions. As stated by Patton (2015) it enables researchers to focus on certain demographic characteristics that are of interest, which can lead to a deeper comprehension of the topic being studied. The participants in this study consist of Chandika basic school teachers who are currently teaching Grades 1–3 under an integrated curriculum model. Using purposeful sampling, the study will select five teachers who have direct experience with integrated classroom assessment practices in Chandika Basic School of Sahid Lakhan Rural municipality Gorkha. These participants are chosen based on their relevance to the research questions and their active engagement with integrated pedagogical and assessment approaches. Semi-structured interviews will be used to explore teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and challenges in depth. This format allows flexibility while maintaining a focus on key topics such as understanding of assessment, perceived effectiveness, and institutional support. Document analysis will supplement interview data where available. Teachers' lesson plans, assessment tools, and student progress reports may be reviewed to gain further insights into how assessment is practically embedded within integrated classroom activities. This triangulation of data helps to enhance the credibility and richness of the findings.

This research follows important ethical rules for qualitative studies. All participants will be fully informed about the study and asked to give their consent before taking part. Their names and identities will be kept private in all notes and reports. Participation is completely voluntary, and anyone can stop at any time without any problem. All data, like interview recordings and notes, will be safely stored to protect privacy.

Findings and Discussion

Five major themes emerged from the study, reflecting the perceived efficacy of classroom assessment under the integrated curriculum as well as its practical difficulties.

Insufficient Institutional Support and Training for Teachers

One of the main problems that teachers talked about was the lack of proper training and support before the integrated curriculum and its new assessment system were

introduced. Although local authorities, like Shahed Lakhan Municipality, provided standardized assessment forms and the curriculum itself, teachers said they were not given enough guidance on how to use these forms effectively. Many teachers felt confused and left to figure things out on their own without any clear instructions or help. For example, one teacher said, *"We were not properly trained. They only gave us the form and the curriculum, but they didn't teach us how to use them. We had to handle everything by ourselves."* This shows a big gap between what the policy requires and what teachers are actually prepared to do in the classroom. This gap is not just a local problem but has been seen in other studies too. Research by Heikkilä (2020) and Prajapati (2024) also shows that for any new curriculum or assessment system to work well, teachers need proper training and ongoing support from the institutions that manage education. Theories like the Assessment for Learning (AfL) framework and Constructivist Learning Theory highlight that teachers play a very important role in guiding students' learning. These approaches require teachers to constantly think about how their students are doing, give meaningful feedback, and adjust their teaching based on students' needs. But this is hard to do if teachers do not have the skills or knowledge to carry out these tasks, which is exactly what the teachers in this study reported. Besides the lack of training, teachers also mentioned how difficult and time-consuming it is to prepare and maintain portfolios for each student. Portfolios are collections of students' work that show their progress over time and are an important part of continuous assessment. However, many teachers said they struggled to keep up with the detailed records they needed to maintain, such as tracking the highest and lowest scores for different learning themes, writing notes about student progress, and organizing all this information for parent meetings. Teachers are already very busy with regular teaching responsibilities, so adding these administrative tasks made their work overwhelming. One teacher explained, *"It takes a lot of time to fill out all the assessment forms, keep track of progress, manage portfolios, and prepare for meetings with parents. Because of this, we don't get enough time to give individual attention to each student."* This shows how the extra paperwork and record-keeping can reduce the time and energy teachers have to support their students' learning directly. Similar problems have been found in other countries as well. Hood (2020) and the PPTA (2017) reported that teachers who are overloaded with work and have little time to plan or collaborate with other teachers often find it very hard to implement new assessment systems properly. When teachers do not have time or support, assessment can become a mechanical task done just to meet requirements, rather than a meaningful process to help students learn and improve. According to Wiliam (2006) effective assessment for learning should be flexible and use simple tools that help teachers give timely feedback and support to students without adding too much extra work. The current situation, as described by teachers, shows a clear mismatch between these ideal principles and the reality on the ground. Without enough training, clear guidance, and reduced administrative burdens, teachers are unable to use assessment as a helpful part of teaching and learning, especially in an integrated curriculum that requires more active

and ongoing evaluation.

Lack of sufficient institutional support and professional training creates significant obstacles for teachers. They are expected to implement new and complex assessment practices but are not equipped with the necessary skills, time, or resources. To improve classroom assessment in an integrated curriculum, education authorities need to provide regular, practical training, simplify assessment tools, and reduce paperwork so teachers can focus more on teaching and supporting their students' learning.

Community and Parent Opposition to Ongoing Evaluation

A major issue raised by teachers in this study was that many parents do not trust the new continuous assessment system. This method of assessment, which focuses on daily student progress instead of formal written exams, has caused confusion and dissatisfaction among parents—especially those who are used to traditional exam-based grading. Some parents do not believe that this new system gives a clear picture of their child's performance. As a result, teachers shared that many parents request written exams, question their professional judgment, or even refuse to sign the assessment reports that show how their child is doing. One teacher explained that before Grade 1, most parents were happy with the results their children received. But now, with the continuous assessment system in place, many parents complain or express doubt, saying things like, *"How can my child be failing now when they were doing well before?"* Because of this pressure, some teachers feel forced to give written tests anyway—even though they are not part of the new assessment approach—just to avoid arguments with parents. They then prepare exam-like result sheets as a formality, even though it goes against the true purpose of continuous and formative assessment.

These findings are supported by research from Akoyt (2024) and Nyantakyi et al. (2024) who explain that there is a strong cultural divide between traditional beliefs and modern assessment practices, especially in rural areas. In these communities, parents and even some teachers still believe that grades from written exams are more important and reliable than progress reports based on daily classroom observations. This mindset makes it difficult to fully adopt newer, student-centered assessment practices. From a constructivist learning perspective, this is a serious issue. Constructivist theory promotes learning through real-life experiences, group work, and student self-reflection—not just memorizing information for tests. But in practice, these ideas clash with the deep-rooted cultural belief that only exam results show true success. Until this gap between modern teaching ideas and community beliefs is addressed, teachers will continue to face resistance when trying to implement more progressive, formative assessments in their classrooms.

Inconsistency Between Assessment Procedures in the Early and Upper Grades

Another important issue highlighted by teachers was the clear mismatch between the way students are assessed in Grades 1–3 and how they are assessed in the upper grades. In the early grades, the integrated curriculum focuses on continuous assessment, which

includes things like classwork, observation, and student portfolios. However, once students move to higher grades—starting from Grade 4—the system changes back to traditional exam-based assessments. This sudden shift in assessment style confuses students and makes it difficult for them to adjust. Teachers noticed that students who are used to the flexible and child-centered approach in lower grades often struggle when they have to face formal exams again in the upper grades. As one teacher shared, *“Students take tests again after third grade, and they don’t know how to handle it. What we are doing in the lower grades and what comes next in the upper grades are not connected at all.”* This means that the learning experiences and assessment methods in the early years are not preparing students well for what lies ahead in their academic journey. Teachers also mentioned that because of this gap, they start to question whether the integrated assessment system is truly helpful in the long run. While it may support learning in the short term, its benefits may be lost if students are not gradually prepared for the kinds of exams they will face in later grades.

This concern is strongly supported by research. For example, Dhungel (2024) explains that inconsistency between early and later assessments weakens the effectiveness of continuous assessment. If schools do not create a clear connection between formative methods (used in early grades) and summative exams (used later), the system fails to build strong, lasting learning outcomes. Similarly, Wiliam (2006) argues that for assessment to truly support long-term student success, there must be coherence across all grade levels. In other words, the goals, methods, and expectations of assessment should be aligned from the beginning of a child’s education through the higher grades. Without this alignment, students are left unprepared, and teachers feel unsupported in maintaining consistent teaching strategies. Misalignment between assessment practices in early and upper primary grades creates confusion for both students and teachers. It reduces the effectiveness of formative assessment and may limit students’ ability to succeed in later academic settings. If the education system aims to support lifelong learning and smooth academic progress, it must ensure that assessment systems across all grades are connected, consistent, and supportive of students’ development.

Contradictory Context-Based Perceptions of Effectiveness

Teachers in this study shared that their experiences with integrated classroom assessment vary widely depending on where they teach, the resources available to them, and the mindset of the local community. In urban schools or those with better facilities and supportive parents, some teachers found the integrated assessment approach to be useful and effective. They felt that this method helped students think more deeply, understand concepts better, and move beyond just memorizing information. One teacher noted that in such environments, students are more capable of participating in discussions, doing hands-on activities, and learning through understanding rather than rote learning. Also, in these areas, parents are more likely to trust the continuous assessment process and cooperate with teachers, which makes the whole teaching and learning experience smoother and more meaningful. However, this was not the case in rural areas, where

teachers expressed frustration and disappointment. Many said that implementing the integrated curriculum and assessment system is very difficult in practice because of large class sizes, lack of teaching materials, and traditional attitudes among both parents and local school communities. Some parents still believe that learning only happens through textbooks and exams, and they do not support the newer ways of assessment. Teachers also mentioned that in these contexts, the idea of "grade teaching"—where students are grouped and taught at the same level—is often more beneficial for students than it is for teachers. Teachers still have to work in overcrowded classrooms with very little support, which makes it hard to follow the ideals of the integrated approach. As a result, many teachers begin to question the value and practicality of the current system.

These real-life experiences reflect findings from Muchlis et al. (2020), Yildirim and Demir (2022) their research suggests that in order for Assessment for Learning (AfL) and assessment as learning to truly succeed, there needs to be more than just good teaching practices. The whole system must support the effort. This includes clear policies, community understanding, and proper training and resources. Even if teachers are skilled, their efforts may not succeed if the education system and society are not aligned with the new assessment methods. These findings show that there is a major gap between theory and actual practice. While educational theories like Constructivist Learning Theory and AfL frameworks promote child-centered learning and continuous assessment, teachers on the ground feel stuck. They are expected to carry out policies that are not fully supported by training, time, or community awareness. Teachers feel limited by rules made at higher levels that don't take into account their day-to-day challenges. They also feel cultural pressure from communities that prefer old, exam-focused methods of judging student success. To improve the system, the education authorities need to listen more carefully to teachers' real experiences and challenges. As Mcleod (2024) emphasizes through the phenomenological approach, it is important to understand peoples lived experiences to bring meaningful change. Teachers must be included in decision-making processes, and their concerns should help shape policies. Only then can we close the gap between what the curriculum says should happen and what actually happens in the classroom. This will help create a more realistic, supportive, and truly effective assessment culture in schools.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex realities faced by teachers in implementing classroom assessment within Nepal's integrated curriculum. While the framework promotes formative, process-oriented learning in the early grades, teachers frequently encounter barriers such as limited training, insufficient support, and community resistance. These challenges are intensified by administrative workload and inconsistencies between assessment practices across grade levels. Teachers' experiences reveal a significant gap between the ideals of constructivist assessment and the everyday demands of the classroom. Moreover, effectiveness varies based on geographic and institutional contexts, underscoring the importance of systemic equity in educational reform. For

integrated classroom assessment to succeed, policymakers must prioritize meaningful teacher training, simplify assessment procedures, and engage with local communities to shift cultural expectations. Most importantly, reforms must be grounded in the lived realities of teachers. Listening to their voices and involving them in decision-making processes is crucial for developing assessment systems that are both practical and pedagogically sound. These steps are essential to foster a more authentic, inclusive, and learner-centered assessment culture in Nepal's basic level education.

Implication

This study underscores the need for targeted teacher training and ongoing institutional support to effectively implement integrated classroom assessment. Simplifying assessment tools and reducing administrative burdens can help teachers focus more on student learning. Additionally, engaging parents and communities is crucial to build trust in continuous assessment practices. Policymakers should incorporate teachers' lived experiences into reform efforts to ensure that assessment systems are practical, culturally appropriate, and promote meaningful learning outcomes. These actions will help bridge the gap between policy and practice, improving basic education quality in Nepal.

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