

ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Sudip Neupane

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of Sudip Neupane for the degree of *Masters of Philosophy in English Language Education* presented on 26th January 2021, entitled *Assessment Experiences of English Language Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry*.

Abstract Approved: _____

Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor

Learning, teaching, and assessment are inseparable components of formal education. Assessment is needed before, while, and after the completion of the course or subject matter to evaluate whether the objectives mentioned in the curriculum are achieved. An assessment helps not only to know about the students' knowledge and understanding of the content area but also to explore the effectiveness of entire academic activities. Therefore, teaching and learning activities should not be controlled by assessment rather they should support each other. Teaching ought to support assessment and encourage learners for their better learning. However, it is realized that our teaching and learning activities are guided by our own assessment practices. Assessment needs to be taken as a part of teaching and learning rather than only a tool to measure and upgrade the students. Realizing this fact, I carried out this study to explore the secondary level English language teachers' experiences on assessment practices in Nepal.

This study, using a narrative inquiry under the qualitative research method, explored the English language teachers' experiences on assessment practices in Kathmandu Valley and outside. However, all the participants had some years of

teaching experience of English in Kathmandu Valley. This study emphasized the experiences and stories of English language teachers to explore how their assessment practices influence themselves and their learners as well. Specifically, the study explored how English language teachers generated the meaning of prevalent assessment practices and narrated their experience of assessing their learners' English proficiency.

The information for this study was collected primarily via interviews. The open-ended probing questions were asked to explore their experiences and stories. English language teachers were involved as research participants of the study.

The findings of the study revealed that the assessment is prominent for the learners' overall development and the professional growth of teachers as well. The summative assessment is found to be a daring task and focuses on the testing of language contents. In other words, the summative assessment focuses more on theoretical aspects of language whereas formative assessment balances the theoretical and practical aspects of the language. Thus, both assessment practices seem to be the best for language learning and its assessment. Finally, the findings of the study suggest that teaching and learning become effective through the accurate application of assessment strategies in English language classrooms.

26th January 2021

Sudip Neupane

Degree Candidate

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degrees at any other university.

26th January 2021

Sudip Neupane

Degree Candidate

DEDICATION

To my family,
friends,
colleagues,
gurus,
ardent supporters,
anonymous readers,
and
future researchers!

The dissertation entitled *Assessment Experiences of English Language Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry* was presented by Sudip Neupane on 26th January 2021.

APPROVED

26th January 2021

Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor/HoD

26th January 2021

Dr. Netra Sharma

External Examiner

26th January 2021

Prof. Mahesh Nath Parajuli, PhD

Dean/Chair of Reserch Committee

I understand that my dissertation will be part of a permanent asset of literature in the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes that the dissertation is released to all the readers for academic purposes.

26th January 2021

Sudip Neupane

Degree candidate

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ABBREVIATIONS

B.Ed	:	Bachelor of Education
BLE	:	Basic Level Examination
CAS	:	Continuous Assessment System
CDC	:	Curriculum Development Centre
CLT	:	Communicative Language Teaching
DLE	:	District Level Examination
EFL	:	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	:	English as a Second Language
GPA	:	Grade Point Average
GT	:	Grammar Translation
IELTS	:	International English Language Testing System
INGOs	:	International Non-Governmental Organizations
KU	:	Kathmandu University
KUSOED	:	Kathmandu University School of Education
MA	:	Master of Arts
M.Ed	:	Master of Education
MPhil	:	Master of Philosophy
MoE	:	Ministry of Education
NGOs	:	Non-Governmental Organizations
SEE	:	Secondary Education Examination
SLC	:	School Leaving Certificate
SSDP	:	School Sector Development Plan
TOEFL	:	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TU	:	Tribhuvan University
UKG	:	Upper Kindergarten

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. But as a teacher and researcher of language, I have felt that there is a dominance of summative assessment in which learners' performance is evaluated and they have been categorized accordingly in the context of Nepal. Realizing this, I felt a need to explore the prevalent assessment practices and experiences of the English language teachers on it. Thus, in this study, I present how the English language teachers generate the meaning of prevalent assessment practices and how they narrate their experiences of assessing English language skills in Nepal.

This chapter particularly commences with my personal experiences as an English language student, teacher, and researcher. The reflection expresses how the students perceive assessment with their reaction to the assessment that had been given without informing them. I unfold my experience of assessing them along with the problem statement. Likewise, I set the purpose of the study, research questions, structure of the study, and rationale of the study before I conclude the chapter.

Assessment: For Whom; Students or Teachers?

It was any day in November 2017. At the beginning of the third period, I was going to give a test of the English subject for grade nine. I had nothing to make my students reflect on except making them write what they had learned in the paper pen test. So, all of a sudden, I made a plan to give a surprise test. With haste, I wrote the phrase 'surprise test' on the board which amazed them.

Unfortunately, many of them opposed my plan since they had been busy with their assignments. However, as a teacher, I suggested them to rip out a page from their

notebook and get ready for the test. All my efforts for convincing them went in vain, so I asked them a question, “What makes you uncomfortable?” One of the students in the class stood up and said that she was not prepared for the examination. Likewise, another student claimed that a test cannot measure students' understanding and capability of learning. I posed a question to myself, “Why should I compel them for the examination? Is it good to compel them for the examination?” I thought, of course, not. Therefore, I have realized that students need to feel comfortable when we give a test to them. Instead of pressurizing them for the examination, a favourable condition can be created, I realized.

The aforementioned narrative is just an example of the assessment practices in Nepal. Arriving at this stage, I have realized that though I made them engage for the examinations, it was not a good practice. I did so because my teachers also would create similar situations for us. I, as a teacher, did not bother much about the students' perspective for assessment. From the above case, I can say that I was doing nothing more than following the ritual to fulfill my duty. I would ask them to prepare for examinations if I completed the lesson before my targeted time. I would engage them in examinations if I felt bored while teaching. This kind of experience is common among many teachers in Nepal. There is a trend of perceiving an assessment as an activity for engaging the students rather than supporting them for their learning. But, if we look at this from the students' perspectives, we can feel that the assessment should be carried out only when they are ready. Moreover, we teachers need to know that assessments are carried out to help our students in their learning but not as a threatening occasion. It is a part of learning rather than a task for freeing us from the course of duty. After sharing the narrative above, I have realized that the aforementioned issue is researchable. So, I have decided to carry out a study to

explore the narratives and experiences of the other English language teachers on their assessment practices.

Do Not Judge Me with a Single Sheet of a Paper

It was any day in November 2017. I was revising English lessons in grade 10 as a preparation for the third terminal examination in one of the private boarding schools in Kathmandu Valley. I was asking my students to prepare well for the examination, but meanwhile, one anxious face caught my attention. It triggered my mind so I decided to ask the whole class, “How do you feel when you have an exam?”. One student responded, “I feel frightened. Please do not judge me with a single sheet of paper”. At that time, I felt uneasy, so I told him, “Dear student, you need not be afraid of anything as trivial as an examination”. All of a sudden, all the students voiced, “But examinations terrify us”. Then I said that they should not perceive exams as a difficult task. Instead of taking the exams as a frightening event, they need to consider it as a tool of assessment and improvement of learning. I further added that there is an obligation to study and appear in examinations and do their best. Another student complained that he had scored low in English subject in the second terminal examination because of not being evaluated effectively. Then I advised them not to run after marks and dwell on the past scores rather focus on how to improve their performance. Likewise, another student said, “Sir, I do not like exams because I hate to be judged by the marks given by somebody else”. After that, I spent some more time sharing my perception and experience. Ram said, "I do not like exams because it just makes us more miserable. We are judged based on our scores and it frustrates us. How can a single piece of paper decide our entire future and ability?"

Likewise, Sikha said, “What I believe is that some words scribbled on a sheet of paper in a certain amount of time cannot define one’s capability”. Similarly,

Sangam said, "The exams, instead of evaluating students, eclipse their inner qualities and emphasize the weaknesses. So, I do not exams." After a while, in an attempt to motivate and educate them, I introduced the concept of summative and formative assessment along with their advantages and disadvantages. In the end, I simply urged them to prepare well and wished them good luck for the exam. The number of times students oppose the examination system and teachers attempt to enlighten them about its importance is not a rare occasion. The course of the students making a fuss over the exams and teachers' feeble attempts to make them see the need for evaluation by the system is typical. However, the perceptions of students shared above denote that summative exam is not favoured by the students as it compels them to memorize the knowledge and reflect the knowledge they have learned within a fixed amount of time. Then I started thinking about my own assessment experience as a student and a teacher that led me to carry out the research. As a teacher, I felt that the paper-pencil test cannot judge students' overall knowledge competence. I also reflect on my past and present practices of assessment in the English language classroom. The above narrative inspired me to study the experiences of English language teachers on assessment practices.

Unfolding My Experience on Assessment

I opened my eyes in the early 1990s in a village, Tumlingtar of Sankhuwa-Sabha district, in the eastern part of Nepal. When I was two years old, I was sent to my maternal uncle's home at Dingla, Bhojpur where my formal education began. I was admitted to Sunshine Boarding School. In those days, I had no fear of examinations. Studying English was interesting and exciting for me. Appearing in the examination of English in a boarding school was equally exhilarating since I used to score good marks.

After the completion of UKG, I was sent to another school named Arun Secondary School. It was a reputed government school in Bhojpur. Gradually, learning English became a boring task for me. Similarly, I started perceiving the examination of English as an ordeal. My scores in English gradually decreased.

Similarly, after the completion of the District Level Examination¹, I had to switch to Shree Manakamana Secondary School, Tumlingtar, Sankhuwasabha due to the Maoist insurgency² (1996-2006). During those days, learning English for me was completely disappointing. First, I was poor in English. Second, I used to think that the paper-pencil test was not adequate to fathom the students' knowledge and skills. This probably made me pose a question, 'why is there a compulsion for us to appear in the paper-pencil test?' Here, I remember my score of English in SLC. I had got very few marks in English in the exam since I had been struggling with the subject. After SLC, I joined the 10+2 level majoring in English but hardly passed it in the second division. The compulsion to make exams and the paper-pencil test is not adequate to fathom the student' knowledge and skills. This continued at the Bachelor's Degree as well. Despite my persistent attempts, my marks did not improve.

After joining Kathmandu University School of Education for a Master's Degree, I started feeling different. There was a new evaluation system. As KU has adopted both evaluation systems; summative and formative, I was motivated to learn English. As a result, I improved a lot during the Master Degree's program which made me think, 'Can we not implement formative and alternative assessment systems in every level of our formal education?' This question and my experience guided me

¹ an annual examination of grade eight which used to be carried out by the District Education Office

² a revolution led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) against the government of Nepal aiming to overthrow the Nepalese monarchy and establish peoples' republic

to research the topic *Assessment Experiences of English Language Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry* in the MPhil program.

As a teacher and a teacher educator, I have realized that assessment is a prominent part of teaching and learning. There is a reciprocal relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. Teaching and learning become useless if we do not assess what is taught by the teacher or what is learned by students. So, I believe that different approaches of assessment need to be employed so that effectiveness of teaching and learning can be measured. Therefore, there is a need for both assessments; summative and formative. We need formative assessment to assess students' understanding, skills, and information regularly and provide them feedback based on their performance. Likewise, summative assessment is needed to assess the students' understanding, skills, and information at the end of the academic session or semester and upgrade their level where feedback is not given. That being the case, as a teacher and teacher educator, I believe that there is a requirement for the combination of both formative and summative assessment for holistic development of learning.

The above experiences triggered me to see how the other English language teachers generate the meaning of assessment and what kind of experiences they have collected. I never liked the assessment practices until I was a student with Bachelor's Degree. I had faced the situation as if I was suffering from exam phobia. As a teacher, I could not get satisfied with my assessment strategies. As mentioned above, after I joined the Master's Degree at KU, I got a chance to be assessed through formative assessment as well. I was pleased to be assessed through summative and formative assessments. And, I started reflecting on my own experiences and asking my students to share their feelings on the assessment practices. From my students' sharing, I

learned that the students also do not like paper-pencil tests and my perception was also similar to theirs. I hate to be judged by three hours of examinations and I also observed that students have similar feelings. Therefore, I narrated my own experience as a student and a teacher which encouraged me to carry out the research study on the same issue. Hence, I decided to research the experiences of English language teachers on assessment practices.

Rationale of the Study

When I was at the school level, I always had a fear of examinations. As I studied in Nepali medium Government School,³ Learning English was very tough for me. I still remember that I could not utter a complete sentence in English, understand the simple words, grab the pronunciation of English words from my English teacher and write a simple sentence without difficulty in my school days. Completion of all questions on the day of the examination of English was terrible for me at the school level, Ten plus Two (10+2) and Bachelor Degree too. Essay writing was also a tough job for me. As a result, I used to remember the whole essay before I appeared for the English examination. Gradually, I started focusing on my study especially in English and improving my English as per the feedback provided by my English teacher. Then I noticed that it was a part of the assessment and regular assessment with effective feedback is prominent to learn the language effectively.

Similarly, I started learning English to understand rather than just to get pass marks on it. My English teachers' suggestions and regular feedback in Plus Two and Bachelor's Degree have become a boon for me. It was during this time I could see a lot of progress due to regular feedback and support given to me by English teachers at the university level too. Gradually, assessment of the English language has become

³ community schools in which medium of instruction is Nepali language

easy for me and I started minimizing the fear of the exam of the English language. Then, I came to realize the necessity of this study for me to reveal my situation and understand how the teachers of English perceive and practice prevalent assessments of the English language.

This study explored the perception and practices of language assessment at present and provided a foundation idea to future researchers on assessment as well. Hence, it was crucial to know the current assessment practices and explore ideas for English language teachers' professional development as well through the narratives of other language teachers.

This study will have theoretical significance as well. As we know that assessment is a part of teaching and learning, it requires both test takers and test givers to be familiarized with it. By knowing how the assessment is taken into consideration, the other English language teachers can apply similar assessment strategies. Moreover, they can update and adapt new assessment practices to make their teaching and assessment practice best.

Moreover, future researchers can get an insight into the practice of assessment which may provide them deeper understanding and ways forward to carry out future research on a similar topic. As this research was carried out to explore the experiences of the assessment practices as a whole under narrative inquiry, the future researcher may limit their area of assessment of some skills of language only. Furthermore, future researchers might get an overall framework of researching a similar issue if they study this research in-depth.

Likewise, the findings of the study might suggest the policymakers change, adapt and improve the policies of the assessment to make the assessment system effective in Nepalese context. Hence, this study may provide crucial ideas and

insights to the researcher himself, other English language teachers, future researchers, teacher educators, policymakers and the stakeholders of education as well.

Problem Statement

As mentioned in the background of the study citing my personal and professional experience, I have realized that students do have psychological pressure of the assessments. They are found more worried to be assessed by summative assessments. Despite this, the educational institutions of Nepal have prioritized summative assessments rather than other approaches to assessments. Ross (2005) highlights the trend towards the use of formative assessment and its achievement at all levels of second language education. Therefore, my concern here is to explore how English language teachers narrate their experiences on different assessment practices in Nepal. *How do they perceive and practice assessment in the English language classroom? How do they explain their experience of assessment practices at school, college and university level as a student? What did they learn about assessment as a teacher? How did they learn about assessment and practice as a teacher in the classroom?* The above questions triggered my mind to explore and address the answers by conducting a research. Though there are various assessment techniques, many English language teachers are making compulsion to their students to sit for a paper-pencil test. If we follow traditional assessment practices, students will be compelled to memorize and parrot the knowledge and information to complete the course. Many students would suffer if we assess the students by using only summative assessment.

Being a teacher, teacher educator, student, and researcher, I had a desire to study the same issue since there was a need for study on experiences of English language teachers on assessment practices. Even though, there has been the provision

of a Continuous Assessment System (CAS) up to grade seven, students are not assessed constructively so far. Furthermore, there is a provision of formative assessment and their implications are found neglected. Keeping this in my mind, I explored how English language teachers assess their students and what are the current perceptions and practices that are being practised in the English language classroom. Curriculum Development Center (CDC) (2014) states that it is impossible to evaluate the level of competence of the students only through formal tests and examinations. There is a contradiction in the policy and practices of assessment. If we see how the assessment of the English language is carried out in Nepal, we can say that formative assessment is not taking place to assess the competence and performance of the language learners. Though the provision of formative assessment is made in curriculum and grid, there is a lack of implication of all strategies that are suggested for formative assessment. We have a tendency to take an examination of BLE and SEE at the end of the academic sessions and the students will be provided scores based on their performance. If teachers want to carry out a formative assessment as a regular activity, they have the freedom of assessing their students. But, it is hardly found that the teachers are assessing their students under formative assessment. Gautam (2014) states that language testing in Nepal does not test the language skills but test the memory of the test material based on the textbook. Khaniya (2014) states that one of the major problems of the testing system in Nepal is a lack of professionalism. As a result, to explore how the assessment is carried out by other English language teachers and understand their experiences on assessment practices, this issue was taken as a researchable issue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore secondary level English language teachers' experiences in assessment practices of Nepal.

Research Questions

To fulfill the aforementioned purpose of the study, I framed one overarching research question and three sub-questions that are as mentioned below.

- How do English language teachers construct their assessments based on their practices?
- i) How do they narrate their experiences of the assessment of the English language?
 - ii) How do English language teachers perceive prevalent assessment practices?
 - iii) How do they assess English language skills?

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited to the area of assessment of teaching English in the Nepalese context. As a researcher under narrative inquiry, I primarily focused on the narratives of secondary level English language teachers on assessment practices. The participants are selected based on network selection strategy so that they are my friends and colleagues. However, they all have teaching and assessing experience in the schools of Kathmandu Valley. Finally, the theoretical delimitation of the study was guided by constructivism.

Structure of the Study

In Chapter I, I introduced my research topic through some anecdotes of my experience as a student and an English language teacher. The anecdotes helped me problematize and stand me as a researcher to carry out this study related to assessment. I presented why this issue is researchable under the section purpose of the

study which helped me frame two research questions. Following this, I presented the rationale of the study which justifies why this research could be undertaken.

Chapter II describes a literature review. This chapter contains a review of relevant literature. Language assessment and its types, test and its qualities, and some other terminologies related to assessment such as feedback, specification grid, measurement, backwash effect, and the relationship between test, measurement, assessment, teaching and evaluation are presented in this section. Moreover, I discussed constructivism and its roles to give a theoretical stance for this study. I reviewed the policy to see how it is implemented in the context of Nepal. I found a research gap by reviewing some previous studies and presented a conceptual framework to show how it provides me with an overt concept and guideline to carry out this study.

In Chapter III, I discussed research methodology. The philosophical considerations guide me to see the narratives of the participants from different philosophical stances. Interpretive research paradigm and narrative inquiry as a method helped me choose a research site, participants, information collection and analysis way-out which I presented in detail in this chapter. Lastly, I presented quality standards and ethical considerations that shaped my study to have a sound research study carried out under the qualitative research method.

In Chapter IV, I presented the stories of experiences of English language teachers on assessment. Their stories are presented under different topics. I also kept their sharing and experience in their statements where I found relevant to insert them to get the real taste of the narratives.

In Chapter V, I presented the analysis of English language teachers' narratives on assessment practices. I presented my situation at first and presented the analysis of the participants' narratives under six themes with some literature.

In Chapter VI, I presented the perception of English language teachers on prevalent assessment. Their perceptions are kept under different topics as per the names of the participants.

In Chapter VII, I presented the analysis of English language teachers' narratives on the assessment of English language skills. The experiences of the participants to assess language skill was analysed in this section.

In Chapter VIII, I presented reflection and insights from this study. I presented how I carried out this study and what I learned from the journey of this study. I also presented the implications of the study and concluded the chapter with the conclusion of the study.

Chapter Summary

I presented my experiences and practices of assessment as anecdotes as a student and teacher as well. The anecdotes helped me to articulate my research agenda with crystal ideas and visions. Moreover, I stated why this issue can be undertaken as a research study under the problem of the study. The problem I faced and the experiences I have collected led me to see my issue as a researchable one which I mentioned in the problem of the study. Then, I mentioned the purpose of carrying out this study. The purpose of this study was to explore secondary level English language teachers' experiences in assessment practices of Nepal. The problem of the study guided me to set two research questions to explore the experiences of English language teachers on assessment practices. I also presented the rationale of the study.

Finally, I presented the structure of the study where I presented a brief description of each chapter.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with the literature that I reviewed for this study. For the literature review, I have mainly consulted journals, articles, researches and books. The chapter incorporates a review of the themes, theory, policy, previous studies followed by the research gap. Then, I have presented the conceptual framework before I conclude the chapter.

Language Assessment and its Types

Assessment is a system of measuring and improving the students' performance and progress of language in the context of language learning. The assessment incorporates the entire educational process of teaching and learning and keeps track of learners' progress (Hedge, 2000). Likewise, Tzagari and Banerjee (2016) argue that the second language assessment is a procedure of gathering information about how many languages the learners know and can use.

Brown (2003) states that an assessment, in general, is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. This means that the assessment helps to measure students' potentiality and understanding. This idea focuses on measurement which is a quantitative way of assessment. It gives more concern to summative assessment in which we quantify the learning in numbers and gives the certificates to the students after completion of a certain level. The judgement of knowledge, theory and understanding of a student can not only be made through summative assessment. Therefore, there is a need for formative, continuous and diagnostic assessment to enhance students' learning. Regarding the test, Guskey (2003) argues that nearly every student has suffered the experience of spending hours

preparing for a major assessment, only to discover that the material that s/he had studied was different from what the teacher choose to emphasize the assessment. Rogier (2014) states that the knowledge of assessment not only helps teachers to assess their students effectively but also supports the evaluation of their teaching and help them to produce tests that can motivate the learners. Roger's perception of assessment was clear and effective enough to mark the achievement of both learners and teachers at a same time.

Frank (2012) states, "Assessment is how we identify our learners' needs, document their progress, and determine how we are doing as teachers and planners" (p. 32). This definition of assessment covers a wide range of assessments with its objectives. It states that the assessment is helpful to know who the learners are and what their needs are for learning. Moreover, it suggests that the assessment works as a foundation to track the learners for their progressive learning. Johnson and Johnson (1996) state that teachers need to measure students' academic abilities, skills, and competencies as well as their attitudes and work habits (as cited in Ghaith, 2002). Therefore, one must not limit himself/herself only as a teacher or assessor for the assessment since s/he is a good planner for the entire teaching and learning process in which assessment can assist them for better teaching and learning. The different types of assessment are discussed below.

Summative Assessment: Assessment of Learning

I do believe that a summative test is done for upgrading students' grades or level through the final examination. In this regard, Hughes (2003) states that summative assessment is carried out at the end of the term, semester, or year to judge what has been achieved by the learners. Likewise, the results of summative assessment are traditionally used to determine and report on student achievement at

the end of a learning cycle (Lan & Fan, 2019). When evaluating the learning outcomes of learners, teachers provide feedback so that they can improve their learning. However, this type of assessment does not provide feedback to the learners since its objective is to make decisions to pass or fail the students. Similarly, Torrance and Pryor (1998) have drawn attention to the summative assessment undertaken at the end of a course or program of study to measure and communicate students' performance for purposes of certification and accountability. Therefore, it can be said that summative assessment helps to measure students' performance at the end of the course or program for upgrading and certifying students. The above idea shared by Torrance and Pryor (1998) stated that summative assessment is there for certification of the course at the end of the academic session or semester. To increase better learning, the teachers need to have frequent interactions with the learners and provide them the areas of improvement as well. One of the major consequences of summative assessment is that it does not require regular feedback and counselling to students. As a teacher, I felt that summative assessment is a teacher-centric approach to assessment since it makes the job of the teachers very easy. Yet, summative assessment is not good enough to assess students' level of knowledge and understanding at a deeper level. It is the major reason why students do not like a summative assessment in comparison to the formative one.

Assessment of learning is a summative assessment that is conducted at the end of a course and it is teacher-centred, judgmental, and result-oriented (Earl, 2013, as cited in Aksit et al., 2018). This form of assessment does not let teachers provide feedback to the students so it is a teacher-centric approach to assess students' learning. It is result-oriented judgment so that students will be promoted to the next

level or provided the final result. The students will not get a chance to re-learn, re-correct, and reform their learning through assessment of learning.

Cheng and Fox (2017) state that the assessment of learning means assessing the students after the completion of the course to determine whether the learning has happened. Assessment of learning is done at the end of the academic year or semester to check whether learning takes place or not. It further provides judgmental value with a certain grade, GPA, or Percentage to the students and so that students will not get the opportunity to improve again once the final exam or end semester exam is over. It is not a continuous way of assessing the students' performance and competency providing regular feedback to the students.

Formative Assessment: Assessment for Learning

Formative assessment is a tool that helps to improve students' learning with the help of continuous feedback from the teachers. Hughes (2003) states, "Assessment is formative when teachers use it to check on the progress of their students, to see how far they have mastered what they should have learned, and then use this information to modify their future teaching plans" (p. 5). As a result, formative assessment is useful to evaluate students' progress and performance and provide necessary feedback to them for better improvement in their learning. Torrance and Pryor (1998) emphasize the use of formative assessment for improving students' learning. The formative assessment brings many advantages such as an increased ability to take feedback from the teachers, give time for language improvement, and develop a learning culture through sharing among the learners. Also, the formative assessment takes place regularly through which the learners get ample opportunities to know themselves and work hard for their study from their interests and individual

differences. Hence, I believe that the main aim of formative assessment is to support students' improvement through regular feedback from the teachers.

Assessment for learning is formative and continuous which takes place throughout the course, and it is more interactive since teachers focus on identifying the learning needs of their students (Earl, 2013, as cited in Aksit et al., 2018). Assessment for learning enables the teachers to provide continuous feedback and suggestions to the students as it emphasizes the formation of learning. There would be more interaction between teachers and students in this approach of assessment since the objective of this assessment is to identify the problems, issues, and gaps in learning and bridge them. Therefore, it can be claimed that this approach of assessment puts learners at the centre of the learning process by understanding their real ground and level of learning. It also assesses students based on their interests, individual differences, and needs so that their learning becomes more effective and continuous and remains until the learners are expected to learn the language skills. Hence, we can also say that this is a learning-oriented assessment. Cheng and Fox (2017) state, "Assessment for learning refers to the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by students and their teachers to decide where students are in their learning process, where they need to go and how best to get there" (p. 4). Students will know their present status and way forward of learning with proper guidance from the language teachers if there is an application of assessment for learning. It leads both teachers and students to make teaching and learning effective with collaboration and cooperation from teaching to testing the language.

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment refers to the process of students' evaluation regularly for better learning. This is quite similar to formative assessment in nature. Continuous

assessment is an ongoing assessment that aims to help students learning from the beginning to the end of the academic instruction so that it has a broad area and it supports both summative and formative assessment in a long run. On the other hand, formative assessment can be taken as a part of continuous assessment. The formative assessment aims to support the improvement of the learning so that it can be considered as a part of continuous assessment. The nature of classroom-based assessment is a continuous and integrated process that plays a prominent role in gathering information to scaffold learners, adjust teaching, and assign grades for learners. (Rea-Dickins, 2008, as cited in Lan & Fan, 2019). Similar to this, Kellaghan and Greaney (2004) describe the nature of classroom assessment that is subjective, informal, immediate, ongoing, and intuitive and the classroom assessment incorporates monitoring and interactions for the students and the teachers. The subjective assessment gives a chance to the students to explore their knowledge and understanding of the language in their way. As continuous assessment is ongoing, it suggests teachers provide immediate feedback to the learners. The learners get a chance to be monitored and guided by the teachers. The teachers provide them ample opportunities to have enough discussions and interactions so that they can learn the language effectively through their interactions and discussions of the subject matters. Isaacs et al. (2013) mention that the classroom strategies and procedures used by teachers, lecturers, or trainers to determine the knowledge, understanding, and skills of the learners play a vital role in the continuous assessment. Indeed, classroom assessment is a part of continuous assessment.

Alternative Assessment

This is a learner-centred approach of assessment that focuses on students' learning through the use of various assessment tools. Ghaith (2002) states that day-to-

day instructional activities such as checklists, journals, reading logs, portfolios, videos of role plays, audio-tapes of discussions, self-evaluation questionnaires, teacher observations, and anecdotal records can be used to assess the performance of students. Scott, Scott, and Charles (2016) state, “Alternative assessment is a term of description that simply refers to approaching student-driven assessment in a manner that is different from that which has traditionally been done-usually about strict pencil-and-paper testing” (p. 38). The alternative assessment incorporates different assessment procedures such as portfolios, learner diaries, self- or peer-assessment, checklists, and learner-teacher ‘conferences (Byram & Hu, 2017). Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin (2020) argue that self-assessment and peer-assessment of alternative assessment expect to develop learners’ autonomy and enhance learning opportunities even in the early stage of language learning. Kovalchick and Dawson (2004) mentioned that the four major alternative assessment strategies that can be enhanced by educational technology are; a) performance-based assessment, b) project assessment, c) portfolio assessment, and d) journal assessment. Therefore, alternative assessment gives numerous ways of determining the progress of students and can be more culturally sensitive and free of the linguistic and cultural biases inherent in traditional testing (Huerta-Marcias, 1995, as cited in Ghaith, 2002). Observation, project work, portfolio, students participation, classroom interactions, checklist, interview are also referred to as non-testing devices of assessment. They came into existence since testing devices such as written tests, essay writing, multiple-choice, and gap-filling questions are not sufficient to assess students’ performance. As a result, non-testing devices are employed in the classroom as an ongoing process and they can be formal (e.g. journal writing) and informal (e.g. feedback) as per the need of teaching instruction and assessment.

Diagnostic Test

Diagnostic test finds the area of improvement of a learner in a given course of instruction as well as provides a remedial measure (Amin & Jan 2018). The main objective of diagnostic tests indeed is to find the specific area of improvement and support the learners to overcome that part in which they require more support. Similarly, Hughes (2003) states that the strengths and weaknesses of the learners can be identified through diagnostic tests. Diagnostic assessment does not reflect score or learning outcome but rather finds areas of improvement for the learners. It offers the learners to have a friendly relation with teachers and ask for help if they have problems in language learning. Thus there is a need for further actions to be carried out by teachers to help the learners at optimum level which is not possible without diagnostic assessment. Isaacs et al. (2013) state:

The diagnostic assessment identifies characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skills, abilities, and any learning difficulties or problems in a new or potential learner to provide initial advice and guidance both for the learner and the teacher about a particular course of study (p. 43).

The main objective of the diagnostic test is to know each aspect of learning and treat learners accordingly for their better improvement. Hence, it not only examines the knowledge, ideas, and skill of the learners but also provides constructive feedback so that the learners' problems will be addressed with the proper guidance of the teachers.

Proficiency Test

A proficiency test is employed to assess the proficiency/skill/ability of the candidates in a certain domain. Hughes (2003) states that the proficiency tests are designed to measure learners' ability in language therefore the content of this kind of

test is designed based on the specifications of what candidates have to be able to do in the language to be considered as a proficient. IELTS, TOEFL, PTE are some of the examples of the proficiency test. Brown (2003) states that the proficiency test is not limited to any single course or skill since it tests the overall ability of language/skills. In general, there is a practice of assessing candidates through standardized multiple-choice items on grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and aural comprehension (Brown, 2003). It is often criticized as a test that is taken for commercial purpose.

Achievement Test

Achievement tests are directly related to classroom lessons, units, and a curriculum since they are bound to assess the objectives of the course in a certain time frame (Brown, 2003). Similarly, Hughes (2003) states that the achievement tests are directly associated with language courses and the purpose of them is to achieve the objective of the course. Final achievement tests and progress achievement tests are types of achievement tests (Hughes, 2003). As names suggest that the final achievement test is taken at the end of the academic session/program to assess the objectives mentioned in the syllabus, and a progress assessment test is a test that assesses what the progress students are making. The final achievement test contributes for summative assessment and the progress assessment test contributes for formative assessment.

Placement Test

Hughes (2003) states that the placement test helps to place the students at the stage of the teaching program according to their ability or prior knowledge. The objective of placement tests is to place a student into a particular level or section of a language curriculum or school (Brown, 2003). This kind of test is taken place at the

beginning of the academic program so that students can be placed as per their performance. People often consider this test as an entrance examination of the institutions.

Test and its Qualities

I believe that a test is an instrument of assessment. Regarding the purpose of the test, Gorsuch (2019) states, “Teachers make tests to figure out what learners do and do not know, and what they can and cannot do” (p. 2). In academia, the test is considered as an instrument to measure the knowledge and skills of students rather than using it for language improvement. A test is an organized process for computing sample conduct by asking a set of questions uniformly, that is devised to measure any behaviour, performance, talent, and knowledge (Amin & Jan 2018). It is an investigation to measure the particular knowledge or skill of a learner through a set of questions. Therefore, we can consider the test as an instrument to measure the sample behaviour and learning of the learners. The test should be based on a set of specifications (Alderson et al., 1995, as cited in Byram & Hu, 2017). Specification grid indeed helps to keep the objective of the test and cover the pieces of information that are kept in the curriculum.

Reliability

Reliability is a quality of test scores, and a perfectly reliable score, or measure, would be free from errors of measurement (American Psychological Association, 1985). If there is a variation in the score of the test, it does not become reliable. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) state that the consistency of test scores across facets of the test is known as reliability. Taylor (2006) states that reliability refers to ‘the extent to which test scores are consistent, accurate, and therefore dependable for decision making’ (p. 56). The test score should be consistent and accurate even if it is checked

by different examiners or by the same examiner at different times so that it can work for decision making i.e. to upgrade the level of the students and provide them with a certificate of completion of a certain level.

Validity

A test becomes valid if the consistency of the score remains the same.

Regarding this, Hughes (2003) states that consistency with accurate measurements helps to have a validity of the test. I do agree that a test is valid if it measures what is intended to measure. For example, if we test the reading skills of the students we must make them read and test the reading skills rather than other skills of a language.

Washback is a part of validity and advises researchers to go to the classroom to observe how beneficial washback is achieved when examining validity (Morrow, 1986, as cited in Ren, 2011). According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007), “The view of validity presupposes that when we write a test we have an intention to measure something, that the ‘something’ is ‘real’, and that validity inquiry concerns finding out whether a test ‘actually does measure’ what is intended” (p. 4). It means that a test becomes valid if it measures what is intended to measure.

Taylor (2006) states that if test scores are a true reflection of underlying ability, it becomes valid. The assessment should reflect what is intended to assess to become valid. Face validity can be maintained if we can assess what is supposed to be assessed (Coombe et al., 2012). For example, if we assess the sub-skills of reading through reading assessment, it maintains face validity. But if we check grammar through reading comprehension questions, it does not show the face validity of the text. Content validity can be maintained if all the elements of the content are tested. For example, a specification of the skill can help to maintain the content validity of a test (Hughes, 2003). The author also presents that the criteria-related validity relates

to the degree to which the results on the test agree with those provided by some independent and highly dependable assessment of the learners' ability. Achievement tests and proficiency tests must have criterion-related validity.

Difficulty

A test should be developed with due consideration of the abilities and other characteristics of the intended examinees (Henning, 1987). A test should not be too easy or too hard to maintain its quality. We can know the difficulty level of the test based on the instructions, selection of vocabularies, length, and other indicators if we pilot the test before its administration (Henning, 1987). If we check the difficulty level of the test item and modify it if the test item is too easy or too hard, we can assure the quality of the test.

Authenticity

Authenticity in a test represents the reality and truth of the test. Brown (2003) states that a test can be authentic if it contains natural language, contextualization, relevant topics, and real-world tasks. Therefore, a test designer should give due consideration to the context, use of natural language, rational topic, and the tasks of the real world. The potential effect of authenticity is on test takers' perceptions of the test and their performance (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). If a test is authentic, the test takers will have sound performance. Authenticity resembles how the language test shows the real-world tasks and true language uses (Richards, 2001). Hence, it is important to design real-world tasks by using natural and true language in the tests.

Practicability

A test should contain a practicability feature to maintain its quality. In this regard, Brown (2003) states that a test should have an appropriate time constraint, easy to administer, scoring/evaluation procedure, and cost-effective. Practicality is the

relationship between the resources that are needed in the design, development, and use of the test and the resources that will be available for these activities (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). If a test provides a practicable time for completion, the appropriate number of items, and proper scoring strategies, it becomes more practicable. If these things are maintained, the candidates will also be sure about the length of the answer required as per the test item. Hence, practicability will support test takers and test givers to maintain the quality of the test.

Feedback

In the context of language teaching and learning, feedback is taken as a process that addresses the output of an action to improve and transform the succeeding action. As a teacher, I believe that feedback is a necessary component of learning which plays a fundamental role in learners' improvement and their learning as well. Amin and Jan (2018) state that feedback acts as a reinforcement for successful learning. It pinpoints the specific errors which need correction. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) state that feedback pinpoints what needs to be learned next to become an independent user of language in a new context since it contains diagnostic information. Hence, it is clear that feedback is needed for students to make them learn language by providing effective corrective information in the classroom. Henderson et al. (2019) state that evaluative information is provided to the learners to improve their performance through feedback. As a result, there must be a positive impact of feedback on the learners. And if the feedback does not change in the understanding, knowledge, skill, and performance of the learners, the facilitation of teachers becomes questionable and the assessment process turns ineffective. Therefore, effective feedback should be given to the students and the students also need to change the instructions of the feedback into action.

Specification Grid

A specification grid is a framework by which the test takers frame the test item. It gives a clear picture of test items, the number of test items, marks of each test item, and units/lessons for a test item, and time allocation for each test item.

Regarding the specification grid, Fulcher and Davidson (2007) argue that it is a document designed to write the test items with clear instructions, authentic sources, and a good layout. On the one hand, the specification grid helps the test item writers to depend upon it to maintain content validity. They must write items as per the instructions written in the specification grid from the curriculum. On the other hand, it may bind the test takers to limit the test times. If test takers want to ask questions beyond the specification grid to test creativity or some skills, they cannot do it which often limits the assessment criteria. The specifications are the blueprint to be followed by test and item writers, and they are also essential in the establishment of the test's construct validity (Alderson et al., 1995, p. 9). If the test item writers do not have sound knowledge about the specification grid, it becomes useless. However, the assessment becomes effective if there is a good implication of the specification grid. Therefore, the test takers and test givers should be trained or informed of the effective applications and use of the specification grid.

Measurement

Measurement in the social sciences is the process of quantifying the characteristics of persons according to explicit procedures and rules (Bachman, 1990). Measurement is a process of quantifying the skills and knowledge of the students. In general, students are being evaluated based on the score that they get in the examinations. I oppose the idea of measuring the students' subjective knowledge and understanding of the language. In the context of Nepal, the students and parents both

prefer the marks in examinations. They are running after the scores rather than what the students have learned. This is one of the reasons why our assessment becomes conventional and impractical.

Backwash Effect

In general, the backwash effect is known as the effect of assessment on teaching and learning. Following this, Wall and Alderson (1993) state that the influence of testing on teaching and learning is a backwash effect (as cited in Safa & Goodarzi, 2014). Testing affects teaching and learning. Similarly, Fullilove and Wong (2002) argue that washback is the effect of tests on the teaching and learning of the educational system (as cited in Safa & Goodarzi, 2014). According to Hughes (2003), “The effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash and can be harmful or beneficial” (p. 1). This means that if a test gives a positive effect to the students, it is considered as positive backwash whereas if it gives a negative effect, it is considered as negative backwash effect. Therefore, it can be said that the test affects teaching and learning since it is used for evaluating students’ performance and achievement.

Relationship between Test, Measurement, Assessment, Teaching, and Evaluation

Test, measurement, assessment, teaching, and evaluation are inseparable from each other. Test, as a subset of assessment, simply is a method that measures a person’s ability, knowledge, and performance. Hughes (2003) states that testing, a form of assessment, gathers information and the ability of a person. Similarly, measurement quantifies the skills and knowledge of the students. Brown and Abeywickrama (2018) state that the assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a wide range of methodological strategies. Brown and Abeywickrama (2018) state that teaching provides the opportunities for students to listen, think,

engage, take risks, set goals, and process feedback from the teachers and then incorporate their acquired skills in their performance. Bachman (1990) argues that evaluation is needed to make decisions from the results of a test. It means that evaluation gives value to the results based on the performance of the students.

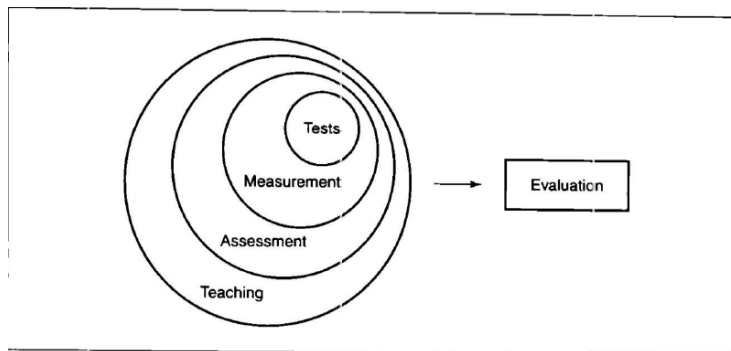


Figure 1

Note. Figure 1 shows the relationship between tests, measurement, assessment, teaching, and evaluation (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018, p. 7).

Constructivism

Constructivism theory believes in generative knowledge. It is “an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner” (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256). Constructivism initially emerged from the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky which focuses on the goals that teachers set for the learners with whom they work instructional strategies that they apply to achieve the goals set for, and methods of assessment used for learning (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Vygotsky (1978) believed that a child learns on two levels. First, s/he learns through interactions with others (interpsychological) and then into his/her mental structure (intrapsychological). It is believed that people generate knowledge and meaning from the interaction between their experiences and their ideas. Piaget (1952) stated that children construct knowledge out of their actions with the environment (as cited in Harlow et al., 2008).

Piaget believed that knowledge is acquired as the result of a life-long constructive process in which learners try to organize, structure, and restructure their experiences in light of existing schemes of thought, and thereby gradually modify and expand these schemas (Bodner, 1986). Butler (2016) states that the social-constructionist view of learning and assessment focuses on the dialogue between students and teachers and provides feedback and diagnostic information. We must perceive assessment as a tool for learning rather than only a tool of learning. If there are interactions between the teachers and students, it helps them to create a comfortable learning zone and for this, the teachers can provide feedback during and after the assessment of the language. The social constructivist theory focuses on the significance of culture and context in understanding what is experienced in the wider community and in constructing knowledge built on this understanding (Derry, 1999; McMahan, 1997, as cited in Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). I strongly support that constructivism emphasizes the knowledge which is generated as per the context and situation. Jia (2010) believes that learning is an initial construction and the generation of meanings. This means that the learner plays a crucial role to construct meaning and ideas through active and meaningful interaction with his/her teacher. Furthermore, Jia (2010) states that teachers should be the designer of the teaching environment, the guide for students' learning, and the academic consultant for students. This means that the teacher facilitates the learners to learn a language in the English language classroom.

Both teachers and students in constructivist classrooms “are aware that the world is a complex place in which multiple perspectives exist and the truth is often as a matter of interpretation, and they acknowledge that learning and the process of assessing learning are intricate and require the student and teacher interaction as well

as time, documentation, and analysis by both teacher and student” (Gould, 2005, n.d.). As constructivism involves the process of questioning, exploring, and reflecting, it will enable the learner to engage in their evaluation process. Therefore this theory provided a theoretical foundation to carry out this research.

Policy Review

In the context of Nepal, summative assessment has been given more priority rather than formative assessment. In my opinion, summative assessment is a tool of assessment that is used for upgrading students’ academic level (grade) through the final examination system with the help of a paper-pencil test. A formative assessment is used for evaluating students’ overall improvement with the help of day-to-day teaching and learning processes. As per nature and scope, formative assessment is used as a method to assess students’ academic performance under continuous assessment. Continuous assessment is practised in Nepal to minimize students’ dropout rates, improve students’ overall learning ability, and assess them through self-participation for quality education since 2006. CDC (2011) states that CAS is a system that goes simultaneously with the teaching and learning process. The continuous assessment suggests the teachers facilitate the students linking it with the teaching and learning process. In this assessment system, teaching is not primarily done to judge the content rather it is used to assist learners in their learning. CDC (2011) directs the application of formative/continuous and summative assessment for secondary level (grade 9-10) students whereas it also approaches the use of alternative testing measures for ‘differently-abled like underprivileged, hearing impaired and poor sighted students. The good part of this provision is that the differently-abled students are also included in the assessment in which detailed instructions and strategies are given to the teachers.

CDC (2011) states:

Out of a total of 100 marks, 25 per cent marks is allocated for listening and speaking skills which are tested by conducting practical tests. Likewise, 40 per cent marks are allocated for reading, and 35 per cent marks are allocated for writing. The language functions are tested under speaking, grammar is tested within writing, and vocabulary is tested within the reading (p. 73).

The above-mentioned provision of assessment does not give equal priority to all skills of language. However, it incorporates the assessment of different aspects of language such as language skills, language functions, syntax, and vocabulary. CDC (2011) states that the reason for teaching English at all levels of the school educational system in Nepal (grade 1-12) is due to the importance of learning a foreign language. Through this language, learners develop the confidence to communicate effectively by using all skills of language and participate in a global society. Therefore, the objectives of teaching English language and its assessment should have a strong alignment.

Letter Grading System Implementation Framework⁴-2072 was approved on 2072/08/23 from the National Curriculum Development and Assessment Council under the Curriculum Development Centre and has been amended for the fourth time till 2075/05/01 B.S. CDC (2015) has made provision of 75 % compulsory attendance of students to appear in the final examinations. This Later Grading System consists of 9 letter grades; A+ (90 & 90+%), A (80-below 90%), B+ (70-below 80%), B (60-below 70%), C+ (50- below 60%), C (40-below 50%), D+ (30-below 40), D (20-below 30) and E (below 20%)] and has made provision to combine marks of theory and practical and give subject-wise letter grades to the students (CDC, 2015). For the

⁴ an approach used for new assessment practice in Nepal which replaced the provision of giving results in percentile format

first time in the history of Nepal, this Letter Grading System has removed pass or fail provision so that it is expected to avoid fear from examination among students in Nepal. This system has made provision to improve grades if students get a 'C' grade or less than 'C' in two different subjects or become absent in 2 different subjects in the SEE examination within three years (CDC, 2015). Although the grading system is adopted in Nepal to minimize negative backwash effects, the students still have fear of assessment. Brown (2003) states, "Absolute system of grading pre-specifies standards of performance on a numerical point system such as points for the mid-term, final term and semester exam, whereas relative grading is usually accomplished by ranking students in order of performance (percentile ranks) and assigning cut-off points for grades (p. 287)." If we look at the form of the grading system of secondary level in Nepal, it is clear that there is an application of the relative grading system. Hence, the results from the grading system at the secondary level may not show the actual performance of the use of language.

CDC (2019) states that the internal (formative) and the external (summative) assessment will be used for the assessment of grades 11 and 12. It further clarifies that internal assessment covers 25 marks (Participation-3 marks, listening test-6 marks, speaking test-10 marks, score from terminal examinations-6 marks) and external assessment covers 75 marks (reading-35 marks, writing-25 marks, grammar-10 marks, and vocabulary-5 marks). The existing assessment system as per the new curriculum of grades 11 and 12 somehow tries to include more approaches to assessing the learners through internal assessment. However, it has focused more on external assessment i.e. summative assessment. Therefore, we can say that summative assessment will again dominate in the assessment of the English language in the context of Nepal.

Ministry of Nepal (MoE) (2016) states that the SSDP⁵ will make both formative and summative assessments learner-focused rather than content-focused. SSDP will also help teachers to understand and use both assessments to improve learning outcomes. This explicitly shows that the assessment system of Nepal is guided by the content of the curriculum rather than the performance of the learners. If the assessment is learner-centred, it can create a comfort zone of teaching and learning. MoE (2016) states that there is a dominance of the use of summative assessment in the majority of schools and public exams at the end of grades 10, 11, and 12 in Nepal. This might be the major reason why there is a gap between the policy and practice in the assessment system in Nepal. In general, the assessment policies expect regular improvement and progressive learning from the students. If we see policies of assessment specifically, there is a priority on the use of summative assessment. Hence, this study helped me to explore such gaps in policies and the practices of the assessment system in Nepal.

Review of the Previous Studies

Various research studies have been conducted regarding assessment to explore practice, perception, and view from the participants. In this section, I have mentioned some studies that I have read and got some insights to carry out further research on my issue.

Al-Shehri (2008) has researched on ‘Teachers’ and students’ attitudes toward formative assessment and feedback in teaching English for specific purposes ESP.’ This research was conducted to identify and investigate teachers' and students' perceptions toward the different types of assessment and feedback being applied in teaching English for specific purposes in the College of Telecom and Information

⁵ School Sector Development Plan (2016/17-2022/23) prepared by Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal to ensure equitable access to quality education for all

(CTI) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This study was carried out through a survey method and data was collected from 49 participants (38 students and 11 teachers). The results of the study found that both formative assessment and feedback have a positive impact on the teaching and learning process.

Restrepo (2013) has researched the 'Role of Systematic Formative Assessment on Students' Views of Their Learning'. As a qualitative study, it aimed to explore the students' perception of their learning during and after the implementation of formative procedures in Colombian Public University. The data was collected through the interview of nine research participants (3 male students and 6 female students). The result exposed that formative assessment helped the learners to improve their learning and make them aware of communicative competence.

Modupe (2015) carried out one research entitled 'Teachers' Perception and Implementation of Continuous Assessment Practices in Secondary Schools in Ekiti-State, Nigeria'. This research was conducted on the qualitative and quantitative descriptive survey design. The sample for the study was 160 secondary school teachers. The finding of the study revealed that the majority of teachers were not familiar with the concept of continuous assessment beyond the test. Furthermore, the results of this study showed that there is no significant difference between professional and non-professional teachers in schools.

Ayalew (2016) carried out one research entitled 'Teachers' and Students' Perceptions towards the Practice of Assessment of Learning: Implication for Future Job Performance of Would Be Graduates' in the Faculty of Educational and Behavioral Sciences (FEBS), Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia. The main objective of this study was to understand the perceptions of teachers and students towards the practice of assessment of learning. This research was conducted under a descriptive

survey research design. The sample for the study was 124 participants (24 teachers and 100 students). The result of the study found that teachers and students' have unfavourable perceptions towards the practice of assessment. Moreover, it is noticed that the practice of assessment in the faculty was more theoretical and most of them assumed that students need further practical training to perform to the standard in the actual job situations.

Joshi (2017) carried out research entitled 'Continuous Assessment in English Language Classroom in Community School'. This research was conducted to explore the way a continuous assessment system is implemented in the English language classroom in three different community schools. Furthermore, it has aimed to explore the tools/techniques of continuous assessment that have been used in the language classroom in Kathmandu district. The data were collected via observation and interviews with six teachers. From this study, I found that the major tools that are being used in language classrooms were; portfolio, peer assessment, self-assessment, project, rubric, conference, feedback, checklist, and open-ended questions. Moreover, it is found that teachers were still unable to use tools and techniques of continuous assessment properly due to which there were no desirable changes in classroom teaching practices and learning. The finding of the study has suggested the researchers explore teachers' narratives and experiences of using tools and techniques of continuous assessment in the English language classroom.

Thapa (2018) carried out the research entitled 'Lived Experiences of Secondary-Level Students with English Language Examination: Low-Scores' Perspective'. The main objective of the study was to explore lived experiences of secondary level low-scoring students on English language examination practices. Phenomenology was employed as a research method under an interpretative paradigm

to carry out this study. The data were collected through observations and interviews from seven research participants (4 males and 3 females) from the 14-16 age range. The result of the study showed that the participants faced pain due to the low score and there were several shortcomings of the examination system in Nepal.

Research Gap

I found different studies related to assessment in the field of social science but I did not find any particular study under narrative inquiry which was carried out from the EFL classroom. Furthermore, the above quantitative and qualitative studies were carried out to explore the perception and practices of formative assessment due to which the study on summative assessment was found to be neglected.

Al-Shehri (2008) has highlighted the teachers' and students' attitudes toward formative assessment and feedback in teaching English for specific purposes in Saudi Arabia. Though this study was carried out in Asia, it did not focus on the experiences and practices of assessment. This study was carried out through a survey method so that the findings of the study would not represent the lived experience of English language teachers. Similarly, Restrepo (2013) has highlighted the roles of formative assessment on students' views. This study was good enough to explore perception and practices on formative assessment but it did not explore the experiences and practices of English language teachers. Moreover, this study was also limited to the exploration of the perception of a single type of assessment which was formative assessment. Similarly, Modupe (2015) has highlighted the teachers' perception and practices of CAS in Nigeria. Though this study somehow tried to explore narratives of assessment, it still did not focus on other forms of assessment. So the findings of the study of Modupe would not be applicable in the context of Nepal since assessment is affected by many other aspects such as curriculum, teachers' qualification, teaching methods,

the policy of assessment as well. I found that the Ayalew (2016) study was carried out to explore the implication of assessment practices for future job performance which could not reflect how the assessment was experienced and practised. Joshi (2017) has highlighted the current practices of continuous assessment practices. The assessment policy of Nepal suggests we follow summative and formative assessment practice and the formative assessment is linked with continuous assessment from grade eight. So, this study did not explore the practices of summative assessment in Nepal. Lastly, I found that Thapa (2018) has highlighted the lived experience of the students who scored low in the English language examinations.

The previous studies did not cover experiences and practices of assessment from the teachers' side. Moreover, the previous studies also suggested that researchers in future will carry out other studies on assessment. This research would help to explore the experiences and practices of English language teachers on assessment practices as it has revealed the different assessment practices such as formative, summative, diagnostic, etc. Therefore, this research would fill the gap of how English language teachers narrate their stories on assessment practices in the context of Nepal. Stoyhoff (2012) also states that very little research has been carried out on the assessment of young learners and the issues remain unexplored. Like Stoyhoff, I also found a similar situation in Nepal. Very few researchers have studied the assessment practices despite the high prospects for enhancing learning. Hence, I, as a researcher, believe that this study would be a significant study to explore the narratives and experiences of English language teachers on assessment and the findings of the study would be a key idea to adapt or adopt new ideas and strategies of assessment in Nepal.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework which I have presented below in Figure 2 shows the overall frame of the study. This framework presents how I commence the research journey and accomplish it. It highlights different procedures and steps that I carried as a qualitative researcher. It shows the justifiable reason how my personal experiences and practices of assessment drive me to carry out this study. Moreover, this framework shows stepwise actions that I have undertaken in the journey of thesis writing. It shows the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and research questions which helped me review sufficient literature to gain a deep understanding of my research area. Constructivist Theory gives me a glance to see and analyze English teachers' narratives and experiences on assessment practices which I gathered through interviews under narrative inquiry. From the narratives and experiences that I have collected from the five English language teachers on assessment practices, I analyzed them in three chapters which are presented in the conceptual framework as well. Hence, the conceptual framework shows the steps which are undertaken to accomplish this research study.

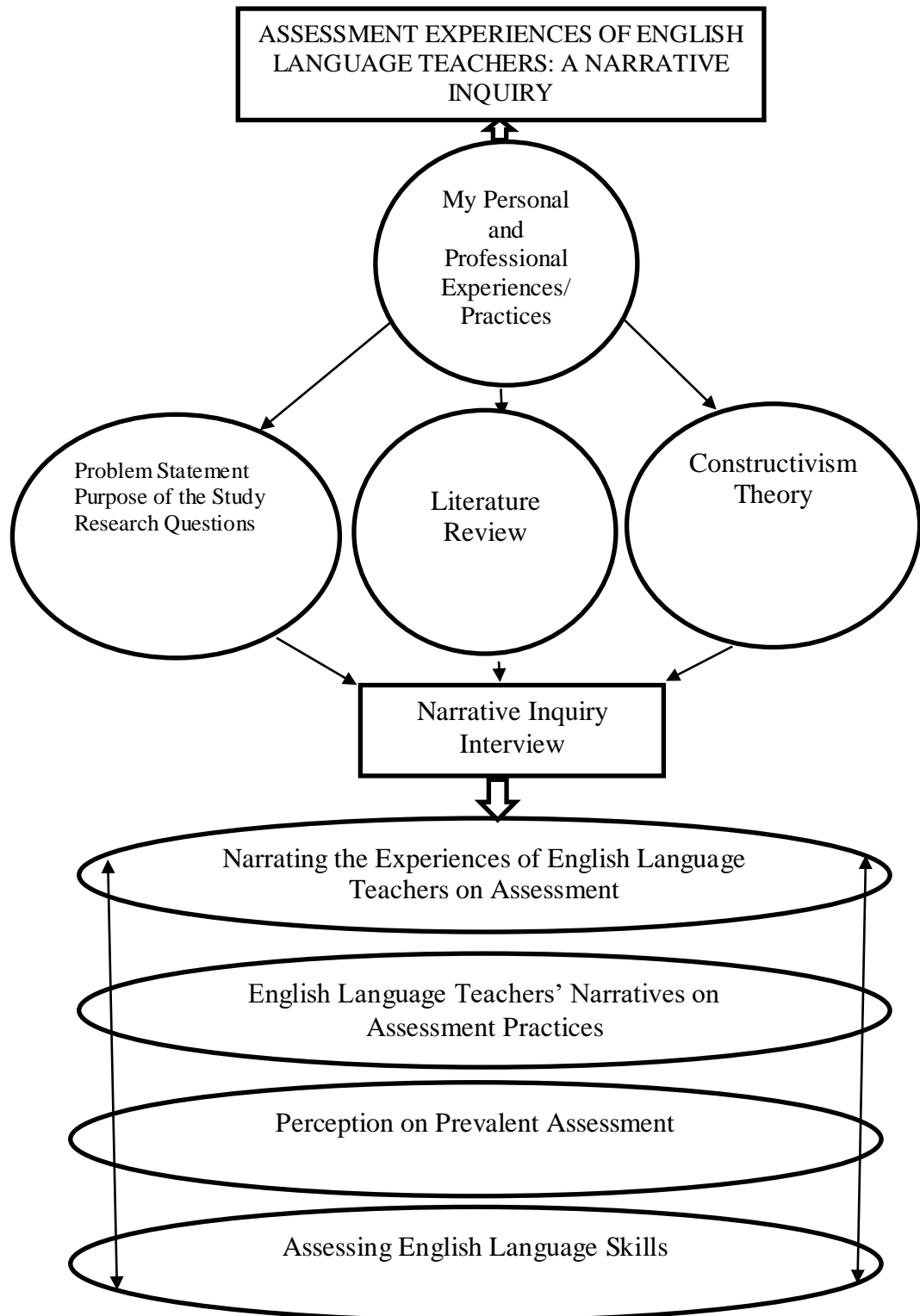


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

This chapter commenced with the discussion of the themes related to assessment. Language assessment and its types, test and its qualities such as reliability, validity, difficulty, authenticity, practicability and other key terms related

to assessment such as specification grid, measurement and backwash effect, and the relationship between test, measurement, assessment, teaching and evaluation have been discussed for the review of the themes. Then, I have discussed constructivism as a theory. I briefly stated how this theory is helpful to see the experience and stories of the research participants from a philosophical view. After that, I reviewed the policies of assessment that are being undertaken at present in Nepal. The purpose of the review of the policy was to see to what extent the policy is undertaken in the assessment practices in Nepal. Then, I summarized the previous six research studies. The aim of studying these research studies was to explore the nature, purposes, methods, findings, and future directions by which I found the gap to be filled and searched for the best area for this research study. Finally, I presented the conceptual framework of the study which provided me with guidelines to plan, work and complete the study as per my research objectives and agenda.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter represents the philosophical stand and methodological consideration based on the research paradigm of the study. It incorporates research design, research site and participants, participants' selection procedure, information collection tool and process, information collection techniques, and procedures. Moreover, it discusses information analysis and interpretation. Finally, this study discusses quality standards followed by ethical considerations.

Philosophical Considerations

One as a researcher needs to be guided by a philosophical perspective while doing a research study. No doubt, the person as an individual may be guided by his/her belief system but as a researcher, s/he is guided by three major philosophical perspectives; ontology, epistemology, and axiology. They are the core guidelines of qualitative research so that they are presented below.

Ontology Stance

Accepting the interpretive research paradigm, my ontological stand is that the reality is multiple. It is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, individual's perception, experience, social environment, and interaction between the researchers and participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Ontology in narrative inquiry is relational, temporal, and continuous (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The reality of the study was constructed with the relation between the researcher and participants based on their stories of a particular time and it is continuous so that the reality may not be the same from person to person. As a result, I believed that the realities existed in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based on the local

self as well as others (Guba, 1990, as cited in Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). It is true that reality is subjective and may differ from person to person in the narrative inquiry because the same story or experience may not be true to the other individuals. Gergen (2009) states that the reality of qualitative study is socially constructed and we researchers have a part in creating it through framing questions, collecting, and analyzing the narratives (as cited in Josselson, 2013). As a narrative researcher, I saw the nature of the reality of my study as socially constructed and contextual. Therefore, I gave due respect to each story or experience of the researchers to see it as my own story and I analyzed the information considering that they have multiple meanings as per their contexts. Therefore, my ontological assumption concerns the nature of the world is socially constructed and it has embedded in the day-to-day life experience and the story of my participants.

Epistemology Stance

The knowledge remains subjective in the qualitative study and here for my research, the knowledge is the shared information and stories by the participants. It is contextual and embedded with the experience that the research participants had in their teaching and learning. Richards (2003) states that it is the scientific study of knowledge and the relationship between knowers and known. Likewise, VanderStoep and Johnson (2009) state that knowledge is constructed through communication and interaction therefore it is found within the perceptions and interpretations of the individual rather than out from them. I understood the knowledge from the participants' point of view. It was constructed by the participants from their experience, understanding, and context as well. Therefore, the participants' realities, perceptions, experiences, and stories are the foundation of knowledge for my study.

Axiology Stance

My axiological stance as a narrative researcher is value-laden. Since the values are multiple with equal significance in a narrative inquiry, I tried my best to value each incident, shared idea, experience, and story with full attention and respect. "Values of being, about what human states are to be valued simply because of what they are" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 287). My concern on multiple values with multiple significance helped me to grab the thick descriptions of the narratives collected from the participants. As an interpretive researcher, I also gave value to the knowledge and understanding that I gained through experience and exposure. It led me to work on my philosophical understanding. At the same time, I gave much value to every experience, story, and incident of the research participants. Subjective values were given due respect and appreciation while conducting this study. Therefore, I tried my best to value the realities of the participants despite my principles. Hence, every account of the narrative was interpreted while generating meaning from it.

Research Paradigm

Regarding the interpretive research paradigm, Taylor and Medina (2011) state, "Applied to educational research, this paradigm enables researchers to build a rich local understanding of the lifeworld experiences of teachers and students and of the cultures of classrooms, schools and the communities they serve" (p. 5). This research paradigm allowed me to build a thick relationship with teachers opening a platform to explore assessment practices. As I mentioned earlier the prime purpose of this study was to explore English language teachers' experience on assessment practice, I needed to have a prolonged process of interaction with my participants under an interpretive research paradigm.

Since this research was guided by an interpretive paradigm, I indulged in the process that was more like a natural setting. The researchers discover or unpack the phenomenon of interest in the natural setting (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). As a narrative inquirer, I tried my best to understand the phenomena in terms of the meanings of the people from their own social and real context. Besides, as an interpretive researcher, the above research purpose and questions led me to find out the ground reality through my participants' views, their background, and experiences for further interpretation and generalization. Hence, the interpretative paradigm helped me to generate a rich description of the informants to meet the purpose of this study through the lived experience and narratives of the participants in their socio-cultural context.

Narrative Inquiry as a Method

A man is always a teller of tales;
 He lives surrounded by his stories and
 The stories of others; he sees everything
 That happens to him through them,
 And he tries to live his life as
 If he were recounting it.

- Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea

In Latin, the noun 'narrario' means a narrative or a story, and the verb 'narrare' to tell or narrate (Heikkinen, 2002, as cited in Moen, 2006). A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events and experiences which is noteworthy not only for the narrators but also for their readers. In this regard, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) opine that the source of the sense of experiences and communication are stories through which we understand the world around us.

Quite similarly, Medeiros (2014) states:

A narrative is not a series of random words with no meaning. Exactly how much is revealed through this communicative action, why a speaker/writer tells a particular narrative, and what the narrative ultimately means are questions at the centre of narrative inquiry (p. 2).

My understanding as a narrative inquirer is similar to the above-mentioned view on what narrative is and its sense. Indeed, in the narrative, each word and experience of the researcher and participants must be embedded in their context and practice. Events, actions, and experiences are connected by the narratives (Kramp, 2004). The narrative inquiry enables researchers to organize the story by linking events, perceptions, and experiences. Thus, my argument is that narratives have prominent meanings to the readers which reveal the aesthetic life experience of both researcher and research participants.

In this research, I used narrative inquiry to generate the contextual and cultural stories and experiences of the researcher and the research participants. Saldana (2011) states, "Narrative inquiry recrafts the often scattered, improvisational ways we tend to share our accounts into well-plotted, artistic forms that utilize the conventions of fictional literature to present not just a more ordered rendering of life but an aesthetically rich one" (p. 12). Therefore, I intended to explore the experiences of English language teachers on assessment practices and presented them in an artistic form. I did believe that narrative inquiry provided me with a rich framework through which I could explore the ways my participants experienced the world through the stories and experiences as suggested by Webster and Mertova (2007). They further suggest that narratives provide us with a better way of knowing teaching and learning. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) encouraged the practitioner-researcher to engage in

the process of examining the stories in search of their meaning which can lead researchers to engage in the process of restoring their lives. As a practitioner-researcher of narrative inquiry, I have a keen interest to explore meaning from each experience of mine and the participants from which I can generate the ideas and insights to transform myself first and encourage others to transform their practices. Likewise, Roseik and Snyder (2018) state that narratives are easily retained by our minds and they change our thoughts even if we do not have an interest in them. Hence, the narrative inquiry supported me as the best method to generate meaning from teachers' interpretations and explanations of assessment practices.

Research Design

Research design helps the researchers to plan and execute the designed plan to carry out research successfully. It is about making choices and articulating a rationale for the choices researchers have made (Schwartz-Shea & Dvora, 2012). Therefore, I discuss narrative inquiry as a method, my research site, and participants' selection process, and interview as a narrative collection procedure for narrative analysis in research design.

Research Site and Participants Selection

Earlier I was intending to choose the participants only from Kathmandu Valley to gather narratives. But when I came to know about 'the network selection strategy' as suggested by deMarris (2004), I chose the participants who were already in personal contact with me so the research site of the study was not only the schools in Kathmandu Valley but also outside. Though it is believed that the teachers who have been teaching in Kathmandu Valley are more competent, qualified, active, and dynamic, I did not limit the selection of the site to only in Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, I did not choose participants only from private schools. Three participants

were teaching in private boarding schools and two were teaching in community schools when I collected the information. I gathered the information from the five male teachers who were teaching at the secondary level. The network selection strategy as suggested by deMarris (2004) helped me collect the information from the teachers who were in contact with me. It was an obligation for me to call the participants frequently and they needed to give enough time, therefore, I included only male participants. Although I could not make this thesis gender-based inclusive, the participants were from different geographical areas and ethnic communities. Hence, I suppose that I have not gone against female teachers who are teaching at the secondary level. Since I collected narratives in a very difficult time due to COVID-19⁶, I could not maintain inclusiveness in terms of gender. But, this study incorporated the experiences and life stories about assessment practices of the participants with their geographical and ethnic variations. It was fortunate for me to gather the stories from the teachers from both private and community schools. I purposefully approached the teachers to serve as research participants of the study. Creswell (2012) opined that in purposive sampling, researchers intentionally select participants and the research site to learn and understand the central phenomenon of their research agenda. Purposeful sampling has the power of logic to select an information-rich case for the depth study in which researchers can learn a great deal of issues of central importance to the purpose of the research study (Patton, 1990, as cited in Lodico et al., 2006).

After approaching them, I talked to them informally and shared the research objectives, the nature of the research, and how I was going to gather information.

⁶ Coronavirus disease emerged in 2019 from Wuhan, China

I made two criteria to select research participants: a) Master's Degree completion, and b) five years or more experience of teaching English at the secondary level. The first criterion was made believing that the participants with Master's Degree qualifications could have a long journey of experience about assessment practices in different academic levels. The second criterion was a perception that the teachers with five years or more teaching experience are presumed to have different life stories on assessment practices in different phases. Moreover, I believed that the participants having long teaching experience could provide information-rich stories drawing on their professional experiences to answer the research questions posed in this study.

The participants in the study were English language teachers teaching in secondary level schools. The total number of participants was five. Out of five, two of them were teaching in community schools and three of them were teaching in private schools while I was collecting information. However, they all had the experience of teaching in private schools as English language teachers in Kathmandu Valley. Their experience in teaching ranged from 10 to 15 years. Their age ranged from 25-35 years old while collecting information.

- a. Sabin is a research participant of this study who has completed an MPhil degree in English Language Education from one of the universities of Nepal. He has more than 10 years of teaching experience in English in private schools.
- b. Ujjwal is another research participant of this study who has been studying MPhil degree in English Language Education from a university in Nepal while I was gathering information for the study. He has more than 15 years of

teaching English. He has taught some private schools in Kathmandu and outside. Now, he has been teaching in a government school in Kathmandu.

- c. Dinesh is a research participant of this study who has been studying MPhil degree in English Language Education from a university in Nepal while I was gathering information for the study. He has more than 10 years of teaching English. He has taught at some private boarding schools in Kathmandu Valley. Now, he has been teaching English in a government school outside of Kathmandu Valley.
- d. Ishwor is a research participant of this study who has completed an M.A. and M. Ed degree from one of the universities of Nepal. He has more than 15 years of teaching experience in English. Now, he has been teaching English at a private boarding school in Kathmandu Valley.
- e. Pawan is a research participant of this study who has been studying MPhil degree in English Language Education from a university in Nepal while I was gathering information for the study. He has more than 15 years of teaching experience in English. Now, he has been teaching English at a private boarding school in Kathmandu Valley.

Narrative Generation: Interview

To gather information for this study, interviews were employed at different times. For this, I sense where ‘there is more to be told’ by the participants (Gillham, 2005). It was my job to give more emphasis on the participants to reveal their stories in their own words since this is a narrative study. Didison (1961) states that narratives fill the space between ‘what happened’ and ‘what it means’ (as cited in Kramp, 2004). Wells (2011) states that stories are the primary source of data of narratives and narrative analysis examines the content, structure, and context of narratives as a

whole. Therefore, I also sensed the data based on the content and context as per the sharing done by the participants for narrative analysis. Indeed, I frequently provided responsive enforcement such as ‘ok’, ‘yes sir’, ‘oh, yes’, etc. which supported making natural settings during the interview. Interview in narrative research requires a researcher to create a natural setting where the participants can share their own experiences and stories. I also did the same to make them open and express their own story without any hesitation so that I could collect rich information through interviews. The participants’ ideas, thoughts, and views based on their experiences play an important role in the narrative. For this, I used open-ended questions. Kramp (2004) states that the participants can invite the researcher into their lives. deMarrais (2004) states, “An essential element in the interview process is that of active listening and probing where appropriate for more elaboration” (p. 64). I used probing questions to collect rich and in-depth information to make the narratives seem real.

Information Analysis: Generating Meaning of the Narratives

It was a tough job to generate meaning in the narratives. I thought that I would easily generate the meaning from the narratives but it was not as I expected. “The process of qualitative data analysis is one of culling for meaning from the words and actions of the participants in the study, framed by the researcher’s focus of inquiry” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 118). There are no standard procedures of representing the method of narrative analysis (Elliott, 2005), keeping it in my mind, however, I have followed the framework of ‘categorical analysis’ (Lieblich et. al, 1998, as cited in Elliott (2005). For this, I ‘extracted’ different sections of the text and ‘classified’ and ‘categorized’ under different themes for analysis (Elliott, 2005).

The first step of information analysis commenced with the transcription of participants’ interviews from the recordings. Interviews were recorded and transcribed

digitally since I found it a convenient way. I spent about triple the time transcribing the audio file. It means that it nearly took three minutes to transcribe audio of a minute which was a more challenging task. I highlighted the key terms and ideas while transcribing the audio which helped me to find the patterns to analyze the information. The stories were retold using the expressions and words used by the participants themselves.

I tried my best to draw out the meaning from the words and experiences that the participants shared based on my interview questions. Atkinson and Delamont (2006) state that the analysis of narratives should not be analyzed as a vehicle for personal and private experience rather they should be analyzed as a social phenomenon. deMarris (2004) states, “Researchers can improve the quality of their interviews through a rigorous design process in which the research problem and purpose are carefully articulated” (p. 67). Therefore, I made different sub-questions under two major research questions that are interlinked with the research problem so that I could generate the meaning of the narratives easily. “Through a close analysis of the transcript and listening to the tape, one can see the pattern in the interview style that enabled or constrained a quality interview” (deMarris, 2004, p. 68)”. “The narrative is a telling, a performance event, the process of making or telling a story (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 240)”. Indeed, I presented the information in the form of a story. A close analysis of the gathered information was done to see the pattern of the information and derive themes from it. Lyons and Doueck (2010) state that searching the themes in the data is the core component of the data analysis. The recurrent elements and information are seen deeply to generate the themes and analyze them to generate meaning. I gave more emphasis on the episodes while generating meaning in this study. “An episode has activities, sequence, place, people, and context” (Stake,

2010, p. 133). Indeed, my priority was mainly on the sequences and the context of the narratives shared by the participants during the process of analysis of the information. I analyzed the narratives based on the reality of the experiences and stories considering that they are 'situational and dependent' as suggested by Miller and Brewer (2003). Hence, the realities of the participants were analyzed without looking for a single objective notion.

Quality Standards

As per my understanding, quality standards denote the nature of the research paradigm for judging the quality of research. I maintained authenticity, trustworthiness, pedagogical thoughtfulness, temporality and causality, and verisimilitude as quality standards in this study.

Authenticity

I established a cordial relation with the participants to bring fairness to this study. The stories shared by the participants are presented fairly which assures that the authenticity is maintained. The participants' real-life experiences and stories were retold linking with the real context of the past, their impact on the present, and their future visions. The context, setting, time, and numerous examples are described in the narratives to make the analysis authentic. I have provided sufficient information to convince the reader that the 'stories are told seriously and honestly' to maintain authenticity (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Trustworthiness

During the process of collecting narratives from the participants, prolonged engagement was made which helped me to maintain trustworthiness. I made frequent informal calls, interactions, and communication to gather rich descriptions of assessment practices. As a researcher, I also got ample opportunity to compare my

context and stories with the participants' narratives. As a result, I included sufficient descriptions for the reader to compare their experience to maintain transferability in this study. I used open-ended questions for emergent inquiry and that helped me to maintain dependability. Moreover, a rich context and an in-depth description of the narrative were made for trustworthiness. I have made the best representations of reality based on the context and experiences to maintain trustworthiness (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

I presented the narratives of the participants in a way that would encourage readers to reflect on their assessment practices. Based on the stories of the participants, the readers would reflect on what experience they had and they would try to change in their practice for pedagogical thoughtfulness.

Temporality and Causality

Temporality in the narrative is that rearranging the narrative clauses, or the events within a narrative, typically results in a change of meaning (Franzosi, 1998; Labov, 1972, as cited in Elliott, 2005). To maintain temporality, I recapitulated my own and my research participants' experiences by matching verbal sequences of events and stories that they occurred. So, I believe that the stories are presented by following a uni-linear direction moving from past to present and present to the future. Hence, the temporal transitions of events of the participants are presented in this study from the past to the present and the present to the future.

To maintain causality, the participants' experiences are presented logically, orderly, and consistently. Chatman (1978) states that there is a link between events; cause and effect are the parts of the event (as cited in Elliot, 2005). A cause affects until we get a final effect. If we do not find a connection between two events, we find

the connection through inferring process. Therefore, I tried my best to present the experiences of the participants maintaining coherence and cause-and-effect relationship which supported me to maintain causality in this study.

Verisimilitude

As a narrative inquirer, I presented the information, experiences, and stories of the participants by giving a real taste to maintain verisimilitude. It means that I tried my best to present the ‘thick description’ as suggested by Denzin (2009). Therefore, I believe that the narratives that I presented in this study give the real context of the experiences of the participants and their embedded meaning which manifests the verisimilitude of the text. Creswell (2007) says, “verisimilitude in the research literature is defined as a criterion for a good literary study, in which the writer seems ‘real’ and ‘alive’, transporting the reader directly into the world of the study” (p. 250). The readers of this study may feel that the stories and experiences shared by research participants are of a natural setting and real. I intently studied the narratives of the research participants that helped me to mention their experiences and stories of them overtly. Besides, I conceptualize the concealed realities of the research participants and take account of them in narratives after extensive understanding if they have a prominent impact on their assessment practices.

Ethical Considerations

In general, ethics are moral values and principles which need to be followed by each individual. Whenever I hear the term ‘ethics’, I always remember the ethics of the examination such as we should reach the exam hall before the exam starts, we should not make a noise during the exam, we should not cheat in the exam, and we should not help other friends and get help from them, etc. That was my prior

understanding of ethics of examination and perhaps they are the universal norms of the examination to be followed by examinees.

Now, let me tell you how I maintained the ethical standards of my research study. It is a fact that a researcher needs to get support and trust from the participants, build confidence in oneself, and obtain the trust from the research committee and future readers as well. Keeping this in mind, I became very careful while conducting this research. I was aware of the possibilities of physical, social, psychological, procedural, and situational harm. Thus, I tried my best to avoid them with careful actions and procedures.

To me, it seems to be unethical to gather narratives and life experiences without getting consent from the research participants. In my research, I orally asked the participants to get consent to use their life experience of assessment and narratives but I did not take consent from the written signature. I believe that the traditional model of getting consent can be changed if we can make the participants trust us. Therefore, I will not face any problems in the days to come due to the oral consent that I took from my participants and I also suggest researchers take consent in their way which makes them convenient and feels comfortable. As a researcher, I believed that there was no compulsion to take written consent from the participants because of good intimacy between the researcher and my participants. Rather, to some extent, I realized that written consent might make the participants feel uncomfortable with me which could harm the information gathering process in this qualitative research.

I gave due respect to the participants from my inner heart which supported me to protect them from unanticipated harm. I also maintained trust, empathy, and established a good rapport with the participants which helped me a lot to accomplish this research study. Given (2008) also states that anonymity is the most desirable

aspect to protect the participants from harm in research studies so that it helps to keep the secrecy of the respondents. I used pseudonyms instead of participants' real names to maintain confidentiality in this study. I neither shared very personal information nor the name of the institutions where the participants served.

I also anticipated the events and informed the participants about my research. Oliver (2010) states that the participants should be informed of relevant aspects of the research before they agree to take part in the process of information collection. I also informed the nature and the purpose of the research to the participants before gathering their life stories and experiences. Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, and Silverman (2004) opine that the research participants have the right to know what they are being researched, be informed about the nature of the research, and withdraw from research participants at any time if they want. I informed the participants how I would maintain their position and its role in sense-making in my research showing honesty and reflexivity.

As I selected participants purposefully, I did not face any problem while collecting information. The participation of the participants in the study was voluntary. So, I requested them to get connected with me via the ZOOM⁷ application and the interviews were recorded. However, I maintained online ethics. I recorded the interviews by using my laptop and kept them safe for transcription and analysis. I promised them that the recording would be deleted after defending my research study. After taking interviews with my research participants via online mode, I came to realize that it was a very convenient and friendly way of gathering information through interviews.

⁷ a modern enterprise video communications, with an easy, reliable cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, chat, and webinars across mobile, desktop, and room systems

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with the methodology that I used for the study. Then I discussed the research paradigm which helped me in the organization of the study. After that, I discussed the philosophical consolidations to make the study strong and philosophically valid. Then, I discussed narrative inquiry as a research method, research site, and participants' selection, and interview as narrative generation under research design. Moreover, I mentioned the process of information analysis along with quality standards. Finally, I presented ethical considerations before I concluded this chapter of the study.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATING THE EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS ON ASSESSMENT

In this chapter, I present the participants' narratives on assessment from their entry to English class to till their current experience of assessing English as a teacher. In general, this chapter attempts to address the overarching research question i.e. *how do English language teachers construct their assessments based on their practices?* As this study was conducted as a narrative inquiry, I re-tell English language teachers' experiences they shared in the interview. Experiences are written under different sub-titles aligning with the narrative genre. I also incorporate English language teachers' real voice as per the requirement of the information and experience to make it contextual.

Situating Myself

I have an interesting story to share about how I became a teacher. After completing the 10+2 level, I shifted to Kathmandu for my higher education. Surviving in Kathmandu as a full-time student was a very tough job. The money sent to me by my father for my accommodation and education could barely make ends meet. This led me to search for a job in Kathmandu Valley. As I was a student in the Education Faculty, I thought that the job of teaching would suit me. Therefore, I started roaming around the city in search of schools where I could serve as a teacher. Though I filled a lot of applications and visited many schools for my job, I was rejected more than five times. It was disappointing to me so I started working as a marketing staff at one of the companies. Later, I got a chance to work in one of the publications of Kathmandu where I worked as a writer, content compiler, and typist for about five years. There, I

was asked to write and compile books in the Nepali language. But, I wanted to enhance my English language so I was waiting for the offers in the school though I did not have any experience of teaching English. I was not proficient in English. As a result, I was in search of opportunities to improve it.

As a part of a curricular activity, I carried out an action research along with my friend in one of the schools of Bhaktapur. I started enjoying it while I was applying different action strategies which encouraged me to be a teacher. It was fortunate for me to get a chance to serve at the school where I carried out the action research.

Appearing for the examination was horrible for me when I was a school-level student. My performance in the examination of English was not good even though I was sound in other subjects. I used to recall the words such as 'afraid', 'tension', 'stress', 'pass', 'fail', and 'fear' when I heard the term 'examination'. My thought was guided by the idea that examination was a supreme phenomenon to upgrade the class. Therefore, I parroted and passed SLC, 10+2 level, and bachelor's degree as well. Learning English for me was memorizing a grammar structure and some example sentences. I could not forget the sentence, 'If I were a bird, I would fly', because I read and remembered it more than 10 times. But, producing other sentences in the above structure was impossible for me. There was no change in my perception of assessment though I was in 10+2 level and Bachelor's Degree which compelled me to study English through Grammar Translation (GT) Method.

In the initial phase of my teaching career, I was blank about the practical ideas of the assessment. I had read the course entitled 'Testing and Evaluation' in Bachelor's degree and 'Language Testing' in Master's Degree. These two courses serve as a foundation for me to upgrade myself for a better understanding of the

assessment and its application in my class. Gradually, I learned many ideas and strategies of the assessment through conferences, training, and seminars. I engaged myself a lot in self-reading activities as well. Moreover, I was aware of the effective use of assessment through the observation of the other teachers. Now, I came to know that assessment is a part of learning and it should not be taken as a matter of fear. Therefore, the assessment should have a positive impact on learning and rather than creating tension and pressure to the teachers and students.

Sabin's Entry to English Class

Hailing from the eastern part of Nepal, young and energetic Sabin has got about 18 years of experience of learning English in a formal setting. He teaches at some of the private schools in Kathmandu valley. Upon requesting him to participate in this research, he promptly accepted my proposal. We decided to meet at his residence. When I reached there, he welcomed me with his smile and offered me a cup of tea. We did some catching up with our lives and the current affairs and settled down for his side of the story.

He said that he did not exactly remember how he got accustomed to learning English but he shared an interesting practice he followed in his schooling. . “I vividly remember the way English was taught and leaned back in my schooling.” He further added, “Teachers would write some words on the board along with their meanings in Nepali and ask us to copy them. Then we chorused, as ‘C A T, CAT. CAT *mane*⁸ ‘*biralo*⁹’ over and over again until we memorized it. That is how we were taught the vocabulary; the words in English and their meanings in the mother tongue”. He learned English through the Grammar Translation Method in which he had the

⁸ Nepali translation of the word ‘means’

⁹ Nepali translation of the word ‘cat’

compulsion to memorize all words and vocabulary given by his teachers. He learned the same way until he completed his 10+2 level.

When he joined college for a Bachelor's Degree, he was introduced to a whole new world of English learning. He stated, "This new experience was an eye-opener for me. I came across the Communicative Approach of learning English and from then onwards I focused more on my fluency." The English teachers in his college also emphasized fluency and communication. He learned that communication is as important as learning the meanings. So, he modified his habit to learn English through communication rather than translation.

Sabin's Reflection of Being Assessed at School Level

For Sabin, examinations were simply the rite of passage from one grade to another. He said, "Actually, the test was given to us. Whenever there was an exam, we were supposed to go through everything we had studied and that seemed very tedious to me". He perceived assessment as a tool to score enough marks to pass rather than it being a measure to estimate his level of knowledge. He said, "What we are doing in the course is what I think the test is for us". He used to memorize the lessons taught by the teachers and duped them in the exams. Sheehan and Munro (2017) state that the pressure to pass the examinations was not only taken by the students but also by the teachers. It reveals that there is an intense pressure on students and teachers which needs to be discarded. If there is no fear from assessment, the teaching and learning process is sure to have a sustainable impact.

Sabin remembered that the evaluation was dependent on what they were taught in the class. He used to learn the vocabulary, read the text, memorize the answers written by teachers and answer the questions in the examinations. His policy was to memorize everything by heart for the exams as there were no other alternatives

known to him. Black and Wiliam (2003) state that assessment helps in both measurement and students' learning. However, the perception of the assessment of Sabin was guided only by assessment for measurement. It seems that our assessment system is primarily guided by the score instead of what is learned or what impact has been there on the learners. Sabin added "There would be questions given in the test papers and we had to answer them. Who was Suren Majhi?, What did he do?" He would have remembered the answers to the questions from the textbook and xeroxed the same in his examinations during his school time without or with much less understanding of the reason behind being asked the questions.

This method of studying did not always lead him towards victory. When he was in grade 10, his school had the system of having three examinations per academic session. The first terminal exam was worth 10 marks. He remembered that he failed in English though his performance was good in other subjects such as Science, Nepali, and Social Studies etc., in grade 10. This event made him the target for his friends' mockery while he was feeling dejected too. Being that weak in English and failing in the exam was a surprise to him. He recalls being able to learn by rote but having more difficulty in answering the subjective questions in comparison to the objective ones. So his motivation was fizzling out.

Sabin's Reflection on Assessment as a College/University Graduate

He started valuing English and its assessment in a new light as he started giving precedence to learning and using the language daily there was a drastic shift in his beliefs when he learned about the different skills of the English language. He said, "There are many skills of language and we had to focus on all those skills. I realized that at my school level, we were much focused on the writing skill alone." He had this realization when he was studying Bachelor's Degree. He said, "When I was in

college, I realized that reading should be tested by providing some kind of reading test". He further stated, "I felt that reading passages should be given to test the reading comprehension or sub-skills of reading. In the same way, for writing, there should be freewritings and creative writings." He believed that students can express their ideas and opinions through creative writing. The proper use of language is a compulsion. He said that the testing of language skills should be done under each category such as listening skills, reading skills, writing skills, and speaking skills. He complained that since listening and speaking were neglected in his school time, he focused on those skills along with reading and writing during his Bachelor's Degree. He started emphasizing communication development. He was still pursuing his Bachelor's Degree when he started teaching at a school. He then discerned that he should have a good speaking ability as well. He started speaking English most of the time to improve his dexterity. He also studied the communicative approach of teaching and was motivated to focus on learning and speaking English. Communication and meaning were most important for him and hence, he communicated with friends, teachers, and students in English. This is how he could speak better in comparison to earlier days when he had just started practising English speaking. He knew that his learning was gradually improving at his college level. The testing systems were completely different in comparison to the systems in his school. But, he followed the same technique while he was preparing for the examination. He used to read and recite the text and write verbatim in the Bachelor's Degree examination as well. When he joined the Master's Degree, he felt that the paper-pencil test was not the only way of testing language skills. He remembered that then there was a continuous approach or internal evaluation system in his Master's Degree where he got an opportunity to present on different topics assigned by his teachers.

Assignments and other tasks were provided to test them internally while a written test would be a part of the overall evaluation. He concluded that writing was not the only method used to assess students when he was in university. He said, “I came to realize that testing should not be limited to only paper-pencil or pen-paper tests.” The focus should be on different sub-skills of writing, listening, speaking, and reading while students are assessed.

Sabin’s Reflection as a Novice English Teacher

Sabin narrated, “I began my teaching career in Kathmandu Valley as a primary level English teacher. I was initially more guided by my teachers’ principles of teaching”. He further added, “I followed somehow the similar process for a few years until I got to know about other approaches and principles of teaching”. As his teaching style was influenced by his English teachers, he did not try to find new ways of teaching in his earlier days as a teacher. According to him, he used to go to the class and ask the students to read or he used to read and explain while teaching English subject. Translating the text into Nepali was an important technique for Sabin as an English teacher primarily. Sometimes, he also used to explain the text in English with the help of simple lexical items. Telling or explaining the texts was common to him as he was also taught in the same way by his teachers. He said, “Students had to understand the text explained by the teacher”. He narrated, “I never gave much emphasis to my students whether they could read, write and speak English.”. He thought that his students should understand the text rather than the language so he focused on decoding the meaning. Therefore, he gave more priority to the concept of the text thereby making his students read and write the same in the examination.

Sabin's Initial Experience of Assessing Students

Recalling his earlier experience of assessing students, he narrated that he learned more about assessment in his higher studies since it was a part of the course 'Curriculum and Evaluation. But he could not implement his expertise gained through learning about the assessment in the course. Thus, he regretfully revealed, "In private schools, the assessment practice is guided by the stakeholders' interest. Their main interest is to make the students get better marks in the exam". Therefore, he accepted that his entire teaching and learning process was guided by the exams for better results of the students in DLE, SEE, and other board examinations. The stakeholders focused on reading and writing skills as well. The main reason for focusing on reading and writing was to warrant the students' ability to score better in the examinations. He was told to make his students get good scores hence he followed the assessment approaches which could make it easy for his students to score well in the examinations. He said, "I just believed that students should read and inscribe exactly as I had taught them. Whatever they have been taught should be seen in the answer sheets, and tested accordingly". Considering himself a master of knowledge, he would not give the marks if they had written the answers different from what he had suggested. If the answers were divergent he would judge them as unworthy and mark them low since he thought that the students needed to write what was taught to them rather than what they had learned.

He also reflected, "A test is to gauge what has been learned and to test the intelligence." He would deem himself a weak student if he was unable to perform his best in the examination. He also remembered that he could not do better since he neglected the examination and English subject. Later, he realized that it was his fault. Besides, many other factors hindered the learning process. So, he changed his belief

system upon realizing that testing is not everything. As a teacher, he realized that the evaluations are not being done in a way that benefitted both the parties; the teachers and the students. It was proving to be problematic in testing the language skills. He conceded that learners' ability in language could be tested in various ways. "Besides summative tests, I started acknowledging the formative tests as well. I believe that there are many devices which can be used to assess learners' language prowess." He added, "You can ask the students to discuss and present a particular topic." He also said that we could give the student something to read and then ask them to share what they understood. He said, "You just create the environment and test the students in your way as your creativity and knowledge serve." Listening to the students and observing them were other approaches to the assessment of language. He did not like the idea of just giving a passage and asking the students to read and answer the questions as a whole process of evaluation. Different approaches to testing should be applied in the assessment of language. He remembered that he also tested the students in a similar way he was tested by his teacher. At the beginning of his career in teaching, he felt that students must be tested for what they have learned. He tried to see whether the students had read what he asked them to read. Later, he realized that other approaches can also be applied to test his students since students may not be able to remember each and everything for the examination. He changed his mindset on the practice of testing and started testing his students not only through paper-pencil tests.

Sabin's Current Experience of Assessing Students

Sharing his current experience on assessment practices he said, "Now I believe that assessment of language should not be a burden to the students". The above view of assessment shared by Sabin can be considered as a 'learning-oriented assessment'

which keeps students at the heart of the assessment (Carless et al., 2007, as cited in Hamp-Lyons, 2016). Assessment can be a part of everyday lives considering it a tool to assess and improve language proficiency. He said, “Language is just a part of life. Language can be learned while going here and there”. He believed that the skills of language should be developed in students by balancing them. For example, if students cannot read the text, the focus should be on the reading skill. According to him, to develop reading ability, learners should be engaged in reading comprehension English language. Talking about ways to improve reading skills, he said, “Reading tests can be done by giving a series of activities such as scanning, skimming, and other reading vocabularies or many other ways”. He gives the activities and makes his students engage in those and test them. He applies many activities in which students can participate. Sabin’s practice of teaching and assessing English shows that he is using cooperative assessment activities. Ghaith (2002) states that cooperative assessment activities facilitate language assessment by providing opportunities for continuous improvement of the learners in a supportive and stress-reduced environment. Adding to it, Sabin said that students can be tested through observation and listening to them.

For Sabin, assessment of listening and speaking is not difficult. He said, “Listening and speaking can be tested like testing system of IELTS¹⁰ and TOEFL¹¹.” He recalled a moment in 2018 when he gave a topic to the students while he was testing the listening skills of his students of grade 10. The topic he gave to his

¹⁰ The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work where English is used as a language of communication

¹¹ Test of English as a Foreign Language, a standardized test to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers wishing to enroll in English-speaking universities.

students was ‘An Unforgettable Moment of My Life’. There, he created different phases of speaking such as scene-setting, discussion section, and conclusion. He also remembered that he gave questions from IELTS for the listening test. Even at present, he also makes his students practice listening skills like in IELTS. He also revealed that school-level students can do listening activities from IELTS. He said, “If they are provided an opportunity to listen, and if it is played twice, students do better even on such tests”. Testing for listening and speaking is not so difficult but we need to know that exposure is a must. He claimed that he provided the students to listen to the spoken language of native speakers and made his students do better in speaking tests.

The major problem in assessing listening and speaking skills is that there is less priority given to them in most of the schools in Nepal. In this regard, he recalled that his students sometimes felt unwilling to appear in the tests of listening and speaking skills. He also revealed that there is negligence of teachers and lack of interest in students to appear in the examination. He also faced such issue due to lack of materials. However, he tried to solve the issue of speaking by making the students value all skills equally. He also collected different materials from different sources and used them for testing listening and speaking. He said that this could be the best way of solving the problem of assessing listening and speaking.

Assessing reading and writing skills were easy for Sabin. He followed the curriculum while assessing reading and writing skills. Yet, in the initial years of his teaching, he did not have much knowledge about testing reading and writing skills. He recalled that he gave reading text and some questions to assess reading skills. He also gave textual questions and students were asked to remember and write the answer in the answer sheet. For testing writing skills, he focused on essay writing. It shows that he assesses his students’ reading and writing skills as per the objectives of the

curriculum. Though he does not have problems in testing reading and writing skills he highlighted that the majority of the teachers do not have ideas about rubrics and they are facing problems in marking writing. But he does not have any problem in language testing as he has done a course on 'Testing and Evaluation' in his Master's Degree.

Dinesh's Entry to English Class

Dinesh has got 20 years of English learning experience in a formal setting. He started learning English from grade Nursery in a private school. After completing his third grade, he switched schools and joined the fourth grade in a community school, and there English was taught from the same grade only. He remembered how his teachers would teach English in a formal setting. His way of learning English was mainly based on the textbook inside the classroom by using the Grammar Translation Method. So, he learned English through memorization and rote learning. For him, tests were a difficult feat. He recalled that the tests were conducted on a three hours basis. English was the most difficult subject to him at the school level due to the lack of exposure to the English language. He got more familiar with writing and reading only in the 10+2 Level. He did not bother about the internal tests except the final assessment since it decided his final grade and the case was the same even at the Bachelor's Degree. But when he joined the Master's Degree, his perception of assessment practice slightly changed. It was because there he got the opportunity to be assessed based on formative assessment. There was the provision of a continuous assessment system hence every activity related to education were given equal emphasis. "This was a good practice," he added. Thus, when he became an English teacher, he did not assess his students only through summative tests, and presently, he

gives equal importance to the various techniques and strategies of continuous assessment to assess his students.

Dinesh's Reflection of Being Assessed at School Level

Reflecting on the test, Dinesh said, "It was not my cup of tea. It was an offbeat situation for me when I was a school-level student". Students were assessed based on paper and pen-tests making them sit for three hours tirelessly. But, in his former school, teachers used formative or continuous assessment systems while in the community school he later joined, the summative assessment was the only system followed. However, the system of conducting terminal examinations was common in both schools. In the government school, there used to be a half-yearly and yearly examination by which students' performance and understanding on the subject matters used to be assessed. He said, "Written tests used to be set for language and grammar questions would be set to assess the grammar. We used to be given comprehension passages to solve as well." To him, exams were arduous, and scoring good marks was unnerving.

During his schooling, final assessments were the main tools to assess their performance and decide their promotion. He shared that there was no trend of observing students and measuring their progress as a continuous assessment nor there were any other criteria of assessment besides summative tests at school. He reflected that language testing was limited to the test of some specific skills only. Listening and speaking were not in the practice in his time. He further revealed that in his schooling, assessment of reading and writing skills were the focal points. For him, to be considered a good student, one needed to do well in reading and writing skills but later he realized that it was not enough for learning a language. He also recalled that English used to always be the first paper in all examinations. "During my time,

English was thought to be the most difficult subject. So, people used to be nervous about it” he said. He also reflected on the examination ethics of his schooling, particularly, of grade 10. He revealed that the exam was not conducted fairly, possibly due to the Maoist Insurgency. Students could even cheat to get pass marks in national examinations like SLC. Reflecting on the test of listening and speaking skills in SLC exams he said, “We were kept in a room and asked a couple of questions for speaking and for the listening test, a recording was played thrice and a few questions were given to be answered accordingly”. According to him, “There was no practice of listening and speaking in the regular classes so appearing in the test of listening and speaking in the SLC exam was quite unusual to me”. The listening test became challenging to him since he had not listened to the authentic recordings before that. He tagged this test as a mere formality. He added that students could hardly score higher and even if they scored it was difficult to guarantee that their proficiency in listening and speaking was good enough. So, he believed that there were some lapses and problems in such examination systems.

Dinesh’s Reflection on Assessment as College/University Graduate

His experience of being assessed as a college/university graduate is not much different from being assessed as a student at school level. He said, “I did not find many variations in assessment approaches even after I joined college”. His schools, 10+2 college, and TU affiliated college had similar assessment methods. There was also more focus on the final assessment. The final assessment also used to be a three hours long paper-pencil test and it adjudged the students’ future. Right from the beginning of the plus two, he detested the fashion of examination and he believed that many other students shared his ideology on the final test of English. Despite his abhorrence, he was bound by the order. Most of the time, there was a backwash

effect. He recalled, “Students who had a very good bonding with the teachers and students who had done well in earlier examinations used to get more marks in English which was not fair.” Most of the time, students used to study and prepare just for the sake of examinations so language learning was simply being focused on content and memorization. He said, “The only method of evaluation was a simple three hours long test. I became aware of the different terms of assessment when I got enrolled in the university.” He learned that there were different ways of assessing language skills. The different examination tools were applied and slowly he gained theoretical and practical knowledge about assessment. He admitted to having a vague idea about different forms of assessments at the Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree. He recalled that he had gained a little understanding of what an exam is and different forms of assessment in one of the subjects in Nepali medium in his 10+2 level. Still, he is not satisfied with the three hours test that is being carried out in 10+2 and Bachelor’s Degree to assess students’ performance in the English language. Therefore, he started valuing assessment in a positive way when he studied Master's Degree in one of the universities in Nepal. There, he also got clearer ideas about assessment theoretically and practically too.

Dinesh was assessed through a three-hour examination in 10+2 and Bachelor’s Degree. He said that the examination of English in the 10+2 and Bachelor’s Degree was influenced by summative tests. There were no listening and speaking tests in those levels as well. The teaching-learning and assessing method English language was completely guided by a summative testing system. But, he found that assessing English at Master’s Degree was interesting as for the first time he experienced the system of continuous assessment. He narrated, “It was in the university we were assessed not only through a written test but also through a continuous assessment

system for the first time”. He narrated that in his Master’s Degree, some tasks were given based on interest, and marks were also provided based on the language performance which he liked the most. There were some marks for the overall presentation of the students also. He also said that the language was assessed based on how competent they were on all skills of language. He reflected on the nature of assessment, “Assessment was more natural there in the university and it was not like the assessment of language in Bachelor’s Degree or the previous level’s examinations”. He felt comfortable while taking tests at the university level since language proficiency was assessed in a real sense. He said that presentations, writing reflections regularly and other examinations were taken in different ways to assess the students and this was a good way of assessing the English language of the learners.

Dinesh’s Reflection as a Novice English Teacher

He initiated his teaching career from a private school and recently he started teaching in a community school. He found that the teaching environment of private schools and public schools is completely different. As a novice teacher, Dinesh acted as a Xerox machine. He just imitated the ways of teaching from his teachers and followed the same while teaching English in the early days of his teaching career. He narrated, “My teaching was like transmission of knowledge which I had learned from my teachers. He knowingly or unknowingly copied the teaching styles of his English teachers and did the same in his classroom as a teacher. He added, “Of course, my teaching was also influenced by the way I was taught when I was in school or college”. But slowly, he learned other ways of teaching the English language by reflecting on his practices. He was always in search of better teaching methods thus, he learned many innovative ways due to his rigorous efforts on teaching and learning. Though he learned many aspects of teaching, he also accepted that there are still many

things to be learned and applied in his teaching. He said, “I think exposure plays a vital role in teaching”. But he believes community schools lack exposure to English. For him, the best way to teach students who have less exposure is by providing different exposures and experiences of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. He focuses not only on lecture methods but also on the methods where students get an opportunity to speak and learn more skills. He said, “They must get the opportunity to get exposure and practice too. First, they should get input, then practice, and finally, they can produce something”. It means that they can take part in communication. Students should get a real opportunity to learn language so more focus is needed on the communicative approach by which they can take part in various communicative practices. Students should be equipped with a real classroom or communicative classroom which will be natural and real to them so that their learning becomes more effective. He also said, “We need to create such an environment where students should be able to speak in English. We need to understand the perception level of the students and create tasks and activities for language learning”. In practice, he is trying his best to implement such tasks as much as possible so a better learning context can be created for better teaching.

Dinesh’s Initial Experience of Assessing Students

Dinesh was influenced by the assessment practices of the time he studied 10+2 and Bachelor’s Degree. In his 10+2, he studied a course that had a little discussion about assessment. He also learned about assessment at Bachelor’s Degree and applied his learning into practice when he started teaching students. But he learned about language testing in a real sense, at his Master’s Degree. He knows that the teacher needs to follow the assessment system set by the government and he did the same. However, Nicholls (n.d.) states that the assessment must be flexible and tailored to the

needs of the learners (as cited in Hamp-Lyons, 2016). If we keep assessment as a tool for improvement, the students would be given more flexibility on appearing for the assessment of the language.

Most of the time, he evaluated his students based on the provision mentioned in the curriculum. However, he implemented the continuous assessment system (CAS) in the school. He said, “It was very effective so I tried in my class first and found it was effective. Then, the school also implemented CAS. I think learning and assessment should go side by side and we did that one”. It was found that the students were more engaged and learned better. Students got better opportunities for learning since he linked his daily teaching activities with this assessment system. Davison and Leung (2009) state that classroom-based assessment (CBA) supports student learning with useful and developmental feedback since the assessment is context-based and mediated by teachers (as cited in Lam, 2013).

Dinesh’s Current Experience of Assessing Students

When Dinesh reads something interesting, he feels that the same text could be given to the students to read. He said, “If I find something intriguing, my mind is already deciding to give the text as a passage to the students and I generally bring that one to the class”. He is designing text-based learning which he found interesting. Even, he gives the source of the text to motivate the students so that they can read the whole text if they have a keen interest in reading. He said, “For example, I tell them that I have given the text from ‘You Can Win¹²’. Please feel free to go through the whole text if you are interested.” Sometimes, he gives text from religious scriptures, and sometimes he gives very interesting facts to read. He designs questions by himself for assessing the reading ability of the students. The interesting fact is that he makes

¹² a literary book written by Shiv Khara

his students read and do the task while assessing reading. He checks his students' sub-skills of reading while assessing reading skill. The tendency to check reading skills and their sub-skills by asking students to answer comprehension questions with long answers is challenged. He makes questions based on what he has read and follows a specification grid. He said, "Each skill can be subdivided." For example, in reading comprehension questions, he prepares questions by which he can check inference, scanning, skimming, etc. He said, "I designed questions myself which are generally not found in any kind of question bank." He does not like to copy and paste the questions from the question bank. He discovered that the culture of reading is missing.

He is doing a similar thing in assigning writing tests to his students. He said, "If I want to test the students' writing comprehension, I give a question worth 20 marks. I give them a title and ask them to follow some guidelines such as a title, length, and structures." He asks students to submit their first draft, gives some feedbacks, and returns it to the students. Then he asks his students to submit the final draft. He believes that freewriting makes them collect ideas and write based on those ideas. He also asks students to revise, edit and produce the final work of writing. This is how he is assessing his students' writing for 20 marks. He said, "I used to check the whole process from the initiation to the final product and that worked which wonders to improve students' writing." He found that it is difficult to engage every student in writing. He said, "There are some students who are hesitant. They feel like they will commit mistakes and that is a matter of embarrassment to them." He would explain to them that committing mistakes is also a way of learning and not a big deal. He let his students write freely and correct them by providing constructive feedback.

Ujjwal's Entry to English Class

Ujjwal has an academic experience of learning English of about 18 years. He got a chance to learn English from a boarding school up to grade seven and joined a community school from grade eight. Since he was admitted to a boarding school at an early age, English was never a tough subject for him. He had a better experience of learning English language from a boarding school and he was good at English in the other school as well. He was loved by his English teacher and he was close with other teachers too. Since teachers used to ask him to share his experience, he got more chances to explore himself in both the schools and college. He scored first division in the SLC examination and joined intermediate level by majoring in English since his dream was to work in the area of NGOs and INGOs. He completed Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from the same university of Nepal and also studied MPhil in English in one of the popular universities of Nepal.

Ujjwal's Reflection of Being Assessed at School Level

The exam was given higher value when he was a school-level student. He used to prepare well before the examinations. The important questions and syllabus were given to the students for the examinations. He said, "There were no other types of assessment of language so that test was all in all and given a higher value." There used to be only unit tests, internal examinations, first terminal examination, second terminal examination, third terminal examination, and final examination. Every time students were assessed in formal examinations so those were not his favourite. He said, "Even in my time, ok, SLC was regarded as a milestone. And the name 'Iron Gate' was given for the SLC examination. If students could not pass the examination, they were blamed that they had not learned anything so far in school. He said, "If you

cannot pass the exams or some subjects then people consider you as a student who has learned nothing. That is what we were programmed to believe and everyone else too.”

When he was in school up to grade seven, every subject was assessed in English except Nepali and Sanskrit. For pure English, the book named ‘Headway English’ was taught and Grammar Book was also included in the course. The questions could be solved easily if the students parroted. The teachers used to give the same sort of questions as discussed in the regular class. They used to score very low in writing. Despite English being considered an easy subject by Ujjwal, he never scored high. He could not find the reasons behind being able to secure low scores in examinations. He said, “I want to share my experience of the SLC examinations. We used to get questions to test our memory power rather than creativity. We used to get questions based on textbooks only.” Even the questions in the terminal examinations used to be repeated time and again. He does not think that the teacher used to ask questions from the textbook but from the question banks, they were advised to refer to. During his time, it was very difficult to get textbooks in his place even though he is not from a remote area. It was quite difficult to get textbooks, practice books, and extra materials. But, fortunately, he got a Practice Book of English and the questions were familiar to him. So, he passed the SLC examination with the first division and it was a wonderful experience for him.

Ujjwal’s Reflection on Assessment as College/University Graduate

Ujjwal’s perception on assessment in Bachelor’s Degree was the same as when he was in school and 10+2. However, the perception got altered when he enrolled in a Master’s Degree. Before that, there used to be 100 marks examinations in every subject. And, the students were supposed to memorize and write the answers for it. He did the same to get pass marks in school, 10+2, and Bachelor’s Degree. But

upon joining the Master's Degree, he learned about formative assessment. He said, "We were given some papers there before the examinations. And the assessment was practical and it encouraged us to learn." The regular attendance in the university was given value in the assessment as well. Therefore, he found that the assessment was different from his earlier education. After the completion of his Master's Degree, he joined MPhil in one of the universities of Nepal. The assessment in Master's Degree was different than his earlier education. He said, "We were even allowed to take references from books and other materials during examinations. We were allowed to go to the library and sit for an examination." In this regard, Durairajan (2012) states that the open book assessment is a valid way of assessing how much a student has learned and internalized from a course. Ujjwal's experience of appearing for examination at the library was synonymous with Durairajan's idea since there is more flexibility to see books if the students have problems. Ujjwal liked the flexibility and regular assessment that was done in his MPhil Degree. Hence, this experience completely ameliorated his perception of examinations. During his Master's Degree, he got a chance to be assessed in a new way. The new system of assessment was started during his time at Tribhuvan University. They were given 20 marks of internal assessment and 80 for theory. Attendance, discipline, test paper, and notes were some of the criteria for internal assessment. Everything was checked consistently there. And when he joined Kathmandu University, the assessment system was completely different. He said, "We were given assignments and different tasks via the internet. The class attendance was also taken into account." He had to appear in formal and informal tests. All the tests were important and this was the main difference from the ones before. He said, "The assignments were of higher value as we were graded on

their basis. For the first time, assignment and attendance had value. So, we were motivated to study.”

Ujjwal’s Reflection as a Novice English Teacher

He did not make any plans to be a teacher. One day, when he was studying in grade 11, he met the principal of the boarding school from which he had completed grade seven. The principal asked if he had any engagements to which he replied that he did not have any. Then the principal asked, “Do you want to teach?” Ujjwal had never thought of joining the school as a teacher. The principal persuaded him not to waste time. So, he was convinced and decided to join the school where he had studied earlier as a teacher. He became happy since he had completed his schooling from there. He was motivated to teach there since the students were his junior brothers and sisters. He could earn a little as well. “I, then, asked my father for his opinion. As he was also positive about it, I joined there as a teacher,” he reminisced. Even though he was teaching, he never identified himself as a teacher there. He said, “Students used to call him ‘teacher’ inside the school compound and ‘brother’ outside the premises.” When he left his teaching job there, he thought of joining another profession so he tried his best to get a job in a field other than education but he could not find a new job. So, he joined in the same profession again. In his initial career of teaching, he just copied the style of his English teacher. There was no variation in the style of his teaching from his teachers’. He said, “I used to punish students for their mistakes. I used to ask them to remember all the names of the things and stories.” He was taught similarly. He imbibed the style of his teachers and applied the same as an English teacher.

Ujjwal's Initial Experience of Assessing Students

Ujjwal started assessing his students as to how he was assessed at the school level in his initial career of teaching. He used to take questions from the exercises in the textbook. There was a chance of a repetition of the question since he had no idea how to make new questions. He said, "When I joined the school, for the first time, my principal asked me to make 100 marks questions for the first terminal examination from the units I had taught." He was expecting a model of the questions but he could not get it. So, he faced a problem while drafting the question paper. He said, "I just copied and pasted old questions. I never saw the curriculum and grid." He made questions from the exercises given in the textbook which he made students practice in the classroom. He said, "When I was very new in the teaching profession, i.e., before I joined government school or before I joined a Master's Degree, I used to assess students traditionally." Sheehan and Munro (2017) found that the teachers lack confidence if they do not get practical aspects of assessment. Their finding seems true in the case of Ujjwal's experience as well. If he had got training on the assessment before he joined to teach, he would not have faced the difficulty. This case would be the real scenario and experience of the teachers who have been teaching in private and community level schools of Nepal.

Ujjwal remembered his experience of assessing listening skills for the SLC level students in the year 2014. He said, "Students from other schools used to come to our school for the test and that was my first experience. We were given a set of questions and a set of instructions for listening and speaking also. And I asked students and then I was unaware of their level. I mean I never expected students of that level before. I was very strict with the marking and I gave them very low marks." As per him, some students could not even score the pass marks. Later, his co-

teacher/partner suggested not making students fail in listening and speaking tests. Then he changed his perception. Before that, he used to believe that if the students could not answer the questions of the listening test, they should be scored accordingly. He did not encourage the students when they had problems speaking as well. He did not even simplify questions while taking the listening test at that time. He took this as a bad experience and now realizes that it was a mistake. He found that the students of community schools view English as a tough subject. Students feel that if they pass in English, they have a good command of English. He faced problems in making his students speak. Now, he has changed his strategy. He realizes that he can make students speak easily by motivating and simplifying the questions.

When he appeared for the training of international testing systems, his perception of assessment changed. Popham (2006) suggested having a “dose of assessment literacy” (p. 84) as cited in Harding and Kremmel (2016). Assessment literacy is meant by in-depth knowledge about the purpose of assessment, assessment tools, testing situations, and outcome of the assessment. As a result, I believe that assessment literacy starts from the beginning of the preparation of the assessment and remains until a decision is made by the test takers. After getting in-depth information about the assessment, Ujjwal realized the mistake that he was doing before. From the training, he knew the importance of grid, curriculum, and other approaches to assessment. Before he knew about assessment in detail, he used to give very few marks even for the correct answer because he had been assessed in the same way. After this enlightening experience, his perception was renewed. Hasselgreen et. al. (2004) and Taylor (2009) state that many teachers get little or no training in either the theory or practice of assessment (as cited in Sheehan & Munro, 2017). If we see the scenario of private schools, the teachers hardly get a chance to take part in the training

since the school administration focuses on the regular presence of teachers inside the classroom. The majority of the private schools do not think about the professional development of the teachers. Moreover, the training packages are made very general so that the teachers of all levels can sit and learn together. I found that the assessment is not even covered or prioritized in many training sessions. To address this issue, Harding and Kremmel (2016) suggest studying introductory courses on language testing from different testing associations such as the European Association of Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA)¹³, the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)¹⁴, the International Language Testing Association (ILTA)¹⁵, the International Associations of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL)¹⁶, and the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TESOL)¹⁷. The teachers should not be deprived of getting chances to study about the assessment and take part in workshops, seminars, training, and conferences whether they teach in the private sector or the community sector. Hence, the gap between the teaching and testing could be minimized through the training sessions on assessment besides general training which generally focuses on the areas such as ‘classroom management’, ‘teaching method’ and ‘teaching materials, etc.

¹³ a professional association for language testers in Europe which aims to promote the understanding of theoretical principles of language testing and assessment, and the improvement and sharing of testing and assessment practices

¹⁴ an association of language test providers who work together to promote the fair and accurate assessment of linguistic ability across Europe and beyond

¹⁵ an international group of language testing and assessment scholars and practitioners whose dedication and work are respected both within and outside the profession, and who together define what it means to be a language tester

¹⁶ a global professional membership association, and a UK registered charity which works to link, develop and support English language teaching professionals worldwide

¹⁷ a global association which offers the opportunity to be part of a dynamic professional community and join in TESOL’s mission to advance excellence in English language teaching

Ujjwal's Current Experience Assessment Practices

Ujjwal thinks that assessment of language should not be limited in the writing form. There is a need for assessment of all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). He said, "The way we assess English language at present is different from the way we used to do in the past." Students used to get a passage and were asked to write the answer after reading it. Now, his perception of such traditional assessment has been changed. He is teaching different writing in the classroom with different styles and different structures. For listening, he has some recordings and he plays them in the class. For speaking, he is making his students interact in the classroom and outside as well.

Ishwor's Entry to English Class

The next participant of this research study, Ishwor started learning English from grade four and has academic experience of about two decades. He remembered that the Economics teacher used to teach English at his school. Ishwor was unsure whether the teacher was capable of teaching English or not at that time. However, he remembered that he used to learn English by memorizing the words and terms and it was very difficult for the students. They continued the practice of parrot learning till class 10. His English teacher used to write 12 Tense formulas on the board and asked the students to read them out. He said, "We used to memorize all the formulas like Subject+Verb+Object, S+V1+Obj, etc." Though he could remember the structure of the tense, he could not make a sentence in any structure. When he was in grade nine, a new teacher was appointed in his school. There he noticed some differences in the teaching styles as well. The new teacher used to give examples and ask the students to derive the structures from the examples. He took that incident as a turning point for him to learn English. But, he recalled that the real learning of English for him started

from grade 11 since he took English as the major subject under the faculties of humanities.

Ishwor's Reflection of Being Assessed at School Level

Assessment of English used to be horrible for him when he was a school level student. Since he was from a government school where English was the toughest subject. It was even more complicated than mathematics. He used to compare English with a tiger because it was a very difficult and scary subject for him. He said, "Everybody used to be afraid of English because the students could not understand. They neither could reply when a question was asked nor write the answers properly." He just used to copy the words and sentences written on the board by his teacher without understanding at all. He hardly passed the English tests. He said, "The result of English used to be quite poor because we did not have very good practice during our school time." There used to be half-yearly examinations and annual examinations. Even term examinations did not come into practice during that time. Exams were always unpleasant affairs for him and he was afraid of them.

There used to be examinations for assessing the reading and writing only up to grade nine. He said, "The teacher used to ask a particular student to stand up and read a paragraph. Sometimes, I got a chance to read as well." And in examinations, passages and their related questions would be given. The students had to answer them without having a clue about the text itself. He got a chance to appear in the assessment of listening and speaking only in grade 10. "We were asked some of the questions for speaking. The teacher gave the marks for speaking based on how much the students could read in the class. Students who ranked higher were given more marks simply by looking at their faces." he recalled.

He remembered an incident when he was in grade eight. He said, “Our English teacher had not majored in English. Though he was a teacher of Economics, he used to teach English to us.” The students would be given 10-20 questions on the board with answers and asked to write and read them out. The same questions used to be asked in the examinations. Even the questions of the writing composition could be the same. He quoted, “Especially for composition writing, we were given topics such as My Family, My Aim in Life, My Country, etc.” His teacher used to make them copy the answer of the composition writing in the class and the same type of questions would be asked in the examinations. Though they copied the answers, their copies were never checked despite them making mistakes while copying the answers from the blackboard. He remembered another incident and he said, “There used to be composition writing on the title ‘Highways’. And we had to write a paragraph for topic like ‘Prithvi Highway¹⁸’. For this, we had to remember the exact details given by the teacher by parrot learning. So, everyone’s answer would be the same in the examinations.”

Ishwor’s Reflection on Assessment as a College/University Graduate

Ishwor’s perception about assessment at the college level was almost the same as when he was in school. He even had the fear of examination in the finals of Intermediate level and Bachelor’s Degree. He remembered that there were not any internal assessments in his college. Tests were used to upgrade students’ levels rather than helping them to learn. He said, “I could not decide whether I was on the right track or not though I had appeared in different tests.’ Ishwor was admitted to one of the colleges of Lalitpur under a popular university of Nepal for his Master’s Degree. He noticed that there were three types of assessments in the application. The

¹⁸ a highway of Nepal which links Naubise of Dhading district with Pokhara of Kaski district

prominent way of assessment was the written tests. The questions used to be prepared by the university and the examination was to be attended physically. He compared this examination with a live examination. The second type of assessment in the application was the assignments. 20% marks in the Master's Degree were allocated for assignment. The assignments were given to them by teachers' perception. He said, "We would not get any chance to choose an assignment as per our interest and curiosity." He further added, "We five friends were very close and our academic performance was also similar so we had a good bond. We used to sit together and study together. We had a habit of doing assignments by sitting together and discussing among friends. The reason we made the group was that five friends could find five different books and prepare the assignment." The third practice that was used in the assessment at Master's Degree was viva. Each type of assessment had great significance so that there was a compulsion for them to appear in the examinations.

There used to be a two hour long examination at the Master's Degree and the time of the viva was also decided by the teacher. He shared that he had feared the viva at the Master's Degree since he had seen the viva committee consisting of about five to six members. Due to his tireless efforts, hard work, and enthusiasm for study, he got a good score as well. He said, "To be frank, I regularly upgraded my grades from my hard work on the study. The way the tests were conducted consistently and regularly motivated me to thrive for more success." He became so happy when he shared why he liked the assessment system at his Master's Degree. The breach between teaching and assessment was filled since he started giving importance to his education on his own accord. He recalled his memory and said that he had never prepared for more than three days for his examination in his Intermediate level. This way of preparation for examination had become a waste to him. But, at the university

level, he knew the essence of time that motivated him to prepare from the beginning to the end of the class. It was his remarkable experience how he changed the perception and practices of assessment at the university level.

Ishwor's Reflection as a Novice English Teacher

He never thought that he would be a teacher. As soon as he completed his Intermediate level, he got an opportunity to work as a teacher near his dwelling. He was quite indecisive about joining the profession. Later, he decided to work as a teacher to gain some experience in the field of teaching even though it was not a piece of cake for him to work in a private boarding school. He was poor in the English language. He could neither speak in English nor could he write without blunders. But, he challenged himself to succeed as an English teacher. He accepted the reality that he needed to learn to study when he started to work as a teacher. He said, "I understand the way one has to study. Now I have to pass it on to my students so they will not have to struggle like I did until I became a teacher. When I became a teacher, my learning became important due to which I started studying." He learned how to imitate rather than how to teach in his initial days of teaching. He did not even make close contact with the students like today. He learned how to imitate the different teachers who were teaching English to him. Though they did not apply different methods and approaches of English Language Teaching, the opportunity led him to learn different styles of teaching. Their styles have become examples and a landmark for his career as an English teacher today.

Ishwor's Initial Experience of Assessing Students

He believed that assessment is a tool by which we could give a score to the students and that could decide whether to promote the students to the next level or make them repeat their class. He was not familiar with the assessment and its types

and purposes of assessment in detail. When he joined Bachelor's Degree majoring in English, he came to realize that assessment is an important part of teaching and learning. In the initial stage of his teaching career, his focus on the assessment was just to upgrade the students to the next level. Realizing it as a mistake, he started researching and studying assessments in detail that revealed to him that the assessment is everywhere such as on assignment, regularity, class performance, and interaction as well. Instead of just guiding his students to upgrade to the next level, he kept himself in the same status quo and tried his best to make his teaching lively and interesting. Teaching is not just to complete the course, it is also to know whether the students could understand what is delivered to them, he realized. He went on to assert, "I often ask questions to the students randomly. I also make my students review what is taught to them and present it too. And, of course, an assignment is the must to review their learning." Despite having less idea on the different ways of assessing students, there was the application of regular and continuous assessments, weekly tests, regular tests, written tests, and final tests in his teaching.

Ishwor's Current Experience on Assessment Practices

He has been applying different activities of assessment at present. He loves to teach and assess his students by role-play and demonstration. He said, "Role play helps students to pay attention in speaking with correct pronunciation and motivates them in their reading." He further added, "I make my one student read the text/lesson and other students to be judges how he/she reads it." Green and Hamp-Lyons (2015) suggest designing learner-oriented tasks and have self and peer engagement in assessment (as cited in Hamp-Lyons, 2016). Like the suggestions above, Ishwor loves to have a silent class when someone is reading and wants his students to point out the words pronounced wrongly. When a paragraph is read by a student, other students

comment on the reading with suggestions. He encourages his students to improve their pronunciation by providing effective feedback. He said that this is the best way of assessing the pronunciation of the language.

He remembered one of the activities that he did while he was teaching English in grade 10. He made his students practice listening tests from IELTS books. A lesson is a dynamic interaction between the teacher, course materials, and students (Allwright, 1981, as cited in Leung & Andrews, 2012). Ishwor's practice of assessment is found dynamic and proactive since he is emphasizing the students by using different teaching materials. One of the examples of the application of teaching material is that there was the use of IELTS listening tests in his classroom.

The students' performance was also good. He said, "I used my mobile phone. If we have a plan, we can make our students practice listening tests through our device as well." He is fond of searching different sources for listening tests. He also said, "I record my voice or keep a record of foreigners' voices and make them listen. After listening, the students should be asked a few questions so that we can assess their proficiency and the effectiveness of the test. He gives some common topics to them for speaking practice and its assessment. He said, "Last year, I gave some topics and gave them a week to prepare and asked them to speak in the classroom and school assembly as well. This is a free kind of speaking practice in which there is no bound of a certain structure and time frame." Friel (1989) recommends involving students in suggesting topics for the test or in generating some questions (as cited in Shaaban, 2005). The idea of Friel can help the teachers to choose topics for the assessment of speaking and writing as per the suggestion given by the students. It would be an effective and new practice of assessment of language since it provides flexibility to the learners. It also can help them to choose the topic as per their interest, level, and

individual differences inclusively. He shared his experience of assessing writing skills. He remembered that he had given his students free writing and gave feedback. He said, “Some students wrote well and some of them could not. One of the students did not write anything. The student thought that he did not have any idea how to begin, organize and conclude the writing. Then, I encouraged him to write and not fret about the faux pas. He then wrote and submitted. That was a happy moment for me”

Everyone makes mistakes when s/he writes in their preliminary writing stage. But, they can correct themselves if they have the curiosity to improve their writing. He is making his students remember two new words per day. This is a prominent idea to make the students read, memorize and use the vocabulary which will help them in the overall enhancement of the language. He also recalled another experience of teaching writing to his students. He said, “I teach students how to write by providing bullet points. If I teach paragraph writing, I ask my students to write a topic sentence. I further suggest them to paraphrase the topic sentence and include supporting details with examples. The paragraph ends with a conclusion based on what is discussed aligned with key points of the paragraph.” This is a good way of teaching how to write a paragraph. If students are taught by providing detailed ideas to develop paragraphs with at least a sample, it could be an effective way that they can bring into their writing practice.

Pawan’s Entry to English Class

Pawan is a hardworking person with an alluring personality. He has prolonged experience as an English teacher, trainer, and writer. His journey of learning English has crossed more than three decades. He narrated, “I started learning English from grade four. I just learned the basics despite having studied it for six years in my school.” He has learned English for about two decades which encouraged him to work

in the field of education though there were many opportunities. He remembered, “We traditionally learned English. We learned by translating it into Nepali. We used to have only one English book.” He even said that the English class was not much different from other subjects’ classes. He compared the English class with Nepali as his English teacher dominantly used Nepali language in the English class. He said, “The teacher used to teach everything by translating it into Nepali. There was a compulsion for us to memorize the word meaning and recite them in the classroom. There was the dominance of the Grammar Translation Method which also made him read, recall, and deliver for learning the language.

Pawan’s Reflection of Being Assessed at School Level

Pawan took an exam intending to upgrade his class rather than evaluating his capability. Examinations used to be run twice a year in the name of half-yearly examinations and yearly examinations during his schooling time. He said, “Though I appeared in different assessments repeatedly, I never got feedback. The teachers just gave us marks and completed their duty. Assessments were not taken to see whether there was an improvement in students’ learning or not. We never knew our ability and performance in English through the assessments in school time.” He feels unlucky today since he never got a chance to learn English through listening and speaking. There was no practice of listening skills and their assessment in school. Though the speaking was spractised informally, he could not speak a complete sentence with proper grammar and appropriate lexical items until he was in Bachelor’s Degree. There was more focus on reading and writing. Grammar was prioritized in the District Level Examination (DLE) and SLC examinations. He said that 40-45% of marks were covered by the grammar questions in the assessment of the English language and it was a traditional type of assessment system.

Pawan's Reflection on Assessment as a College/University Graduate

Pawan said that the English language teaching at his college was not much different from the school. The lecture method was applied by his teachers of English in school and college. Listening and speaking skills and their assessments were not prioritized at the intermediate and Bachelor's Degree. He got a new experience of learning English at the university level only and the assessment system was poles apart. He learned new trends of assessment from the university. He also acknowledged that the application of these trends of assessment fosters complications if there is a lack of enough knowledge, experience, and materials related to assessment.

At the university level, he finally perceived assessment as a tool to improve his knowledge. He became more serious in his study at the university level which encouraged him to compare his performance in different assessments. He believed that assessment was not only to judge what is taught in the classroom. He was motivated to give more time for the study. As a result, there was an improvement in his learning and in the application of the knowledge that he learned at his Master's Degree. In his college, there was an obligation to attend the examination hall for the assessment where the written form was prioritized. The assessment used to be taken by the board, college, or university. He said, "We could not get much improvement in our study at the college level since very few assessment practices were in application. We had mid-term and final examinations for our assessment and it was completely a summative type of assessment. If the different methods of assessment such as examinations, unit tests, project works, presentation, and interaction are emphasized, we can work harder and improve our study." He further narrated, "Annual tests were taken by the university or board and the results were published after four to five

months and in some cases, we used to forget the things learned before the result even got published.”

He found some changes in the assessment practices in university as there was an application of continuous assessment system. He remembered being assessed through attendance, classroom participation, presentation, interaction, and assignment. The way he was assessed in university incorporates all-around progress that is why he felt some changes in the perception and practices of assessment at the university level. He said, “I experienced that students can be assessed not only by paper-pencil tests but also built on their practical performances, practical improvement, and their participation in other sectors of learning for example presentation, attendance, and regularity.”

Pawan’s Reflection as a Novice English Teacher

It is believed that a student may be influenced by his teacher. Pawan had a similar experience in his career as a teacher. When he started teaching at a school, he taught his students the same as he was taught by his teachers at school and college. He taught his students through a lecture method where students had the compulsion to listen and follow him. He narrated, “I thought that a class needs a pin drop silence and students should not ask any questions to the teacher unless they are inquired.” Going to the classroom, starting to teach without any kind of warm-up activity and other activities were common features of his teaching when he was a novice English teacher. He would translate the text and traditionally teach the grammar. He did it since he was unknown about the different techniques and methods in the early days. When he got admitted at the Master’s Degree, he realized his misconception in the early teaching days.

Pawan's Initial Experience of Assessing Students

He thought that assessing students is a duty of a teacher. Instead of helping students to improve their learning, he simply performed his duty and left the students to fend for them. It was an injustice to the students since they have the right to know how they are studying, improving, and learning. They can discover their weaknesses and improve them if they are provided constructive feedback on time. He said, "I did not have a clear idea how to assess their reading. The students would be given a passage with some comprehensive questions to assess their reading. The nature and pattern of the question would be the same in different examinations." Similarly, the students would be given writing practices such as essay writing, letter writing, and other types of writing to assess their writing. He never provided any sample or an example that made his students face difficulty to improve their writing. For the assessment of speaking, some easy questions would be asked to the students. He had no experience of assessing listening. However, he provided marks of listening by referencing their writing performance.

He narrated, "I faced a problem while teaching writing in the early phase of my career. I did not have a plan on how to teach writing. I used to tell my students to write by just giving them a topic." He learned how to teach writing when he joined university. There, he learned technicalities of writing such as topic sentences, thesis statements, supporting details, examples, and concluding remarks. He, therefore, now has started teaching his students to engage in writing with different paragraphs, coherence, and cohesion. Hence, it is true that there was a drastic change in the teaching and assessment of writing skills when he applied what he learned in his university degree. He also noticed a problem with reading skills of his students. He said, "Some students do not take care of the tenses. The majority of the students copy

the whole paragraph or a few sentences to answer the questions. They add one or two sentences before and one to two sentences after that part. They do not put their insight and ideas while answering the comprehension questions. He would score 50 % marks if the students wrote unnecessary answers for the reading comprehension. If the tense was incorrect and the answer written by the student was the whole paragraph, they were not awarded any marks as per the marking system.

Pawan's Current Experience on Assessment Practices

Realizing the significance of all skills of language, Pawan has started assessing all of them in his practice. He believes that the assessment of listening should not be done only at the end of the class or after the completion of the course. He said, "Listening skills should be assessed often in each chapter when it is taught to the students. He gives equal priority to all skills while preparing questions for the examinations at present. He claimed that the present assessment system is much more advanced in comparison to the time when he was a student at school and college. He said, "Especially, listening tests in a formal setting are taken in grade eight and 10. I remember that there used to be listening tests at the examination centre of SLC exams right after the completion of the English exam". He opposed the practice of giving scores for listening and speaking at present by the school without conducting the assessment. To publicize the result and attract the parents, the trend of offering full marks in listening and speaking is developed which is a bad practice. We should not neglect listening and speaking tests because these skills of language are equally important like reading and writing. "However, we are facing some problems while teaching English. There is a lack of apparatus in my school. The school does not have good audio players. This is a technical issue of teaching," he added. On the other hand, many teachers do not know how to run listening and speaking classes and their

assessment protocols. Pawan faced the same problem in the beginning phase of teaching. He came to know how to resolve this issue when he attended different training sessions about how to conduct listening and speaking classes and assess those skills. He did not face any problems while teaching speaking skills. As he is teaching at a private boarding school, the students have nearly good communication skills in English. They have developed better speaking skills at the present.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the experiences and practices of assessment in the form of narratives that I developed from the English language teachers' interviews. The experiences and the practices of the research participants were discussed under different topics. I discussed their entry in English class, the reflection of being assessed in school, college, and university, reflection as a novice teacher and initial assessment practices, and current experience of assessment practices of each participant. I organized the experiences of the English language teachers in different categories as discussed above.

CHAPTER V
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' NARRATIVES ON ASSESSMENT
PRACTICES

This chapter attempts to address the first sub-research question of the study i.e. *how do English language teachers narrate their experiences of the assessment of the English language?* In doing so, I present the analysis of the experiences of the teachers on generating the meaning of assessment practices that have been narrated during the interview. Moreover, I not only rewrite the voices of the teachers as they narrated but also narrate my experiences on making the meaning of assessment practices through different themes.

Situating Myself

As a student and teacher of the English language, I have experienced assessment practices differently in different stages of my life. I defined them as they appeared to be in my student life and later as I perceived them to be, as a teacher. There has been a vast change in my perception towards it since my schooling to date. English was never the subject of choice in my schooling and nor was its assessment. English, for me, was a subject imported from a foreign land and its assessment was a daring procedure to be followed to fit into such land. In my schooling, I was always afraid of it. Thus, even though I tried my best, I could never get good grades in this subject. This happened to me in the SLC examination as well. I was pretty sure of getting good marks in all the subjects except English. During my schooling, people used to describe SLC as 'the Iron Gate¹⁹', and I was not an exception either just

¹⁹ comparison of exam with tough gate to cross for academic journey

because of the English subject. I was confident in other subjects but doubted English even though I had read and taken extra classes as tuition for further practice of it.

Appearing in the Assessment as Attempting a Daring Task

Since my childhood, taking assessments was like attempting a daring task. Passing them was like succeeding in such a dreadful battlefield. Rogier (2014) states that the term ‘test’ can make learners nervous. Therefore, for me, studying day and night was the main ritual before and during the exam. The day before and on the very day of the exam, I would tirelessly practice being afraid of failure. In my schooling, I never enjoyed being assessed. Sharing his experience on assessment, Ishwor narrated,

The assessment at school was horrible for me. I was from a government school so I took English as fearsome as a tiger. In those days, mathematics was easier than English. Everybody used to be afraid of English because neither they could understand what was asked nor they had an answer to write.

Ishwor’s own school experience on assessment was disgusting. From his memory, it can be said that the assessment has negative backwash. One of the causes of it might be due to emphasize *assessment of learning* rather than *assessment for learning*. The next probable reason could be the use of Nepali as the medium of instruction in all subjects except English.

Similarly, Dinesh had a congruent experience. Expressing his feelings about the day he appeared in the SLC exam of English, he stated,

It was during the SLC examination in 2006. I can recall that English always used to be the first paper. And it had a kind of fear compared to other subjects. English is said to be the most difficult subject. I had poor status in English and my performance was also the same. Teaching and learning English was not good in my school either. My preparation for the examination was not

sufficient enough to get better scores. The course was not completed and the learning context was also guided by the exam. Due to this, I was pressurized a lot for my better performance in the SLC examination.

Dinesh accepted that English was a tough subject for him. He realized that the teaching and learning process of English in his time was not good. As a result of it and due to the lack of time for preparation, he was not satisfied with his performance in the examinations. He recognized that teaching and learning were heavily influenced by the assessment. Green (2014) states that assessments are linked with rewards and access to the opportunities such as prizes, certificates, grades, praise, and attention from the teachers and these rewards serve as influential factors and motivation to the learners. From such a perspective, the conventional thought on assessment should be changed so that it can become a motivating factor for learning. Likewise, Ujjwal narrated his own experience,

Even in my time, the SLC examination was regarded as the highest of all. Iron Gate was the name given to it. If you cannot pass the exam, you have not learned that is what we used to believe when we were in school. If you fail in the exam means students who fail in the exams, if you cannot pass the exams or some subjects then people consider you as a student who has learned nothing. That is what we used to believe and everyone used to believe the same.

Ujjwal's experience reveals that appearing in exams was one of the difficult tasks during his schooling. He particularly compared the SLC exam with an iron gate depicting the opinions of people towards the exam. Butler (2016) states, "Children are vulnerable to adults' attitudes towards assessment" (p. 362). Ujjwal faced the same problem. According to him, failing a subject would tag a person as a dull student and

one with a potentially darker future. He also shared a story of an event in which his student's experience is shared. He narrated,

I had one student in grade 12. He failed in English about 5 times. One day, he shared his intentions with me. From his sharing, I came to know that he wanted to get pass marks in English to complete grade 12. He also felt sorry for his study. So, I helped him by asking him to read some probable grammar questions. He studied the same. Fortunately, similar kinds of questions were asked in the exam so that he passed the exam. He became so happy and expressed his gratitude. If the assessment had been practised in Nepal by giving equal emphasis on formative one, he would not have faced such difficulty.

The above observation depicts the real story of many students in Nepal. Many students are facing such problems since we have a trend to assess rote learning rather than performance-based learning. Stefanakis (2011) stated that our students have failed due to the use of obsolete assessments which inaccurately and inadequately measure their abilities. Therefore, it reveals that the conventional ways of assessing language may not measure the ability of the learners.

My participants mentioned that examinations rendered them anxious when they were school students. They have also experienced their students sharing the same feelings at present. I too have been through similar circumstances. The unannounced pressure of scoring good marks and fervently competing with classmates is one of the causes of fear. Another cause may be the anxiety of being judged and the dismay of having poor results. Shaaban (2005) states that students' progress and achievement in EFL/ESL classes should be assessed in a way so that it does not create anxiety for the students. Assessment should support students' learning instead of creating fear in the

process of learning. Speaking from my experience, the students believe that assessments are simply the product of the system and as the pivotal aspect of the system, they are obliged to follow it. They fail to realize the true intention behind the system and the schools and teachers also do not consider it necessary.

Assessment as a Product of Teaching

Generally, assessment is assumed to be a process of learning rather than a product of it. As per the formative assessment, learners are assessed to identify the problems and difficulties they come across while learning a language rather than evaluating just what they have learned so far. However, the language teaching of Nepal being guided by result-oriented education, assessment is considered as a product. Black and Wiliam (2003) argue that the way traditional summative tests are designed might not be very effective for the day-to-day guidance of learning. If our day-to-day learning is influenced by the result or the final product at the end of the session, the learning would not be meaningful at all. It shows that the traditional way of teaching and assessing language would not support assessment as a process. Ross (2005) says that formative assessment has tangible learning products besides the learning process. Ross further states that formative assessment can allow the learners to determine the importance of the process and the product of the learning achievement. Bacha (2002) also states that testing practices in ELT are dynamic and changing. It suggests an innovative and student-centred approach to assessment in today's assessment culture. Sabin expressing his detest towards product-oriented assessment said, "unless and until the student can read, write and communicate, we cannot say that the student has improved in the language even if they get a 100 % score in the paper-pencil test or summative test". His response presents that the assessment needs to be taken as a process rather than a product. However, the parents,

stakeholders, and students want better scores in the examinations. Therefore, Shohamy (2001) mentions that formative assessment is more democratic and flexible than the traditional assessment since formative assessment gives prominent roles to the learners, parents, and teachers (as cited in Ross, 2005). Similarly, Butler (2016) states that the assessment results are interpreted and used as an agenda by the stakeholders. Instead of evaluating their level of learning and what more efforts are required for improvements, they are running after better scores. This scenario discloses that the students study just for the sake of completing the course with better scores rather than developing language skills in a real sense so that they can use them in a communicative process. It will have adverse effects on the entire teaching and learning process.

Similarly, Dinesh, who had the experience of teaching English in both Kathmandu Valley and one of the districts of Terai, opined,

As a teacher what I observe is that the whole assessment is guided by-product or the outcome. I noticed that there is a trend of taking tuition and coaching classes in English and other subjects too. The students and parents believe that the students must get good scores in grades nine, 10, and SEE. They still believe that the students will not get good scores in English unless they are admitted to coaching and tuition centres in the cities of Terai²⁰. Content is focused on the present scenario in the case of Terai. Students are not given tasks and activities to improve their language. Instead of this, they would be asked to memorize the question answers, grammar and vocabularies, and word meanings from the question bank. I focused more on process rather than product when I was teaching at the school of Kathmandu Valley. I am trying

²⁰ one of the ecological belts lies in the southernmost part of Nepal

my best to change the trend of taking classes from coaching and tuition centres in the school where I am serving at present. But, it is very difficult to change the mindset of the students and parents since they are running after product rather than process. There is a practice of exam-oriented teaching and learning rather than improving the language. But, we need to be taking the assessment as a process rather than a product. Assessment is not only a three-hour test. I think learning and assessment should go side by side.

If we look at the practice of assessing the students in the eastern world, we could notice that more preference is given to the summative test. Completion of the lessons in the textbook is conceived as the prime duty of a teacher. S/he needs to complete the whole book and assess the students through a three hours paper-pencil test. We can even notice that the teachers highlight the important topics and key ideas when s/he is teaching the lessons. S/he will not hesitate to say that this is important for the examination. In doing so, the language skills are limited to the contents of a subject. In this regard, Dinesh said, “the contents of the language subject are taken more than a language. The teacher is programmed to complete the course and guide the students better in the assessment rather than the teachers teaching them effectively the language skills”.

Similarly, Ujjwal opined,

My teaching practices at the beginning of my career were guided by the exam. It means that my teaching was exam-oriented. I used to believe that I must complete the whole book before the final examinations. The textbook was everything for

teaching and assessment of language. I felt that teaching cannot be done without a textbook. Though there was a curriculum, specification grid, and so on, I did not consult them. Therefore, that was not complete teaching but I changed this thought at present.

Grabbing the attention of the students by highlighting the important portion of the lesson for examinations, they are obliged to accomplish the course in the assigned time and prepare their students for a three hours paper-pencil test ensuring a satisfactory result. Berry (2008) states that paper-and-pencil tests oblige students to respond in writing in a standardized test environment where the content of the test papers, administration procedures, and marking criteria are the same for each student. The trend of completing the course and preparing the students for paper-pencil tests highlights that teaching intends to make the students able to score better results rather than making them learn a language. Bacha (2002) states that students' higher expectations of grades or scores may negatively affect student motivation. If they are guided by result-oriented learning, they have no option to prepare for the examinations by hook or crook. There is no alternative way for the students to appear in the examination since the final examination at the end of the academic session is a must. I oppose the provision of evaluating students' learning only through summative tests. Therefore, I propose to combine formative assessment with summative so that it helps to gather evidence of students' strengths and weaknesses, plan instructions, help students develop learner autonomy, and build skills in self-evaluation as well (Cizek, 2010, as cited in Parsons, 2016). Davison (2004) states that ritual summative testing of language learning outcomes is gradually integrating formative modes of assessing language learning as a continuous process (as cited in Ross, 2005). If students are assessed by using different assessment approaches, their holistic language learning

ability can be measured. Hence, it is true that an assessment is a part of learning so it should support the students in their improvement of the language.

Assessment as a Learning Curve

Assessment cannot be separated from the process of teaching and learning. It is within the process. Continuous assessment tools such as observation, presentation, interaction, homework, and classwork play an important role in learning. There could be many purposes of assessment in specific but in general, the purpose is to identify the problems and assist accordingly. Harris (2016) states that positive assessment or praise is a prominent element of learning in language classrooms. If teachers praise the learners, it can help to enhance the learning of their students. In this regard, Ishwor said,

There are different reasons why we assess our students. It is done for knowing whether they have understood our teaching or not. By knowing their level of understanding, we can give feedback through assessment. Assessment is done for improving students' knowledge and ideas so that they can be improved.

Learning is a never-ending process and assessment is a part of it. On the one hand, assessment helps teachers to know whether the students understand what is taught to them or not. This is a formative process of assessing the students. On the other hand, the teachers must provide constructive feedback to the learners so that the learning improvement can be made on students. Green (2014) states that teachers' feedback can help the learners to know their strengths and areas of improvement and make them improve in their learning. Teachers need to embrace new ways to give feedback so that we can track the learning process and encourage the learners to give more attention to their learning. Giving feedback in the same style is not a good technique as the nature and perception of the learner vary. Different innovative ideas

can be put together while giving feedback. To have sound knowledge on feedback and the ways to provide it to the students, the teachers need to update themselves. As a result, the assessment can be a motivating factor for the teachers to learn new and innovative ideas so that they put their learning into application.

Similarly, keeping assessment as a milestone for learning, Dinesh opined, *Most of the time we cannot go away from the evaluation system. As a teacher of the school located in Kathmandu Valley, I have tried implementing a Continuous Assessment System (CAS) in the school I taught and it was very effective. I tried in my class first and then it was effective. By realizing its impact, the school implemented CAS and I think learning and assessment should go side by side and we did that one. Students were found more engaged and perhaps they were learning better. They were getting better opportunities for learning.*

In this regard, Paran (2010) states that teachers can develop their understanding of assessment procedures in their classroom. Teachers can learn the different approaches and techniques of assessment during the process of teaching and assessing the language from their classes. In a similar line, Sabin states that testing should be a part of learning and teaching rather than the end of the teaching and learning process. It is not just a means which may help the overall teaching and learning process to get better results. He further argued that assessment helps the learning, it does not end the learning. It is not just to test what a person has not learned or what he/she has not done but the goal of the test should be what the person has to do more.

Likewise, Ujjwal said,

“I came to know that teaching can be done through the curriculum. We should not solely depend on textbooks for teaching and assessing the language. Now, if I have a curriculum and specification grid, I can do my best to make my students learn a language and assess what they have learned so far.”

From the above sharing of Ujjwal, it can be assumed that he learned more about teaching and assessment. We can say that if teachers are aware of the curriculum and specification grid, there will be an improvement in the teaching-learning process and assessment as well. He builds confidence in the teaching and assessment of the learners which represents the assessment plays a significant role in learning. Lee (2017) has a similar idea on assessment, who suggests taking the assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Stiggins (1991) estimated that teachers spend as much as 50 per cent of their time in assessment-related activities (as cited in Rogier, 2014). From prolonged engagement in teaching, the students also can learn about assessment effectively. Therefore, we need to take the assessment as a component of teaching and learning which can go side by side.

Assessment for Testing Memorized Knowledge

One may often perceive assessment as a tool for testing how much one has been able to memorize the contents of the text. Therefore, learners are often afraid of the test before they attempt it, thinking that they have not read anything if the exam is organized with no long vacation. Here, reading means mugging up the contents rather than getting the meaning of the text. Puppin (2007) states that if a test is not related to classroom instructions, it enforces the students to memorize and the learning obtained from memorization is short-term. Pawan recalled his experience in this way,

Assessment in the beginning I thought was mandatory to measure the level of improvement of students and then as a teacher, I should take it while some kind of perception that I had as a teacher. I also took it as my duty because when a teacher teaches students, it is his or her duty to measure the level of their improvement. I took assessment as a tool to upgrade my students from grades four to five and five to six.

Pawan took assessment as a duty of a teacher rather than a tool for the improvement of the students. This is a false belief of a teacher since the core objective of the assessment is to support students for their learning. The above memory reveals that the summative assessment was given priority so that teachers are taking the assessment as a tool to upgrade the class of the students. Instead of supporting students in their learning, the teachers are running after quantifying the memorized knowledge and skills of their students. I had a similar perception on assessment up to my bachelor's degree. During that time, reading was memorizing the knowledge and information and reflecting the idea of what I could memorize. I did not read for the improvement of the language, nor did I read for my passion. My dream carried me so close that I had to memorize the knowledge as I wanted to upgrade my class which never made me fail in the examinations of my academic career. In the same manner, Ujjwal opined,

The perception of assessment changed for me when I joined my master's degree. Before that, there used to be a 100 marks examination for every subject. And we were supposed to memorize and remember all the answers. Textbooks were everything in our time. The assessment was also carried out based on the textbooks. But in my master level, practical assessment, regularity, and assignments were also prioritized.

At the 10+2 level, I had many experiences that reaped memories. I was fond of playing sports and the number of students majoring in English was two. I could be happy if my teacher let us play either volleyball or table tennis. I was accustomed to writing a note for the first 15 minutes and going outside for the games for the remaining time. There was no other way rather than to memorize the note to get pass marks in the examination. Similarly, I was inspired to read the summary loudly and memorize it and write what I could remember in the examinations. It was the time when I had examinations of grades 11 and 12; I even memorized the summary and notes by climbing the tree near the residence where I stayed for examination. I used to believe that learning takes place only through memorization and recalling and for this loud reading is a must. When I came to Kathmandu for my Bachelor's Degree, I gradually improved my reading strategy. From the Bachelor's Degree, I started preparing for the examination by understanding the text at a deeper level and connecting the information with different activities which made me an independent and hardworking student.

However, I oppose the idea of testing the memory power for assessing the students' level. Sharma (2014) noticed that the memory-driven testing system is faulty. To overcome the issue, Bailey (2017) and Papp et al., (2018) as cited in Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin (2020) suggest that the focus on technology and gamification in teaching and assessment are today's needs. Kapp (2012) argues that gamification is game-based mechanics, aesthetics, and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems. Therefore, the technique of gamification can be the innovative way of the 21st century to teach and assess the students by avoiding the traditional paper-pencil test. Hence, it is true that the ultimate goal of assessment should not only be to upgrade the students from one

grade to another one. Instead, assessment is needed there for the holistic development of language learning. Ishwor said,

We continued the practice of parrot learning till class ten. A funny thing is that our English teacher used to write a 12 Tense formula on board and we were asked to read it out. We used to memorize all the formulas like Subject, Verb, Object. Subject+VI+Object. Every student used to remember tense structures but rarely anyone could make sentences by using these structures.

I had a similar experience when I was in grade eight. It is one of the reputed government schools named Arun Secondary School of Dingla, Bhojpur from where I completed grade eight. There, I was similarly taught tense structures. My English teacher used to come to the class with his notebook and write the structures and examples of the sentences in different tenses. We were asked to remember the tense structures and repeat the same in the next class. If we were unable to tell the correct structures and the exact examples given by the teacher, we would get punished. There was no other provision except remembering the structures and the example of sentences in different tenses. Though I could remember the structures of the tenses, it was a tough task for me to write a new sentence using the tense structure that I read during the time of examinations of English. Regarding this, Sabin's experience is not different from mine. They were taught to learn the vocabulary, they were taught to read the text and then answer questions mugging up that means reading by heart. So, likewise, there would be questions given in the test papers and they had to answer the questions such as 'Who was Suren Majhi?', 'What did he do?', 'Why did he fail the exam?' According to him, answers- questions were supposed to be read by heart and they were supposed to write in the answer sheet.

Similarly, Dinesh opined,

Assessment is a part of learning. But, in the context of Nepal, learning is guided by assessment. Learning should be guided by curriculum, objectives, and teaching methods rather than assessment. But, the summative examination made me memorize and become a rote learner. I was not aware of the formative and summative assessments when I was in school. Now, I came to know that there was a dominance of summative assessment in my schooling and up to bachelor's degree too. I observed that the summative assessment has enhanced the life of the students but they are found to have poor engagement in learning and its objectives. I did not see the change in the skills, behaviours, and attitudes of students which are being caused by summative assessment. We did not provide tasks that can engage our students in their self-learning. Our assessment has not been able to assess the application, analysis, and evaluation. The focus was given to the assessment of knowledge and comprehension which is not sufficient enough for effective and quality assessment. Since creativity and engagement are not assessed; the assessment could not go beyond knowledge and comprehension.

Of course, our learning is guided by assessment and it is the main cause why the students have fear on examinations. One of the causes of perceiving assessment as fear is led by a lack of assessment awareness. Bacha (2002) suggests increasing awareness of the assessment of writing through questions and discussions, individual or small group conferences, clarifying the criteria for the proficiency of writing, self-assessment as well. Swan (1992) states that ready-made textbooks and exam-oriented ELT settings may influence teachers' abdication of responsibility for designing what students should learn and how they should learn' (as cited in Leung & Andrews,

2012). The assessment of memorization skills is problematic for the students. In this regard, Hall (2014) states that testing of memorized skills of language may lead teachers to teach what language is rather than how it is practicable. Therefore, the assessment should focus on performance rather than the scores of the learners in a certain subject at a certain level for the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

Assessment for Enhancement of all Language Skills

Although language skills are assessed separately to know the proficiency of a learner on a particular skill, in the context of Nepal they seem to be overlapped by each other. Tante (2010) states that the language skills cannot be taught totally in isolation but there is their assessment separately. Some skills are focused more and rest skills less, not only in teaching but also in assessment. In this regard, Dinesh narrated,

We had the speaking and listening tests after the written test of 75 marks and for that, we were sent into a room and we were asked a couple of questions and that's all. So in perhaps one hour, they took the test of about more than 100 students. You can imagine the speed and amount of questions asked in that listening and speaking test. There were no practices of listening and speaking regularly in school. So it was strenuous for us to be listening to the authentic/native speakers and answering the questions. I do not consider that to be an exam in a real sense. It was more like make-believe. So, it is very difficult to say that was the actual evaluation of our proficiency.

On scrutinizing the information provided by the participant, there seems to be considerable room for improvement of the assessment method in the school and 10+2 levels. The speaking and listening tests seem to be conducted solely as a formality.

The tradition of prioritizing written tests is still intact and reading activities are quite a rare event.

Similarly, Pawan narrated, “There were no listening and speaking classes in the formal settings. Listening activity never took place at school level; speaking was practised but not in a formal setting”. Talking about writing and reading activity, he further added that reading and writing skills were focused in his school but listening and speaking skills were discarded. The examinations were held formally twice a year; half-yearly and yearly in each class. In a similar line, another participant, Dinesh narrated,

When I was at the school level assessment was more like reading and writing. Later on, I realized it's not enough. Language skills should be checked. It is a kind of skill-based so skills should be checked. So perception has changed. There should be a different set of.....even when we design questions that should be based on a grid or that should be something to all listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Not only reading and writing. That should be a regular and un-disturbing manner.

He also shared his experience of being assessed in the SLC exam, “What I can recall about the listening and speaking test is; we were brought into after that written test of 75 marks listening and speaking for that we were sent into a room and we were asked a couple of questions and that's all”. He added that there were some questions for listening and for speaking, a couple of questions were asked. Just as other participants, Ishwor reported that assessment of listening and speaking took place only in the SLC exam. There were no classes but only the exams. He further reported that they were asked some of the questions to test their listening and speaking skills.

The narratives of my participants reveal that only reading and writing skills were emphasized in their schooling. Listening and speaking were neither taught nor tested in the school. However, in the SLC exam, both listening and speaking were assessed for examination purposes. In this regard, my experience is not different from the experience of the participants. Just like them, I also did not get a chance to practice listening and speaking in the school except appearing in the DLE and SLC examinations. One of the prime reasons behind having difficulties in the English language could be this as well.

Assessment for All-round Development of a Learner

Though assessment is often considered as a process of identifying what the learner has done or not done or what further effort should be given, We have failed to perceive it as a process for the holistic development of learners. Regarding the importance of assessment, Sabin shared, “It helps the learning rather than ending it. It is not just to test what a person has not learned or not done but what a person has to do more, should be the goal of the test. Analogously, Haghi (2015) states, “Assessment, in today’s educational milieu, is no longer solely teacher-centred assessment of learning, but a means of enhancing learning through greater learner involvement and effective feedback - using assessment for learning” (p. 10). And accordingly, the teachers have to work and understand the test.” Sabin further echoed,

Teachers should focus more on what students have learned and what should be done further to their future or to make them better in learning the language. So testing should be a part of learning and teaching rather than the end of the process. Assessment will help the overall teaching and learning process to get better results.

It seems that the teachers' role is crucial for students' learning. Sabin suggests taking the assessment as a part of teaching and learning activities. It can be seen from the idea of Sabin that assessment should be taken as a process rather than a product. The role of the teachers is to help the learners for their better understanding and it has a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Similarly, Ujjwal narrated that his way of assessing students' language skills was traditional. His perception and practice of assessing language skills can be apparent with the following narrative.

When I was very new in the teaching profession, before I joined a government school or before I joined a master's degree there, I used to assess students customarily. But, after I got my experience of assessment in my master's degree, my perception towards it changed. And especially giving marks like I used to give very few marks even for the correct answer because I was taught I was given the same way. But later when I learned about assessment and knowledge about all these things, my perception changed.

The narrative reveals that Ujjwal focused on what the learner has not learned in particular rather than what the one has done and how competent he/she is in the language. He considered language learning as a process of mastering a separate skill and accordingly assessed the learners' specific skills separating from the holistic process of learning. Ishwor also argues in a similar line, "If there is the system of regular assessment, there is improvement in language learning". He narrated that at the beginning of his teaching career he had felt that students had to be tested on what they had learned so far. With this perception, he tried to see whether they had read what he had taught them. But later he realized that could be an ineffective way of testing the particular person's language ability.

From the narratives above, it is realized that assessment is often considered as a process of teaching and learning a language rather than taking it as a process of helping a learner for his/her holistic development. This shows that language learning and assessing is solely perceived as a phenomenon for evaluating the objectives of the curriculum thereby discarding the entire development of the learner. In this regard, Rogier (2014) argues that the ultimate aim of the assessment is to improve students' learning so that assessment should not be taken only to give scores to the students over their mastery. Generally, how competent, skilled and practical the learner is in that particular language is neglected but how well the learner has performed in the test while evaluating him/her based on the curriculum is focused in the assessment.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the themes related to the first sub-research question of the study. I discussed the findings of this research question in six different themes. Appearing in the assessment as attempting a daring task, assessment as a product of teaching, assessment as a learning curve, assessment for testing memorized knowledge, assessment for enhancement of all language skills, and assessment for all-round development of a learner are the themes that I developed while analyzing the narratives of the research participants. I illustrated the perceptions of English language teachers on assessment. I elaborated on the experiences of the teachers reflecting assessment as/for teaching-learning as narrated by the participants.

CHAPTER VI

PERCEPTION ON PREVALENT ASSESSMENT

In this chapter, I present the English language teachers' perceptions on prevalent assessment practices to address my second sub-research question i.e. *how do English language teachers perceive prevalent assessment practices?* I also analyze the perceptions of the participants to explore what they and other scholars think about prevalent assessment practices.

Ishwor's Perception

On 25th February 2020, I called Ishwor through Facebook messenger. The interaction commenced with a gentle inquiry about our personal and professional life. Then, I requested him to give me 10 minutes to gather the information for the research. But, he asked me to call him after a few minutes. So, I called him after 10 minutes. When I asked Ishwor to share his perception on assessment, he shared:

Assessment is an exam. Now, it is considered a tool to evaluate the learning achievement of the students. It is also used for checking the learning. We can use assessment as a means to evaluate whether the achievement of learning takes place or not. We can use different tools such as exams, assignments, multiple-choice questions, oral interviews, cross-questions, and projects to assess students. What I feel is that the assessors do not have the willingness to assess the language properly. There is a lack of supervision too. They just think that students can be assessed by asking a handful of questions and giving marks to them based on them is not an accurate way of assessment. They give marks based on assumptions rather than real assessment. At this time, we tend to teach and complete the course for some months and give tests to the student

which is not fair to students. Pass or fail in the exams is taken as all in all for the assessment. If we check the creativity of the students, we can assess students' homework, presentation, and interview. But, our parents are not happy with this practice. They want an A+ grade in the exams which do not show the real assessment.

From his perception, it can be said that generally, the teachers perceive assessment as an exam. It seems that their mindset is guided by a narrower sense of teaching and learning. However, he also highlights some other ways of assessing students. He pointed out that the examiners had not been showing their accountability on students' assessments. Therefore, he suggests having monitoring and supervision on the assessment practices in Nepal as well. He also stated that the job of teachers is not only to complete the course and assess their students from the pass and fail tendencies. Contrarily, Aziz and Kazi (2009) state that the most prominent role of a teacher is to promote effective learning. Similarly, Ishwor highlights that the parents are also running after the better score of their wards' which is very shameful in academia. Hence, it can be said that the teachers, examiners, parents, and stakeholders of education should play supportive roles for students' learning and the students' assessment should be done in a way in which it is done for their improvement of the language.

Dinesh's Perception

Dinesh is an active person and has an intention to work for his professional works. He is serving as a teacher, teacher educator, researcher, and editor for his professional growth. I knew that he was living outside of Kathmandu Valley. As a result, I called him on his mobile number and talked for 18 minutes on 25th February

2020. During the call, I asked him to share his perception of the assessment. He narrated,

I feel that assessment is a frightening thing. Exams are taken as serious things. Even if there is no teaching and learning, there is a belief that one must do well in the exams. The teachers and students think that exams are everything due to which we are in problems. We are creating problems by ourselves. After studying assessment, I learned that it is a continuous process. The perception of assessment is being changed too if I compare how I used to perceive in my past days. The assessment of Nepal is result-oriented since we give more focus on the results rather than what the students can learn. We do not take care of the process of teaching and learning.

His perception of the assessment was stressful. He presented assessment as a serious phenomenon since it puts learners in a frightening situation. This perception proves that the assessment has a negative backwash effect. He believes that people are taking the assessment as a supreme thing. To some extent it is true but our teaching and learning activities should not be guided by assessment rather assessment should support learning. He accepts that teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders of education themselves are the prime cause to make assessments as frightening. He also realized that his perception of the assessment in the past was wrong. He suggests having a good link between teaching-learning and assessment. Hence, it is true that the assessment of the English language in Nepal should not be oriented by the result.

Ujjwal's Perception

Ujjwal was very dynamic and busy in several works besides teaching. Keeping it in my mind, I called him on 25th February 2020 to set the time to collect

information about the perception of the assessment. Upon his request, the next day, I called him on his mobile and requested him to share his perception of the assessment.

He shared,

Assessment is an exam. It is of two types at present and they are internal and external assessments. The assessment of English in Nepal has not become effective. The learning system of Nepal is guided by the result. Our teaching and learning activities are guided by the result. If one passes the exam, it is considered a success in learning. We have given importance to get pass marks rather than what a student should learn. We need to change the pattern of evaluation in Nepal. We should evaluate our students regularly. It will make our students aware of their assessments. They should know that assessment is for learning rather than passing the examinations.

He highlights the narrow scope of assessment since it is compared with examinations. He argues that our assessment practices were influenced by results and so that our teaching and learning activities are done for better results rather than better learning. The prime parameter of measuring the success of learning is being done through examinations. He accepts that the assessment perceptions and practices of Nepal need to be changed since learning does not only mean getting ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ marks in the examinations. As per him, there is an obligation to assess our students repeatedly so that students would be aware of their learning and assessment. Lastly, he stated that assessment should be done for learning rather than passing the examinations with better scores.

Sabin’s Perception

Sabin is a versatile and hardworking person. He serves in more than three institutions as a teacher, teacher educator, and planner. Since he is my colleague, we

meet regularly in one of the schools of Kathmandu Valley. However, I could not talk to him for a long time due to his business. On 1st March, 2020 I got a chance to talk with him. The conversation commenced sharing about our daily and professional works. After a while, I asked him to share his perception of the assessment. He shared in the following way,

Assessment is a system of knowing what and how students learn and help them learn with regular support from the teachers. But, I observed that people are considering assessment as a tool to check their level of understanding of the subject matter. I believe that assessment has some purposes such as certification, language improvement, and giving feedback. We need to realize that assessment is a part of learning so that the job of teachers is to help students develop their language skills. If they give prime focus on the improvement of the learners, their teaching and assessment become more successful.

From the perception shared above by Sabin, it can be assumed that assessment has a wider scope. He also highlights that the stakeholders of education limit assessment just to an examination which shows that they are focusing on the product rather than the process of the assessment. According to him, assessment is needed not only for summative but also formative. So, the job of the teachers is to prioritize students' learning rather than examining what they have learned so that teaching, learning, and assessment become meaningful.

Pawan's Perception

Pawan is a bold and active participant in this study. He works as a teacher, teacher educator, textbook writer, etc. During the call dated 1st March 2020, he shared his perception of assessment in this way.

Assessment is a kind of task that helps to make students creative and also check their understanding of knowledge. We can develop their reading and writing habits through assessment because if there is an exam, students are compelled to give time for preparation for the examination.

From the above view shared by Pawan, it can be said that assessment is there for the students to make them creative by giving tasks. He also highlights that assessment makes the students involved in reading and writing so that they become creative on their own. If so, what about the other two skills of language such as listening and speaking. This is one reason why our assessment system of English has given more priority to reading and writing. For example, it allows many teachers of English in Nepal to emphasize reading and writing for assessing students. Rita also tells that assessment is done to evaluate whether the students understand the thing that they learn in the class or not as per subject matter. If so, does our assessment system just become judgmental on the subject matter? Of course, we need to know whether the students learn from the class or not, however, if we just assess the knowledge and information that we teach to the students in the class, again our assessment becomes narrow, hence we need to view it holistically so that the overall performance of the student can be assessed.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the perceptions on assessment of English language teachers and their analysis. The English language teachers' perception of assessment may vary from one person to another and they would be a guiding phenomenon to direct and practice the assessments in English language classrooms. Therefore, this chapter gave the perceptions and analysis of the perceptions of the teachers under different topics.

CHAPTER VII

ASSESSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

In this chapter, I address the third and last sub-research question of my study i.e. *how do English language teachers assess English language skills?* This chapter specifically incorporates how teachers assess language proficiency. In doing so, I have presented the English language teachers' assessment practices in different themes. The themes are developed out of the information collected through interviews and also by incorporating my experience gained both as a learner and a teacher.

Specification Grid in a Nutshell

Practical Assessment

Listening: 10 marks

Speaking: 15 marks

Theoretical Assessment

Reading: 40 Marks

Writing: 35 Marks

Source: CDC (2014)

The above provision for assessment of language skills shows that the weightage for assessment of each skill is not equal. It depicts that more priority is given to the assessment of reading skills followed by writing skills. This could be the major reason why our teaching process is mainly guided by the assessment of reading and writing skills. There is also a gap between the policy and practice in teaching and assessing language in Nepal. On the one hand, the policy suggests that assessment needs to measure how learners use the English language and not what they know about it (CDC, 2014). On the other hand, there is discrimination among the language skills which has created confusion even for the teachers while teaching and assessing the language. The policy suggests assessing listening and speaking skills through practical examination which can only be seen in the document as the schools are

sending the practical marks of these skills without taking the assessment. Therefore, it can be said that our assessment of the English language was dominated by reading and writing through summative mode where students are administered to take a paper-pencil test of 75 marks.

Assessing Listening Skills

Listening is a receptive skill of a language. To understand the message and information, one must have receptive skills (Broughton et al., 1978). Listening skill enables learners to interact with other participants. The assessment of listening skills suggests whether the shared ideas are understood by the listener or not. Regarding the practice of assessment of listening skills, Ishwor said,

There are lots of resources now to make them listen. Sometimes, when there is a lack of the availability of an audio device, I use my mobile and make them practise the listening skills and assess the listening skill as well. Sometimes, I record my voice or download native speakers' sounds too. And students are asked to listen to it and then they do have a few questions that they have to answer.

Ishwor is trying his best to make his students take part in listening skills and their assessment. Alderson and Bachman (2001) state that listening is one of the least understood, least developed, and yet one of the most important areas of language testing and assessment (as cited in Brunfaut, 2016). Due to which, other teachers of English language need to emphasize listening skill as well besides other skills of language.

It was Saturday on 23rd January 2020. I was in my room at Bhangal, Kathmandu and Dinesh were at his own house. In my second interview and informal

talk in messenger call at 2:08 pm, I asked him how he has been teaching and assessing listening skills of language. Dinesh has narrated,

I have been using audio for listening tests by downloading them from the website of CDC. Last year also, I told my students to come to school with English books compulsorily. First, I gave information about what they were doing before listening to the test. They were asked to listen to the audio and write the answers in their books. I did it regularly as per the lessons and listening activities that are provided in the textbook of English. They were found active and excited for the listening test. It made me happy too.

Dinesh acknowledges the significance of the audio files of listening which can be downloaded from the website of CDC. His experience would be a way to utilize the teaching resources in the best way. His strategies of teaching and assessing listening skills could be encouraging factors for other teachers as well. Richards (2009) states, “Current views of listening emphasize the role of the listener, who is seen as an active participant in listening, employing strategies to facilitate, monitor, and evaluate his or her listening” (p. 1). As the current view of listening suggests the listeners to be active participants, the assessment of listening would make the listeners self-dependent. The students themselves can explore different materials to practise their listening skills and they even assess their listening proficiency.

From the first interview with Sabin on 18th August 2020, I came to know that he is fond of utilizing different resources to make his students practice their listening skills and their assessment. He seemed very happy and excited about everything he did. I heard purposeful use of IELTS’s materials for listening practice. He opined,

There are many ways I often use with my students. Similarly, by listening I know, I remember or I still give the questions even from the IELTS Test so

such questions can be solved by my students. If they are provided with an opportunity to listen, and if it is played twice, students do better even on such tests. It's not so difficult. The things we need to know about exposure are a must. So when we listen to a lot of such languages, especially the native language, then they can be better in such tests.

If we can make the practice of listening through IELTS, the students would get ample opportunities for enhancing their listening skills. However, it is not feasible in all geographical areas in Nepal and the teachers who teach English may not be familiar with IELTS. Indeed, the teachers who have taken classes of IELTS or taught IELTS can apply their learning of listening skills to their classroom. Buck (2001) presents three major ways of the assessment of listening: discrete-point, integrative, and communicative approaches. According to the author, the discrete-point assessment incorporates phonemes, stress, intonation, etc. Similarly, integrative assessment is also known as 'pragmatic expectancy grammar' (Oller, 1979, as cited in Buck, 2001). Gap filling, cloze test, dictation, sentence repetition, and translation are mainly used for this test type. Buck (2001) highlights the use of language in a wider communicative context. This kind of assessment is a key for communicative second language teaching. As there is the application of CLT in Nepal, the students are still found as passive listeners. If there is the use of formative assessment in the classroom, the learners do not become passive in the learning process. Therefore, the language learners use their reckoning of improvement, effort, revision, and growth in formative assessment (Ross, 2005). And, it is found that the marks of the listening test are being provided to the students without taking a test which neglects the real assessment of listening skills in the context of Nepal. As a result, the proficiency of listening skills is found measurable and it has a long-term adverse effect on the students.

Assessing Speaking Skills

Speaking is a productive skill of a language. One has to have a good command of speaking to make a sound proficiency of the language. Richards (2003) states, “learners often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course based on how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency” (p. 19). Taylor (2006) states that assessment of speaking incorporates appropriacy of grammar and vocabulary, comprehensible utterances, and meaningful communication.

At the appointed time for the first interview, I and Ishwor met at one of the cafes in Tinkune. We exchanged greetings and discussed daily teaching experiences. Then, I took out the mobile and requested him to record our conversation. After taking permission, I asked him to recall one of the classes of speaking skills and its assessment. Ishwor recalled,

Speaking is commonly done by giving topics. It was my experience of the last year. I gave topics to my students. I used to make them practice speaking once a week. They were given a topic a week before. The topic was ‘My Role Model’ which was given on Sunday and the speaking activity was carried out on Friday. five students of grade 10 out of 42 were chosen and they were asked to speak on the given topic for five minutes for each. They spoke nicely and I assessed them and provided feedback.

Coombe et al. (2007) suggest assessing speaking skills through simple tasks in which students could feel at ease to take part. They also state that the assessment of spoken language through tests of oral grammar and pronunciation is replaced by oral exams and interviews.

Dinesh narrated,

I used my laptop and mobile for speaking and its assessment. I gave topics to my students and asked them to prepare presentation slides. They presented the slides which were prepared by them. Likewise, I gave marks for speaking from the regular interaction with the students. But, at present, I found that there is no practice of speaking by the students of the community school. They even hesitate to speak. Therefore, I am having problems with teaching and assessing the speaking skills of language.

Dinesh is fond of designing tasks for speaking practice and its assessment.

This shows that dynamic and responsive teachers are always eager to apply new practices in teaching and assessment. Dinesh's perceptions and practices of assessment of speaking are similar to Luoma (2004) who states that the assessment designers can create the task and clear instructions. They can be ready with the task materials such as pictures and role-play cards. If the assessment designers design the tasks with clear instructions, any interlocutors can use it for the assessment of speaking skills.

Dinesh is teaching and assessing the speaking skill of language at present. He used to feel that teaching and assessment of speaking are not as important as reading and writing skills. He shared his experience and current practice of teaching and assessing speaking in this way.

At the beginning of my teaching profession, I used to feel that the assessment of speaking is not as important as reading and writing skills. Frankly, speaking with the students was tough for me even though I was a teacher of English. But, now I am encouraging my students to speak and assess their speaking. Day-to-day interaction and conversation is the major base for me to

assess my students for speaking. I often ask cross-questions to the students.

Likewise, I give different situations of real-life and ask my students to speak on this. Yesterday, I gave different situations (e.g. Ramesh won the table tennis competition, Sita got a new watch, etc.) to congratulate their friends on role play. They took part in speaking actively. Now, I feel that this strategy worked well in my teaching. I am also assessing their speaking by cross-questions, role play, regular interactions, etc.

His experience of teaching and assessing speaking proves that the students would be encouraged to speak or take part in speaking if teachers create different situations. The curriculum of secondary education also suggests the teachers enhance speaking skills and make them able to have global interactions. Therefore, the job of English teachers is to create different contexts and situations for speaking so that they can enhance their speaking ability.

Assessing Reading Skills

Reading skill is one of the significant skills of language and its assessment is inseparable to assess the proficiency of the same language. Harrison et al. (1998) opine, “States and governments often regard national performance in reading as an indicator of the effectiveness of the educational system, and take the view that assessment is too important a matter to be left in the hands of teachers” (p. 1). If we see the practice of assessment of reading skills of the English language in Nepal, we can say that more priority is given to reading skills in the course of teaching and assessment of it. Ishwor has a different style of teaching and assessing the reading skill of the English language. He said,

While teaching any text like an essay or stories or whatever is there I make one of the students read it out and all the students be a judge. It becomes

completely silent. Everybody has to be ready with a pen and point out the words which were pronounced wrong. And when a paragraph is read out, and then at least four to five students comment on it. It was a mistake, that was a mistake, and I also do the same together. And if anything remains I improve on it and then the owner who has read it out is given feedback. So while reading that was the best assessment I felt ever.

This is the best practice of assessing the reading skills of language as the students themselves are involved in the assessment of their language proficiency. However, it can be noticed that the objective of the above activity was to assess pronunciation rather than testing reading skills. The best part of the above-mentioned assessment is that the teacher has applied the student-centred approach of teaching and testing of English language. Dinesh has a clear idea of the assessment of reading skills. He said,

I follow the specification grid. Reading skills can be divided into different sub-skills. The sub-skills under reading should be tested. For example, in reading comprehension questions, we can make questions to assess inference, scanning, and skimming, etc. So I make questions targeting each skill. I prepare questions myself which are generally not found in the question bank so that I am avoiding the trend to copy and paste all the questions. I understood what the assessment of reading skills is and it worked well too.

From the above experience of Dinesh, it can be assumed that he has been assessing reading effectively. He knows the sub-skills of reading and assesses those sub-skills of reading. It seems that he is well known for reading assessments. He is against preparing questions for examinations depending on the question bank. This

practice would fill the gap between theory and practice of teaching and assessing reading.

Ujjwal loves bringing and utilizing an innovative idea of teaching and assessing reading. He said,

It was an experience in class nine when I was teaching a text called 'A Specimen of Movie Review on Jhola' from unit 13. I went to the class with a book review of Munamadan written by Laxmi Prasad Bhattarai. I asked them to compare and contrast these two items. I asked my students to underline difficult words. Students were asked to read and do comprehension questions. Besides this, I made some extra questions to assess their higher-order skills. I remember one of the questions i.e. what did you learn from the review of the movie. Later on, I also linked it with the writing portion of language.

Ujjwal is fond of assessing high-order skills of reading. He is not limited to assess the knowledge and comprehension level of his students. It is also found that he goes to the class with necessary reference materials for effective teaching and assessment of language. If teachers go to the class with the necessary materials and use them in the class, the students become energetic and enthusiastic. This kind of teaching helps to avoid negative backwash of the assessment. Hence, the new ideas and strategies of teaching and assessment should be applied by the teachers to make the teaching and learning process effective.

Assessing Writing Skills

Writing is a productive skill. Assessment of writing skills is also important in language assessment. Concerning the fundamental areas of writing assessment, Taylor (2006) states that it incorporates accuracy of spelling, punctuation, content,

organization, cohesion and coherence, range of structures, vocabulary, and format as well. Sharing the practice of assessment of writing skills, Sabin opined,

It is like you know given in the curriculum. I do not have a different experience. We just give the text, reading text, and some questions, essay questions for writing. And then also, we give some textual questions which they have to read and remember and write in the answer sheet. This is just as prescribed in the curriculum.

From the above practice made by Sabin, it can be assumed that the English language teachers are teaching and testing writing by following the ritual practices. To improve this trend, Bacha (2002) suggests teachers help students by increasing awareness and understanding of the proficiency level. The author further highlights providing students' sample essays that represent each of the grade levels from poor to excellent. If we assign students themselves on the evaluation of their writing as a classroom assessment, they can actively take part in it. But, for this, the teachers should have been informed about sub-skills of writing, organization, content, and other criteria of assessment as per the curriculum.

Reflecting on his fruitful experience with teaching writing and its assessment, Ujjwal narrated,

It was any day of the year 2019. I taught my students how to write congratulations messages in grade nine. I taught different parts of congratulations such as an address, name of the receiver, sentence of congratulations, the reason to write congratulations, and end with best wishes. For this, I used the textbook of English as a reference and I asked my students to see the congratulations letter written to Oscar Ojha which is given in the book. Then, they were asked to write a congratulations letter from the

exercise of the book as homework. The next day, they came with their good writing which made me happy.

The above story shared by Ujjwal represents that there was the use of formative assessment in his classroom. He was teaching about writing congratulations letters by telling different parts of the letters and the rationale to write them. If we analyze the above event, we can say that students learned how to write congratulations letters well. There was a good practice of applying formative assessment in his classroom without letting them know that they were being assessed for writing. Hence, we can say that the assessment should go side by side with the teaching and learning process which makes students comfortable to learn the language.

Likewise, Dinesh said,

I give them a title and they would write something. I set the guidelines for everything like title, length, etc. They give the first draft, I let them follow the whole process right from invention to final draft so free writing makes them collect ideas first, make them write, if needed revise, edit it and produce the final work. Three or four different products, they used to collect and once they showed the product I would test those under 20 marks.

Dinesh gives clear instructions to the students for writing including its different stages. He also asks his students to show their draft time and again and produce the final writing task. His idea is very similar to the suggestion made by Lee (2017), who states that the students should be given time to write and involve themselves in different stages such as brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. In general, it is noticed that the teachers just ask the students to write without providing them different stages and ideas to write. This kind of

practice and assessment can create confusion for the students. Lee (2017) states, “Traditional forms of classroom writing assessment put a premium on student performance evaluated based on scores” (p. 22). Therefore, we should not assess the writing of the students based on their score or final product. Writing assessment should help the learners to improve their writing. Regarding this, Weigle (2002) states, “ Writing assessment can be a positive tool for supporting student learning, helping language learners achieve their personal and professional goals, and promoting more effective communication worldwide” (p. 244). I also believe that the assessment of writing should support the learners to improve their writing skills. If the assessment of writing supports the students, they can enhance other skills of language and as a result, the communication becomes effective.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the themes related to the third and last sub-research question of the study. I illustrated the practices adopted by EFL teachers to assess the English proficiency of secondary-level students. The practices of assessment of four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are analyzed based on the experiences and stories shared by the participants. It is found that the teachers are trying to utilize the resources for teaching and assessing. However, they are getting problems due to the lack of sufficient resources. Likewise, the majority of the teachers are making practice speaking regularly. It seemed that they did not sit for one-to-one speaking practice. Similarly, the sub-skills of reading are not much focused while teaching and assessing reading skills. The majority of the participants simply make the students practice reading skills through the questions given in the textbook. More priority was given to teaching and assessing writing skills. It is found that the teachers are providing feedback for the improvement of writing as well. If we see the practice

of assessment of all language skills, it is found that reading and writing skills were prioritized in comparison to listening and speaking of the language. Hence, this chapter analyzed the gap between the policy and practices of prevalent assessment in our classrooms.

CHAPTER VIII

REFLECTIONS, INSIGHTS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reflect on my MPhil research journey. Then, I present the insights of the study which I found from the narratives and their analysis in Chapters IV, V, and VI respectively. I also make a conclusive discussion on what the findings referred to and how assessment may be employed in EFL settings.

My Reflections

The assessment had become a source of fear for me until I was a B.Ed. level student at Tribhuvan University. Since the beginning of my formal education, appearing in examinations became a risky job to me though I was included in the top ten students up to grade 10. Specifically, learning English and appearing in examinations of the same until my Bachelor's Degree was formidable to me. Since the beginning of the MPhil degree, I have had the enthusiasm to carry out the research related to my interest. I first wrote a proposal on 'Washback Effect in EFL Classroom' as an assignment for the course entitled 'EDUC-521 Research Methods in Education and Social Science'. In the second semester, I was suggested to narrow down the research topic in the course of 'EDUC 621 Advanced Qualitative Research Methods'. By following the suggestion of my gurus and friends, I commenced writing a research proposal related to assessment. The dissatisfaction or fear of assessment led me to carry out a study on the topic related to assessment. I wanted to explore the experiences and narratives of secondary-level English language teachers on assessment practices of Nepal. I had a thirst to know how assessment practices were taken. Therefore, I carried out this study to unfold my own experience aligned

with the narratives of the research participants who were teaching and assessing English at the secondary level.

The literature of the study worked as a foundation to articulate my ideas and explore the narratives of the participants on my research issue. During the literature review, I consulted numerous books, journals, and articles related to my research topic through which the study is scaffolded.

I reviewed different themes that are associated with assessment. Assessment and its types, assessment of learning, assessment for learning, test, feedback, specification grid, measurement, reliability, validity, and alternative assessment were taken as the major themes since they are directly associated with assessment and the areas on which I could explore the narratives from the participants.

Similarly, 'Constructivism Theory' was chosen as a theoretical underpinning of this research since I believe in generative knowledge which has a direct association with the assessment process. I do believe that assessment is a part of the teaching and learning process. This theory indeed highlights the use of questioning, exploring, and reflecting. I considered them as a part of the assessment and chose this theory to provide a theoretical foundation for this study.

To explore the experiences and practices of assessment in the past, I read the previous research studies that were carried out in Nepal and abroad. From the depth study on them by comparing and contrasting, I got suggestions and ways forward to research similar topics.

Moreover, I also reviewed the policy of assessment of Nepal to compare it to the practices of the assessment made by the English language teachers. The study of assessment policy made me aware of the area, scope, and suggested strategies of

assessment. It also made me aware of the provision of assessment as suggested by the nation.

My research objectives along with research questions suggested me to carry out this study under narrative inquiry. I also got a similar suggestion from my gurus and friends regarding the best method to carry out the study. As this study was carried out under narrative inquiry, I prepared and amended a set of open-ended questions under each research question as suggested by my research supervisor. The narratives and the experience of the five research participants, who are from Kathmandu Valley and outside, were gathered through interviews for the study.

The pandemic due to COVID-19 opened a new door for me to gather the first-round narratives from the participants through the ZOOM application. When I realized that the COVID-19 can be won by us, I proposed to meet them physically too. I met them frequently and gathered the narratives in their residences and cafes. I often called them if I had a problem understanding their ideas and needed more information to make the narratives rich. I transcribed the interviews and narrated their experiences in the form of stories.

Their experiences and narratives were retold in the form of a story. Their real words are also kept r to make the narratives to make them real and I analyzed them. The three chapters were developed based on the research questions. The narratives of the research participants and the researcher were shared in the form of a story. Based on the experiences and narratives of the English language teachers, the themes are generated and analyzed by looking at the literature as well.

Insights from the Study

Two research questions were set to carry out this study. The narratives and experiences of English language teachers on assessment were discussed in Chapters

IV, VI, and VII whereas Chapter V consists of the English language teachers' perceptions on prevalent assessment. The themes are generated from key ideas and similar patterns of the experiences and the narratives of the participants. From this study, I got the following insights.

Perception on Prevalent Assessment

The majority of the participants perceive that assessment is examinations. From their perceptions, I came to know that the secondary level assessment system in Nepal is traditional and exam-oriented. The participants also share that there is the psychological pressure of the assessment to teachers and students on assessment since it demands them to give more importance to preparation for better results. They also state that assessment should not be done for completing the responsibilities rather it should be taken as a part of the teaching and learning process. Hence, I can say that the teachers should be aware of assessment so that their conventional perception can be changed and it will lead them to improve the whole assessment system in the area of the English language.

English Language Teachers' Narratives on Assessment Practices

I learned that the assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning from the narratives of the participants. The English language teachers' teaching was guided by the assessment and it is the major reason why they compared taking exams as a daring task. As teaching and learning is a generative process, the assessment is also influenced by the practices carried out by their teachers. There was a huge imitation of the styles and strategies of teaching and assessment in the class. This suggests that the English language teachers should have sound ideas of teaching and assessing so that the prospective English language teachers would be benefited from the learners. I also learned that the assessment would be effective if it is perceived as a process

rather than a product. Butler (2016) states that there is a chance of having less or more experiences of taking assessment by the young learners and it is often critical to pay equal attention to each individual. If teachers try to give inclusive and equitable attention to the assessment practices, it would help to have a better assessment. It is also noticed that the assessment should not be taken as a means to check memorized knowledge of the learners. Moreover, I learned that the assessment of the learners can support the professional growth of the English language teachers. As a result, teachers have long been proud of their status as classroom researchers (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, as cited in Perrin, 2005). I came to know that the assessment should enhance all language skills so that all-around development of the learners is possible.

Assessment of English Language Skills

Assessment is a part of the teaching and learning process. To have proficiency in the English language, one must have sound knowledge and implication of the skills and sub-skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, Butler (2016) states that it is difficult to tell what exactly constitutes communicative competence or proficiency in a second/foreign language among the learners. I came to know that the assessment not only measures the level of the students in terms of language skills, it also enhances the teaching and learning process. From the study, I have realized that the assessment should have a positive backwash rather than the negative one. Moreover, I learned that the assessment becomes meaningful if there is a blend of different types of assessment such as summative, formative, diagnostic, alternative, etc. Jones and Saville (2016) also argue that the assessment should provide evidence *of* learning and evidence *for* learning (as cited in Seed, 2020). It is prominent to consider that teaching and learning should not be guided by assessment. Instead, it should support learning and the teachers need to apply assessment strategies in a way

that they can enhance students' learning. Bachman and Palmer (2010) state that teachers can use implicit assessment as part of their teaching. They further highlight that experienced teachers do this intuitively as part of teaching. Therefore, I believe that teachers of English whether they are with high experience or less experience need to assess language without thinking of it as something different from the teaching practice. As a result, they can adopt different materials and assessment strategies from their own experience as well. Importantly, corrective feedback on each skill of language can play a better role in the betterment of learning the language.

Conclusion

This study uncovers how English language teachers construct their assessments based on their practices. And most importantly, participants' narratives reveal that they have been in the process of learning and adapting the strategies and approaches of assessment, rather they just assess their students for upgrading their grades.

This study asserts that assessment is not only a judgmental procedure but also a factor to support students' learning. Teaching, learning and assessment are inseparable components of academia so that the existence of one is not possible without other components. Vygotsky (1978) used the term 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)' to extend the level of learning with the help of peers, teachers, parents etc. A learner can learn independently and can extend his/her learning when s/he gets feedbacks and supports from others and this is applicable in the assessment process as well. Professional growth of English language teachers is also possible through students' assessment since they learn and update their teaching strategies accordingly.

Some English language teachers take the assessment as a daring task and some of them take it as a curve for learning and a tool for professional growth. From overall reading of their narratives, it seems that the current assessment practices are highly guided by how they were assessed at schools and colleges. Despite having a lot of challenges of assessment, teachers have overcome them by reading the curriculum, taking part in training, studying it at the college and university level as well. The English language teachers share that they have updated their teaching and assessment practices by considering it as an integral part of teaching. Though they have given more preferences to summative assessment at the beginning of their teacher, they have realized that there is a need for formative assessment too. Summative assessment is not all in all for assessing learning. Besides, formative assessment can play a crucial role in the learning process.

The study further indicates that the assessment is not the only memorization of the content or the information of the lessons; rather it supports students for their continuous progress in learning. The assessment becomes conventional if there is the use of a paper-pencil test only. To bring and adopt different approaches of formative assessment and blend them with summative assessment is a job of all English language teachers. If the assessment is perceived as a product, it will have a temporary impact on learning. The assessment practice should give equal importance to all language skills for language proficiency. The proficiency of language needs to be assessed by giving equal importance to all skills of language. It is found that listening skill has given less priority in teaching and assessment so that there is need of giving equal emphasis on this skill as well. The study suggests that all language skills should be given equal priority for the holistic improvement of the language. As a result, assessment can work as a tool for the all-around development of the learners

and teachers. Pritchard and Woollard (2010) state, “Constructivist teaching is associated with learning that is made up from some or all of the following: critical thinking, motivation, learner independence, feedback, dialogue, language, explanation, questioning, learning through teaching, contextualisation, experiments and/or real-world problem solving” (p. 45). As a result, we cannot exclude different components of learning such as critical thinking, motivation, feedback, explanation, questioning, problem-solving etc. from assessment.

To sum up, it can be said that teaching, learning and assessment are prominent components of education and they go side by side. Hence, there is a need for consideration to blend different forms of assessment, use specification grid, maintain the quality of the test, provide constructive feedback, and eliminate negative backwash effect for successful teaching-learning process and its assessment.

Implications of the Study

Assessment is a part of teaching and learning activity . Teachers need to have a sound idea of the theory and practices of assessment as per the assessment policy of the nation. Innovative and practical ideas of assessment are necessary for teachers to make assessment practice effective and efficient. English language teachers need to blend different assessment strategies so that a valid and authentic assessment can be made. Stoyhoff (2012) states, “If formative and summative assessments are to be more effectively used to support learning, they need to be conceptually aligned and teachers need to be able to integrate the results of both forms of assessment into a more unified process” (p. 528). Similarly, the trend of assessing students by giving more emphasis to summative test needs to be changed and it should be supported by formative assessment. Analysis of the assessment is needed in internal and external assessment so that the gap in the policy and practice can be filled. Seed (2020) states

that assessment should demonstrate the relevance of language skills by observing performance on assessment practices and provide feedback to the learners. Likewise, assessment should support learning so that the learning becomes sustainable.

Assessment should be taken in a way that supports learners. The task as per the interest of the learner can elicit more responses (Carpenter, Fujii & Kataoka, 1995; McKay, 2006; Traphagan, 1997, as cited in Butler, 2016). While designing tasks for the assessment, the assessor must grab the attention and interest of the learners.

Teachers' professional growth is also possible through the effective application of assessment practices. Indeed, they must be provided opportunities to explore assessment as a part of their professional development.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Overarching Research Question

- ❖ How do English language teachers construct their assessments based on their practices?

Sub-questions

- i) How do they narrate their experiences of the assessment of English language?*
- ii) How do English language teachers perceive prevalent assessment practices?*
- iii) How do they assess English language skills?*

Interview Questions:

- ❖ How long have you been teaching English?
- ❖ Can you please share your experience of learning English in School?
- ❖ What was your perception of assessment of language when you were in school? Can you explain, please?
- ❖ How were you assessed in school?
- ❖ Can you recall some incidents/events/experiences of DLE or SLC or any other examination of English? Please narrate.
- ❖ How did you start learning English at the college/university level? Please narrate.
- ❖ What was your perception of assessment of language when you were at college/university level? Can you explain, please?
- ❖ How were you assessed at the college/university level? Can you narrate some incidents/events/experiences of examination/assessment in *Plus two/bachelor/university level*?

- ❖ Now, how do you perceive assessment as you are a teacher?
- ❖ What have you been doing for the assessment of language at present?
- ❖ Please narrate some incidents/events/experiences of assessment as you are a teacher.
- ❖ Do your students like/dislike the assessment of the English language?
- ❖ How do you know about their likes/dislikes about assessment of the English Language?
- ❖ Is there anything that you are doing yourself better in teaching and testing?
Please narrate.
- ❖ What language skills are you assessing to your students? L/S/R/W
- ❖ Please narrate one incident/experience of a class when you assess the listening and speaking skill of the English language.
- ❖ Did you face any difficulty when you were assessing listening and speaking skills? What did you do when you were in such difficult situations? Please narrate.
- ❖ Please narrate one incident/experience of a class when you assess the reading and writing skills of the English language.
- ❖ Did you face any difficulty when you were assessing reading and writing skills? What did you do when you were in such difficult situations? Please narrate.
- ❖ What differences did you notice in the assessment of language before 10 years and now? Please narrate.