

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LETTER GRADING SYSTEM IN PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS OF NEPAL

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## AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertations of *Bimal Sigdel* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership* presented on 8 October, 2023 of viva voce, entitled *Students' Perceptions on the Letter Grading System in Public Schools of Nepal*.

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The letter grading system is widely used in school education to assess student performance. While it offers several advantages, such as providing clear expectations and being recognized by universities and employers, it also has potential drawbacks, including competition, stress, lack of transparency, and unfairness. This dissertation explores the interpretations of grades 10, 11, and 12 students' perceptions of the letter grading system and its implications. By analyzing their perspectives, this study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness and fairness of the system, considering the context and needs of schools. Additionally, Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory and McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principles are examined to identify how assessments can be meaningful and valid.

The findings suggest that while the letter grading system can provide valuable feedback and motivation, steps must be taken to ensure fairness and equitable implementation. Educators, administrators, parents, and stakeholders need collaborate to implement the system consistently, objectively, and fairly, promoting meaningful learning experiences and accurate assessment of student performance. Finally, the study reflects on the complexities of the letter grading system and the importance of considering students' needs when choosing an appropriate grading system.

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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 degree at any other university.

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## DEDICATION

In the realm of dedication and heartfelt appreciation, I humbly offer this work as a testament to the profound influence and unwavering belief of my beloved late father Tika Ram Sigdel. His luminous spirit, brimming with inspiration, propelled me toward the pinnacle of academic triumph. The boundless hopes he harboured for my pursuit of higher education manifest as a resplendent blessing, forever igniting the flames of aspiration within my soul. In this poignant journey, his memory serves as a guiding light, an eternal source of motivation that whispers the sweetest melodies of perseverance and determination.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Anno Domini
CAS	Continuous Assessment System
CCE	Continuous and Comprehensive Education
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
DOE	Department of Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
LGS	Letter Grading System
MOE	Ministry of Education
NASA	National Assessment of Student Achievement
NEB	National Examination Board
NG	Not Graded
OCE	Office of Controller of Examination
SEE	Secondary Education Examination
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
TU	Tribhuvan University
UGC	University Grant Commission

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Letter Grading System (LGS) is a new approach introduced in 2016 AD at secondary schools in Nepal. LGS is regarded as a means of communication of evaluation system in assessment for learning. Due to this reason, I am interested in digging out the students' perceptions of the prevailing letter grading system. This chapter contains the background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, rationale, and delimitation of the study regarding the letter grading system.

#### **Setting the Scene**

The sunset was on the horizon as I walked through the street of the Damauli, Tanahun; at around 6 pm everyone was returning home from their respective jobs. There was a distinct buzz of activity as students, teachers, and parents walked around the streets. I could feel the excitement and anticipation as everyone went to different schools and colleges in the area. I had been teaching at one of the public schools in the district for nearly two decades. I have seen a variety of opinions from students, teachers, and parents regarding the present letter grading system. The letter grading system had been implemented in all the schools, and its response had been mixed. The letter grading system was a new concept for them, and they were trying to understand how it worked and how their marks would be evaluated.

Walking into the school the next day, I saw the students gather in groups to discuss their issues. I approached the group of students who seemed to be discussing the letter grading system and asked them what they thought of it. Some were in favour of it, while others were critical of it. I could understand the confusion and apprehension among the students as they tried to make sense of the new system.

One of the students, a girl of about fifteen years of age, spoke up first. She said she favoured the system as it would allow her to understand her progress better. Another student, a boy, said he did not favour the system as it was too confusing, and he felt that the numeric system was much easier to understand. The other students had mixed opinions, but all agreed that the letter grading system was something new, and they wanted to understand it better. I realized then that this was the perfect opportunity to conduct my research study and gain insights into the students'

perceptions of the letter grading system. I knew that I had to do something to bridge the gap between the students' understanding of the LGS and the practices of the letter grading system, and this research study was a path-finding way to do that.

### **Background of the Study**

Being a teacher of one of the public schools for nearly two decades in the Tanahun district, I have been experiencing a variety of opinions from students, teachers, and parents regarding the present letter grading system. Though teachers, schools, and government advocate that a letter grading system is a means of communicating assessment, students and guardians still do not have positive opinions about the letter grading system (Ghimire, 2019). Students want to get critical feedback as a means of their achievement rather than just getting grades (Rogers, 2022).

The evaluation methods in Gurukul and the modern school system differ significantly. Modern education relies on pre-planned exams with graded results but lacks opportunities for mistake correction. In contrast, Gurukul assessments were spontaneous, conducted at the guru's direction, and focused on skill development rather than grades. Gurus ensured students achieved perfection and offered additional exercises for knowledge testing after rectifying errors (Soni et al., 2018). I have noticed that students' learning assessment styles are changing tremendously from assigning numbers to grades, examinations to project works, and individual tasks to group tasks (Gibbs, 2010).

Students, teachers, and parents have different perceptions regarding the prevailing learning evaluation system in the country. Before 2016 AD, there was a numeric evaluation system, but recently, in Nepali schools, we have been using the LGS to evaluate the achievement level of the students. Letter grading is the system of evaluating students in letters but not in the form of numbers. Under the letter grading system, different achievement levels are formed, and the student's achievement is grouped into different levels as per their achievement. The main objective of the letter grading system is to convey students' learning progress and accomplishments effectively and equitably through clear, precise, and consistent means (Harbour & Miller, 2001).

The letter grading system assigns a letter grade to each student based on their performance in a class or course. Initially, in Nepal, there was the practice of a nine scales grading system that included A+, A, B+, B, C+, C, D+, D, and E. Nowadays, commonly used letter grades in Nepalese schools are A+, A, B+, B, C+, C, D, and

NG. An A+ is the highest grade and indicates that a student has exceeded expectations in their work. NG indicates Not Graded, i.e., the student has not met the expectations of the course. The letter grading system is beneficial because it allows teachers and professors to assess a student's performance in a modern approach. It also allows students to easily compare their performance with their peers (Haladyna, 2019).

The letter grading system is the constructivist evaluation that reinforces learners to motivate them to achieve optimum success (Namli & Şenkal, 2018). The LGS uses letters instead of numbers to group students into a certain category (denoted by the letter grade) according to their scores. LGS establishes an assessment and progressive ranking scale for student achievement by obtaining scores on final assessments on the SEE board exam and other final school exams (Kafle, 2020).

The letter grading system is essential to enhance the confidence level of students. Besides, the LGS helps open the door to quality education in higher studies because well-known universities and colleges are implementing the letter grading system. The LGS also helps students access scholarships in reputed colleges at national and international levels.

Perceptions are the internal feelings of a person towards a particular subject matter. In other words, perceptions can be termed as understanding a certain issue. The major impact of grading suggests that when assigning academic grades, students reward efforts in the same way that grades do, and grades are awarded to the students depending upon their efforts and the numeric marks obtained by them (Tippin et al., 2012). A person forms his understanding or feelings through perceptual thinking. As educational institutions implement a letter grading system, students have been confused about this. Public schools are managed by the public and funded by a country's government. In this research, I am trying to determine the student's perceptual level toward the letter grading system in public schools. The research area of this study is the two major public schools of Vyas Municipality Damauli, Tanahun.

Various types of research have been carried out regarding the letter grading system. They have concluded that the letter grading system is a means of communication of the evaluation system. However, Kafle (2020) posits that LGS has several obstacles and challenges, including implementation concepts and importance, LGS norms and values, teacher and administrator accountability, and usability and learner satisfaction. He concludes that teachers have not clarified concepts and their application processes to their students. Acharya (2016) also claims that most students

perceive continuous evaluation in the letter grading system as a burden, as frequent examinations can create anxiety and an additional burden.

In contrast, being an experienced public school teacher, I have noticed that students are confused and misperceived regarding the prevailing letter grading system. Few of the studies that have been carried out on a similar topic have concluded that the letter grading system is a failed system of evaluation because such research has forwarded one common issue: the letter grading system does not have any motivational aspects towards the students. Due to having arguments on and against the issue, this study neutrally tries to assess the public school students' perceptions of the letter grading system. However, none of the research has been carried out regarding the students' perceptions of the letter grading system in public schools in Nepal. Letter grades provide a concise, efficient, and widely accepted way to display and provide information about accomplishments. Grades have become an integral part of our educational system because they are an efficient, convenient, and international approach to student assessment (Hawkins, 2010)

The LGS is an international evaluation system in the process of teaching-learning activities. Whatever the arguments towards the letter grading system exist, this research is trying to dig out the existing situation of the letter grading system. As this research highly depends upon the students of two public schools, it may not well represent the perceptions of students of overall public schools of Nepal regarding the letter grading system. Finally, this research tries to establish a new understanding regarding the existing model of the LGS in the public schools of Nepal.

### **Statement of the Problem**

LGS is a new approach to students' learning assessment at the school level. However, students are still confused about how their marks are converted into letter grades and cannot identify their achievement level. Due to a lack of understanding about the letter grading system, all the students are not enjoying the current evaluation system. Educational institutions are not advocating the positive aspects of the letter grading system, and therefore, students are feeling quite uneasy about the letter grading system. When students themselves are in confusion, they may not be in favour of the LGS. When this problem is not solved, students will not know the beauty of the letter grading system.

The misperceptions articulated by various stakeholders through nationwide media have conversed at the execution and overall concern levels. Several

stakeholders, students, teachers, parents, educationalists, and advocates are raising their misperceptions and other issues on the SEE grade sheets that the National Examination Board (NEB) is issuing nowadays. To address such issues, the NEB is also addressing the reasonable issues and concerns raised by the stakeholders. Numerous misperceptions regarding the implications of the letter grading system are prevailing among students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. Concerning the conceptual confusion about how the new practice influences the parents, students, and teachers, the letter grading system is adjusting to be the international standard (Schinske & Tanner, 2014).

Nowadays, students are getting letter grades for their achievements. The students' answer sheets are checked in a numeric system, but their numeric values are converted into a letter grading system. Even in various classes and other term tests, teachers return the students' answer sheets evaluating the numeric and grading system. The role of teachers in using different technologies in the classroom is crucial, and educational reform must consider teachers' attitudes, skills, knowledge, and beliefs (Sharma, 2015). So, teachers must help their students to be aware of the positive aspects of the LGS.

Though the teachers and schools are trying to show the practical aspects of converting numeric values into letter grading values, it is not enough to showcase the pros and cons of the letter grading system. Various teachers' training is also being conducted regarding the letter grading system, though the teachers are confused about this. Similarly, students are confused about the letter grading system and are not enjoying the LGS. Variations in students' perceptions of the LGS occur not only in having different orientations and levels of knowledge but also in having a long traditional history of pass/fail or numeric system (Paneru, 2015).

The traditional pass/fail or numeric system has a long history of use in education, and students may have difficulty transitioning to the letter grading system if it is not effectively communicated. Letter grading systems can be beneficial in helping students understand their progress and growth, but the system must be clearly explained and implemented for it to be successful.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the student's understanding of the letter grading system in public schools. This research comprehensively assessed students' challenges in the current letter grading system.

### **Research Questions**

- a. How do grades 10-12 students perceive the existing letter grading system?
- b. What are the specific challenges that students encounter within the current letter grading system?

### **Rationale of the Study**

I have been a public-school teacher for more than two decades and have experienced the letter grading system as a means of communication and evaluation. So, it attracted me to conduct this research as it is a timely and crucial issue (Kolodny, 2005). This study's research issue is also connected to my similar field and area of interest; I am much more excited to conduct research in the public schools of the same municipality. As a result, the study's research findings become assets and constructive issues in my working field. When students still don't understand the LGS clearly, their guardians may also have misconceptions about the LGS. Therefore, this research also tried to eliminate the confusion of guardians via their children. Moreover, with the help of the findings of this research, the teacher will know their students' perceptions about the letter grading system and can formulate their teaching pedagogy accordingly.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is much more important as it becomes a tool to assess the student's understanding of the current letter grading system. This is a novel study as it assessed the students' perceptions of the frequent amendments made by the government. Besides the study's findings, the research reflects the current perceptions of the letter grading system of public-school students. So, this research is more fruitful to formulate plans to address students' confusion regarding the letter grading system.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

It is impossible to incorporate all the issues related to the topic. I have narrowed the study to that level, sufficient to assess the students' perceptions and the specific challenges that students encounter within the practice of current LGS. I have mainly focused on the examination of the perceptions of the LGS in relation to students' attitudes, motivations, and expectations, as well as challenges associated with LGS. Hence, it assesses only the academic grading; it doesn't focus on the other aspects of the letter grading system or the perceptions of students of other grades. This study concentrated only on the narrative inquiry with students of grades 10, 11,



and 12 regarding their perceptions of LGS implemented by Nepal's National Examination Board (NEB).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review part of this study mainly focuses on the research findings of a similar field explored by different researchers. This section focuses on a thematic and empirical review of different research works, theories that match the research area and recent policies that influence the current letter grading system.

This research focuses on the letter grading system's perspectives, practices, and challenges. The term perceptions includes attitudes, experiences, beliefs, and practices. We know perceptions are vaguer than practices, and perceptions are more problematic for the manuscript. Conversely, this study displays why the perceptions are more significant to the compassion towards the challenges and practices of the letter grading system. This part of the letter grading system is further subdivided into four sections: conceptual or thematic review, empirical review, policy review, and theoretical review.

#### **Letter Grading System (LGS): Conceptual/Thematic Review**

Conceptual or thematic review is the researcher's opinion or understanding of the concerned study, the study's scope, and the study's problem. So, the thematic or conceptual review helps the research topic to make a clearer basic foundation. Different research, journals, newspapers, and published or non-published articles are the major sources for the conceptual review (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

Susanna (2020) states the Continuous Assessment System (CAS) approach can effectively assess students' progress throughout the year. A continuous assessment system focuses on the continuous improvement of the students in the classrooms. It follows the remedial measures to improve on the spot rather than giving priority to the year-end examination process. It is an assessment method whereby the students' ultimate grading in cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor areas of the performance throughout a given period is assessed based on the holistic evaluation approach. It is the phenomenon in which students are observed continuously throughout their teaching-learning activities (Hoque, 2017).

The letter grading system, as we know it today, originates in the United States. The specific institute credited with its development is Mount Holyoke College, a women's liberal arts college in Massachusetts. Its president, Clara S. Lewis,

introduced the system in the late 19th century. The exact year of its introduction can vary in different sources, but it is generally believed to have been around the late 1890s. The purpose of the letter grading system was to provide a standardized way of evaluating and conveying students' performance in their courses. This system gave a more concise and understandable representation of a student's academic achievement compared to the previously used descriptive grading methods. The grading system initially consisted of three grades: A, B, and C, with A indicating excellent performance, B indicating good performance, and C indicating satisfactory performance. The system later expanded to include D and F, with D representing a passing but less-than-satisfactory grade and F representing a failing grade (Twain et al., 2008).

The numeric system was the traditional assessing system compared to the modern letter grading system. Though the letter grading system is the new approach, students, teachers, and even parents are accepting the current practices of grade sheets over traditional report cards (Susanna, 2020). The letter grading system doesn't discriminate against the students like the numeric system. It forms different groups of students having the same achievement level. Attempts from the last few decades and advocacy for the letter grading system have helped to practice the letter grading system in academic institutions. It is expected to have prior discussion and sharing of opinions with the concerned stakeholders regarding the new practice that will be implemented so that it doesn't create theoretical un-clarities.

At the secondary level, the LGS divides the students' learning level into eight categories from the bottom to the top. Each letter represents the differences in the student's achievement and defines the descriptors verbally. The marks obtained by the students in each subject are converted into grades. The Grade Point Average (GPA) is calculated based on the credit hour allocated to the particular subject for a week. Different countries have different practices for granting grades. In Nepal, if students cannot obtain a minimum of thirty-five marks in the theory part of each subject, the student is graded as NG (i.e., non-graded). NG in any subject represents that the student must attempt again to obtain more than thirty-five marks to pass (Curriculum Development Center [CDC], 2021).

The letter grading system is perceived to be more effective in assessing students' progress throughout the year, providing a better understanding of their performance in different cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor areas and creating a

fairer system for different groups of students with the same achievement level. Furthermore, the letter grades are accompanied by descriptors that verbally explain the student's achievement. The Grade Point Average (GPA) is calculated based on the credit hour allocated to the particular subject for a week.

### **Current Practices in Nepal**

First, the full mark of NEB Grading is 4 (like SEE). Class 11 and 12 result shows subject-wise grading where separate grading of theory and practice is given together with the total obtained GPA. However, aggregate marks (given in the Transcript) of classes 11 and 12 show the average aggregate GPA, including the total grades in each subject. In SEE, a person needs to secure more than a 3.6 GPA to secure an A+, more than 3.2 to secure an A, and so on in each subject. But, in the total section of the NEB grade sheet or Transcript, students find only their GPA but not letter grades such as A+, A, B+, etc. So, it only considers students' GPA points but not letter grades, and no need to be worried if students achieve slightly less than the so-called A+, A, or B+, and so on.

Sharma (2016) concludes that the current assessment system in Nepal is not ideal for accurately assessing student learning and determining who progresses through the education system. Reporting numeric scores and using arbitrary cutoffs as passing thresholds ignores the measurement error inherent in any measure of student learning. To address this issue, letter grades were introduced in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams in 2016, but it is recommended that this practice be extended to the lower grades as well. Nowadays, there is a practice of letter grading system in lower grades as well.

Furthermore, the role of formative classroom assessment and system-level assessments needs to be strengthened in the overall student assessment system. These assessments provide frequent feedback to students about their learning levels. The liberal grade promotion policy must be accompanied by robust formative classroom assessments and system-level assessments to promote and monitor student learning throughout their educational journey. Ultimately, the student assessment system must be reformed to ensure that students receive accurate feedback on their learning and progress through the education system with their true “ability.” In a nutshell, the current practices in Nepal are inadequate for accurately assessing student learning and determining who progresses through the education system.

### **Review of Related Studies**

Empirical review is the study of various research related to my research topic. The empirical review in the research study helps dig out the previous findings related to my topic and helps identify the research gap. Empirical review derives knowledge based on experience rather than prioritizing beliefs and theories, as it is based on measured and observed phenomena.

Tippin et al. (2012) conducted one research on students' perceptions of academic grading. This research assessed the various factors that affect the students' perceptions of the letter grading system. Students having higher academic performance in the classroom are supposed to get a higher grade, and in contrast, the students who are reserved and do not take part in the classroom discussion, though they have a higher level of potentiality obtain lower grades.

Different research has been carried out and is reviewed here as they are closely associated with my topic. Acharya (2016) has conducted research to assess the attitudes of students and teachers toward the letter grading system. This research was mainly based on assessing the attitudes of secondary-level students and teachers toward the grading system of the SLC examination. This was the quantitative research among thirty mathematics teachers and one hundred and eighty students. The research concluded that students and teachers have a positive attitude toward the letter grading system.

According to Thapa Magar (2017), students and teachers have positive opinions toward the letter grading system. This was another quantitative research conducted among twenty-five teachers and one hundred fifty students at the secondary level of a public school in the Gorkha District. Along with the findings of his study, he has claimed that students and teachers still have confusion, misperceptions, misunderstandings, and illusions towards the letter grading system.

Bhatt (2018) sought to explore the attitudes of students and mathematics teachers toward the letter grading system (LGS) in SEE from the Dhading district in Nepal. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data, which was then organized, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The findings indicate that both students and mathematics teachers have positive attitudes towards the LGS and that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of students and mathematics teachers, with the teachers having a more positive attitude than the students. The researcher

sought to examine the student and teacher attitudes toward different domains of the LGS, such as knowledge, implementation, management, and output. The findings of this study provided useful insights into how the LGS is perceived by students and teachers, which can be used to reform policy and practice.

Regarding the Letter Grading System, Link (2018) concludes that there must be on-the-job training or practical sessions before implementing the program. He also focuses that there must be an open discussion about the pros and cons of the new system. Well-oriented teachers or other advocates can only lead to training others. In the case of Nepal, for the effective implementation of the new policy, it is better to form a few leaders by orienting them. They can teach others in different districts, schools, and sectors. Students' academic achievement can lead to success levels only with the help of modern trained teachers.

Grades have become a crucial factor in student migration trends, particularly the sharp rise of Chinese students studying and relocating to Canada. To better understand the implications of this, a study was conducted by Cheng et al. (2020) to explore the grading judgments and procedures of 35 secondary school teachers from China and Canada. Through nine focus groups, the research revealed that fairness was the primary motivating factor for teachers when assigning and evaluating grades. This fairness was influenced by context and classroom management, learning values, external pressures, and the consequences of grade usage. These findings provided valuable insight into understanding the validity of grades and the importance of student advancement, mobility, and acceptance into educational programs abroad.

Kafle (2020) researched teachers' perceptions of the current practices of the grading system. He concluded that the current practiced letter grading system establishes a new and formative ranking scale of the scores obtained by the students in their classroom assessment or the final examination of SEE. He has concluded that even teachers are confused about the practical aspects of the letter grading system. He added that various challenges and obstacles are raised against the grading system as the stakeholders were comfortable with the previous numeric evaluation system. So, there exists a level of resistance to change. Effective orientation or workshop programs must be launched by the National Examination Board (NEB) to the concerned stakeholders before launching such practices, which have a long-term impact.

To assess teachers' perceptions regarding the new grading system at secondary-level schools, Dhakal (2022) conducted phenomenological research in Tarakeshwor Municipality, Kathmandu. This qualitative research claimed that there is a mismatch between the evaluation system and teachers' perceptions regarding the letter grading system. The research concludes that the letter grading system becomes more effective if teachers focus on classroom activities, project work, group work, and fieldwork rather than traditional teaching pedagogy.

In conclusion, the review of related studies demonstrates a wealth of research on the attitudes of students and teachers toward the letter grading system. These studies have revealed that, while most students and teachers have a positive attitude towards the system, there are still areas of confusion and misunderstanding. The studies have also highlighted the need for training and orientation of teachers to implement the system effectively. Furthermore, the research has shown that fairness is important in assigning and evaluating grades. This fairness is influenced by context and classroom management, learning values, external pressures, and the consequences of grade usage.

### **Review of Related Policies**

The policy-related review reflects what attempts have been made to date in the research area. It helps to know the practices, rules, and regulations formed by the administrative or governmental level. The government forms various policies related to our subject; often, these policies may be amended by the government. We should discuss those policies which directly or indirectly impact our study.

In Nepal, there is a growing realization that large-scale national-level assessment of student achievement is necessary to monitor the quality of education. To this end, the government has established the Education Review Office, which conducts assessments of school-level students and performs performance audits of institutions under the Ministry of Education. The National Assessment of Student Assessment (NASA) is a large-scale assessment conducted by the Education Review Office to provide policy feedback at the system level to improve the quality of and equity in school education. However, research suggests that the environment for the national assessment is still weak, and there is a need to improve the system and practice of NASA to ensure the quality of the assessment. With strengthened national assessment systems, Nepal can ensure that its students receive quality and equitable educational opportunities (Poudel, 2016).

Chapagain (2021) researched to explore the existing practice of evaluation systems in school education. He concluded that schools are the foundation of a country's educational system, and as such, they are a key factor in determining the quality of the education students receive. This is why the federal government has recently proposed a new structural model of governance to bring wider changes in school education. The study's findings on this initiative indicate that policies related to the school education learning reform movement at public schools should be formulated, and the school examination and verification system should be revisited. It also recommends re-evaluating the policy for student marking in practical exams, as a significant gap exists between performance in theoretical and practical subjects. Furthermore, the study suggests that the focus should be on rural municipal government schools, as their students perform satisfactorily. Therefore, this study provides a strong basis for all governments to develop and review policies, guidelines, and practices related to school-level teaching and learning and examination systems to ensure students receive the best possible education.

Dutta (2022) reported that education is the backbone of any nation, and it is of utmost importance that the economic policies formulated for Nepal are comprehensive and focus on holistic education. The annual budget allocated for the education sector must be utilized efficiently to improve the existing infrastructure, provide teacher training, and equip sports and library facilities. Policy analysts must effectively communicate the problems and challenges to policymakers, along with suitable evaluation criteria. For example, the assessment of students' achievements in Science, Mathematics, and Language should not be done through marks obtained in written exams. Instead, the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system should be adopted to evaluate students in a pressure-free environment. This system will assess the holistic development of students, along with their expertise in any particular domain- cognitive, affective, or psychomotor. Thus, the CCE system will help foster individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be accountable and competent. Therefore, Nepal's economic policies must focus on the education sector and prioritize holistic education.

Regarding the entry of the current letter grading system in Nepal, ninety-six vocational schools in Nepal were selected in 2015 AD for piloting the letter grading system at the school level. This program was initiated by the joint effort of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and the Office of Controller of Examination



(OCE) (CERID, 2016). In 2016 AD, the Curriculum Development Center (CDC) published implementation guidelines for the letter grading system. This entry of the letter grading system created a big departure from the previous numeric system limited to history. The LGS has forwarded the subject-wise grade and Grade Point Average (GPA) in aggregate with the descriptions of each category.

The LGS represents the student's learning achievement competencies in letters. The National Examination Board (NEB) of Nepal has repeatedly amended the categories and descriptors of the letter grading system. CERID (2016) states various confusions arise regarding the newly introduced letter grading system. Stakeholders like students, teachers, parents, and even educationalists express their opinions for and against the newly introduced letter grading system. Hence, it was essential to go to practical advocacy and discussion to eliminate misperceptions to overcome the issues and amend the guidelines as needed (Little, 2016). When strong dialogue was needed, the CERID and TU convened a national seminar on the letter grading system in collaboration with DOE/MOE and UGC Nepal.

Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) (2021) has amended the grading system, lowering the nine-scaled grading system to an eight-scaled one and introducing grade "NG" for the first time. Any student obtaining NG in any subject has to appear in another examination to increase their grade. This system has been launched to emphasize relevance, transparency, objectivity, and reliability in the assessment and certification at the school level.

School Education Sector Plan (SESP) Nepal (2022) focuses on a comprehensive assessment framework that includes formative and summative assessments to examine the learners' holistic progress. SESP focuses on developing clear assessment guidelines, rubrics, and criteria to ensure that the evaluation process is fair, transparent, and free from biases. The plan emphasizes moving beyond rote memorization and promoting skill-based assessments that assess students' critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and practical application of knowledge. SESP focuses on reducing the undue stress and pressure that high-stakes exams can place on students. This can involve adopting assessment methods considering a wider range of student abilities.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Theoretical review in the research focuses on the concepts of the particular topic, its definitions, and existing theories related to the research topic. Research

articles become more worthy and valued when supported or guided by related theories. In my research, I tried to connect Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory and Fundamental Assessment Principles for Teachers and School Administrators by James H. McMillan.

### **Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory**

A theory of cognitive development states that learning is an active, constructive process in which learners construct or create their understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences and interactions with others. The learners play an active role in their learning process, constructing their knowledge and understanding while receiving guidance and assistance from more knowledgeable sources, such as teachers, peers, and/or parents. It emphasizes the role of social interaction and joint problem-solving in learning.

Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory implies that learners' level of knowledge can be constructed not by the instruction but by providing those with a suitable environment to explore them and letting them form their theory based on a trial-and-error approach. Knowledge gained in such a way remains for a longer period. Its emphasis on learning by doing reinforces students' creativity rather than giving knowledge by the ancient chalk-and-talk method. The constructivist approach motivates students to learn with fun (Holmes, 2019).

This theory suggests that learners build their knowledge through interactions with others or experiences. My research explored how students construct their understanding of the letter grading system. I observed how they converse about it with their peers, instructors, and other school community members. I also analyzed how their experiences with the letter grading system shaped their understanding. Additionally, I examined how their prior knowledge of letter grading systems influenced their current understanding of the system. This helped me understand how students perceive and construct knowledge about the letter grading system.

### **McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle**

McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle is a set of guidelines to ensure effective assessment and that any assessment method is fair, valid, and reliable. It states that all assessments should be developed to measure the objectives and content specified in the learning goals and objectives; they should be well-designed, appropriate to the content and context, and administered and scored with accuracy; and finally, they should provide evidence that the learners have achieved the expected

outcomes. Furthermore, the assessment should be designed to improve teaching and learning, based on the evidence collected and learner-centred, improve the teaching and learning process and teaching and learning process and ensure that the learners have acquired the expected knowledge and skills.

McMillan (2000) states evaluation is an expert decision. Assessments are based on separate but relevant assessment principles. It affects student motivation and learning. The scheduled evaluation may contain errors, so it is better to have regular. A good evaluation improves education, which is always ethical and valid and leads to fairness. In addition, a good evaluation system always follows several more efficient, feasible methods and is properly incorporated into the latest technology.

I tried to diagnose the application of this principle on student perceptions through in-depth interviews. The data was used to determine what students perceived as strengths and weaknesses of the letter grading system, how they thought it affected their learning, and how they thought it could be improved. Using the assessment results to inform teaching practices, the research can improve learning by making the grading system more effective. Additionally, the research will help guide instructional decisions by providing teachers with information about what students perceive as beneficial or detrimental to their learning.

The essence of the above two theories can be drawn as the letter grading system is an advanced form of continuous assessment that prioritizes the formative teaching-learning activities and evaluation process. Activities like project work, fieldwork, group work, and other practical aspects can be included to motivate and engage the students in participative learning. It helps to enhance the creativity of the learners. Both theories agree on constructive teaching and the formative way of evaluation, which could be addressed by implementing a letter grading system in the learning assessment process.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework serves as a guiding blueprint for research activities. It is rooted in the predominant theories within a research field, which are relevant to the specific research topic. It forms the foundational structure upon which a research study is constructed. This framework encompasses a given theory's theoretical principles, constructs, and concepts (Dickson & Hussein, 2018).

In the context of this study, the theoretical framework centres on the qualitative exploration of students' perceptions regarding the letter grading system,

which has been implemented as an assessment method in Nepal since 2016. The formulation of this framework draws from postmodernism's guiding principles as applied in the examination of relevant literature. Furthermore, the study is deeply influenced by the Social Development Theory proposed by Vygotsky.

It's worth noting that the themes from students' perceptions and insights are not necessarily interconnected. While teachers' actions and students' experiences within the classroom contribute to these perceptions, individual encounters vary. Diverse cultural backgrounds and personal perspectives influence how students comprehend the letter grading system. Given the aforementioned considerations and a comprehensive review of the existing literature, a synthesized framework identifies two key issues related to students' perceptions of grading: the exploration of how educators perceive, comprehend, value, and experience the letter grading system and the identification of the challenging aspects inherent to it.

### **Research Gaps**

The previous research studies are related to assessing the perceptual level of teachers and students toward the letter grading system. Kafle (2020) has carried out research concerning the perceptions of teachers toward the letter grading system. Other researchers studied the perceptual level of mathematics teachers and students. As this study is mainly based on the public school and only concentrates on assessing the students' perceptions of the letter grading system, it is a novel issue. Theoretically, the continuous assessment and letter grading systems are regarded as constructive tools for teaching learning activities and assessment systems. Besides, CERID (2016) forwarded the concern that there are numerous issues and misperceptions in the letter grading system, such as issues of conversion, lack of in-depth knowledge about evaluation, confusion regarding different descriptors, etc. So, this research would successfully explore the student's perceptions of the letter grading system. The research mainly focuses on the perceptual level of the students of public schools in Vyas municipality, Damauli, Tanahun.

There is a lack of research exploring the application of Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory on student perceptions of the letter grading system, specifically in Nepal. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate how the assessment results inform instructional decisions and how such data can be used to improve learning. Additionally, there is a need for research to investigate how various factors, such as

classroom management, learning values, external pressures, and the consequences of grade usage, influence the fairness of the letter grading system.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the philosophical foundation of research, research approach, research design, selection of the participants, methods, means of information collection, instrumentation, data collection procedure from the field, data analysis and meaning-making process, quality standard, and ethical consideration regarding the overall research.

#### **Philosophical Foundation of Research**

My research aims to determine public school students' perceptions of the Letter Grading System (LGS). The perceptions of the students may differ from school to school and class to class because they may have different levels of orientation regarding the letter grading system. The teachers and guardians with a clear knowledge of the letter grading system can coach their students to have clear ideas about it. Finding a single truth related to students' perceptions is very difficult. Therefore, my study's reality is subjective and might be influenced by the participants' social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender experiences (Aliyu et al., 2015).

#### **Ontology**

People think, feel, and see differently in such a subjective phenomenon. Hence, my ontological belief was based on multiple realities. My ontological standpoint was to explore the multiple realities of my research participants, which helped to reveal students' own stories about how they navigated their personal, family, and school perceptions present in their lives as reasons behind their perceptions regarding the letter grading system. I truly believe that people experience and perceive reality in different ways. I strongly believe the notion of reality discards the existence of a single truth but considers that truth is something created or constructed differently by a different context. Thus, I interacted with multiple participants with multiple realities through interaction and sharing in my research.

#### **Epistemology**

As I mentioned earlier, my ontological belief is subjective, and multiple realities may exist; I believe knowledge is based on subjective phenomena like beliefs, values, reasons, and understanding and on observable phenomena. Neuman et

al. (2000) mention knowledge is constructed and co-constructed. In this process, deep interaction between the researcher and participants is essential. Hence, closeness or interaction with the participants can help them grasp the multiple and subjective reality, which is my epistemological belief. To my knowledge, every person in this world has a different understanding of a phenomenon. Truth, for me, is generated by interplaying with the diverse layers of power practiced in society.

Thus, analyzing students' perceptions of the letter grading system, I believe that dialogical interaction with students helps to produce knowledge by incorporating their experiences and perceptions in subjective ways by conclusively sharing their stories. I agree with Blaikie (2007) that epistemology deals with what we can know, how we can know, and what is supposed to exist. My research explores and interprets students' perceptions through interviews in their school household setting. I stand by the assumption that knowledge can be constructed by critiquing self and others. During the interaction with the students, I use dialectic interaction at their site and collect their stories, often retold or restored. Thus, a combination of ontology and knowledge of epistemology helps me to develop new knowledge of research.

In my experience, all people are guided by their grounded values. People try their best to give meaning based on their values. Hence, value's role is crucial in the meaning-making process of the research. Regarding students' perceptions of the letter grading system, there is the possibility of influencing the value of participants and the researcher. Hence, Creswell et al. (2011) mentioned the role of value exists in my study. It indicates that it is difficult to conduct value-free research; it has been value-laden. As a researcher, I explore my beliefs and values along with my participants' beliefs and values, which help explain what, why, and how values are constructed and followed in human life. I align with Cohen et al. (2018) that axiology refers to human nature and the relationship between human beings and their environment.

### **Axiology**

As a narrative inquirer, the value bond between me as a researcher and participant had been maintained; the narrative researcher always remains part of what is being explored, and the researcher cannot be separated from it (Creswell & Miller 2000). In this context, the value of the researcher and research participants might influence their expressions, ideas, and views while participating in the interaction. I value each participant as a source of new insight and knowledge and truly respect their ideas. Thus, my research aims to explore my participants' emotions, feelings,

perceptions, and opinions on the letter grading system. Also, my research value was based on the adversities and resilience factors that can be linked with their perceptions of the Letter Grading System (LGS) and the difficulties or confusions they are encountering in their lives, which provides me a platform to explore new dimensions of their genius and insight.

Research paradigms are the basic beliefs or worldviews about ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’ that assist the researcher with a broad overview and direction of the research (Willis et al., 2007). Following the interpretive paradigm aligned with my ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs by emphasizing the subjective realities, interpretation, and personal perspectives in understanding students' perceptions of the letter grading system. I recognized the social nature of meaning construction and valued the importance of narratives and storytelling in the research process. Linking with these views, my research paradigm focuses on the subjective realities of students' perceptions of the letter grading system. So, there should be a personal lens to analyze world reality, which may vary from participant to participant.

The interpretive paradigm helped me connect participants' different stories about their perceptions of the letter grading system. As an interpretive researcher, I started with the people and got down to recognizing their interpretations of the arena around them. I explored the knowledge through in-depth interviews with participants' experiences and behaviours, and they narrated their experiences in the form of stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). As the stories may vary from student to student, this research went deep down to the students' subjective experiences and gathered the ground reality regarding the subject. Hence, meaning had been constructed from students' own stories, linking with the researcher's experiences as well. I collected participants' experiences and stories and interpreted them to make them meaningful for narrative interpreters' paradigms.

### **Research Paradigm and Approach**

As per my previous explanation, my research paradigm is interpretivism, and its key concern is exploring human experience in the subjective world. Hence, as per the nature of my research paradigm, my research approach was qualitative. The social and cultural context of the participants where they live can be explored with the help of qualitative research methods (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006).

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research acts as a means to explore and understand the group and the individual meaning of a social or human problem.



Therefore, the research method adopted here was qualitative because I worked with the text in my research, which means transcribing the text, constructing meaning, and identifying major ideas through coding, categorizing similar codes, and generating different themes for discussion. This research was interpretive as it depended on the assumption that social reality is neither objective nor singular. Cultural, social, and human experiences shaped the social reality. This research gave priority to studying within the socio-historic context of the participants. As an interpretive researcher, there was a focus on viewing the social reality of the participants in their organic setting, and major attention was paid to the sense-making process rather than prioritizing the hypothesis-testing process (Natow, 2020).

### **Narrative Inquiry**

My key intention was to narrate the perceptions of students toward the letter grading system. Hence, the narrative inquiry was the key research approach in my study. According to Polikinglyhornne (1995), researchers use the word narrative differently. It means it has several meanings. He has argued that narrative within narrative inquiry was “a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity using a plot:” (p.5). Narrative inquiry is a research method that enables researchers to explore and understand individuals' stories, experiences, and perspectives. It is a qualitative approach that emphasizes the importance of understanding how people make sense of their lives, how they see the world, and how their past experiences shape their present.

Narrative inquiry allows researchers to understand people's lived experiences and explore the meanings and interpretations individuals attach to their lives. This method is particularly useful for understanding the complexities of people's lives and uncovering the underlying motivations and values that shape their decisions and actions. As a narrative researcher, I do not guarantee that narrative study is the only way to carry out the result of my study; rather, I claim that it is the best way to explore the students' perceptions of the letter grading system.

Green & Glasgow (2006) state a mutual construction of a research relationship exists where researchers and participants feel cared for and have a voice in telling stories. In my research, narrative inquiry supports me in representing a sequence of stories that can be generated during the data collection process by using an in-depth interview. I also believe that narrative inquiry can provide adequate information with the help of storytelling and narrating as per the need of the research area through

which I can explore the ways of human experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Thus, by using narrative research as a research method in my research design, I explored and then narrated my participants' stories and reflected on their experiences. The story was then shaped normatively to meet the rubrics of research.

As my research is interpretive, the data had been collected from the participants based on interview guidelines set by the researcher. Individual and intensive interviews were carried out up to three times to reach data saturation to dig out the participants' opinions regarding the subject matter of the research. To collect the stories from the participants, the researcher visited them and requested them to participate in the discussion on the stipulated topic, which was set as per the research guidelines. The close discussions with the participants were sufficient to carve beautiful stories on the existing perceptions of students regarding the letter grading system in public schools. It had always been considered that the participants could answer freely from their logic.

### **Profile of the Research Site**

In my study, I selected two public schools in Vyas Municipality. Both schools are rapidly growing their physical infrastructure as the government funds them adequately once they are declared model schools. Schools are in different wards of the municipality. A school with a larger number of students is named School A, and a smaller number of students is named School B. School A lies in the core city, whereas School B lies outside the core city.

School A is one of the reputed schools in Tanahun District and throughout the country. It has nearly 2800 students and more than 90 teaching staff. Guardians have the first choice to get their children admitted to this school. However, the school cannot take more students due to its physical constraints. The pass-out rate of the students in this school is very high. The school runs the study of Science, Management, and Education in grades 11 and 12.

School B is one of the oldest schools in the Municipality. It has a glorious history. The school has a sufficient playground for different types of games. Different types of district-level games are also conducted on the premises of this school. The school has 1100 students and 35 teaching staff. This school runs Civil Engineering, Management, and Education courses in grades 11 and 12.

### **Selection of the Study Participants**

Determining the sample size for open-ended questions or qualitative interviews is largely based on the socio-cultural context of the participants (Weller et al., 2018). Students are the first party as they face or feel the impact of the letter grading system. My research seeks to understand, represent, and explore the perceptions or attitudes of students toward the LGS in public schools. So, this research mainly follows the interpretive design.

I used the purposive sampling method to select the participants in my research because I wanted to target a specific subgroup of students. I initially thought of beginning with six students from two public schools in Vyas Municipality. The research participants were from different categories, i.e., from different grades, schools, and sexes. To make my study more worthy, I also took the expert narratives from one of the NEB officers responsible for policy formulation of the letter grading system. Besides, from Vyas Municipality, I took another officer who is an expert and responsible for implementing the letter grading system.

### **Profile of the Study Participants**

The six students were selected from two public schools, one girl and two boys from grades 10, 11, and 12, respectively, from one public school and two boys and a girl from grades 10, 11, and 12 of another public school. I took only six participants to achieve an in-depth qualitative analysis in my research. To maintain ethical standards, my study participants are pseudo-named Aakriti, Kshiring, Rabin, Diya, Suraj, and Renuka.

#### **Aakriti**

Aakriti is a tenth grader from School A and one of the intelligent girls in her class. She is dynamic, enthusiastic, and hardworking. She started to study in the same school from the nursery. She had a younger brother studying in the same school form. Her father was a public school teacher teaching in another school in the same Municipality. Her mother was an employee of an INGO. Her parents were also taking care of her study.

#### **Kshiring**

Kshiring is a little bit of an introverted student in grade 10 from School B. He also studied in the same school as a nursery student. He was helpful and could influence friends. His younger brother was also a student in the same school in grade

5. His father was a social worker, and his mother was a housewife. Though his parents were aware of his study, they didn't directly support or guide him in his study.

### **Rabin**

Rabin, an eleven-graded student from School A, was very hard-working. He secured an average level in the evaluation conducted by his school. His father and mother lived in their village, but he lived near the school as a tenant. Mostly, he prepared his food by himself and took care of his studies simultaneously. His parents came to help him, especially during his examination. He was self-disciplined, obedient, responsible, and hard-working, so he could continuously upgrade his achievement level.

### **Diya**

Diya was an average student in her class. She was an eleven-graded student from School B. She was an extrovert and cooperative among her friends. She was very influential and could build teamwork with her friends. She was admitted to her school a year ago. Her father was abroad, and her mother was a housewife. She did not get direct assistance in her study from her parents, but her parents were very aware of support her study from their side.

### **Suraj**

He was an avid learner, studying in grade 12 in School A in the management field. Though he was regarded as an average student in class, his enthusiasm and drive to do something innovative were admirable. His home life consisted of his father, a driver who drove a micro from Damauli to Pokhara, and his mother, a housewife. His younger sister studied in the same school, and he attended it since fourth grade. He had always been passionate about learning something new and thus continued to pursue his dreams of doing something innovative.

### **Renuka**

Renuka was a young girl in grade 12 representing School B, a living example of a lady with a burning candle. Though she had a positive attitude, smile, and determination to make the best, her life had been filled with difficulties due to her poor economic condition. Currently, she is a grade twelve student studying management; she was also the captain of her school and loved to guide the younger students. She had great leadership skills and was designated leader of any team she put together. Her character strengths inspire everyone she meets. Without a doubt, she was a role model for many.

### **Means of Narratives Collection**

The major means of the narrative collection that I used in this research were intensive interviews with the participants and field visits to access the real understanding of the participants regarding the research issue. The in-depth interviews with the participants helped carve their beautiful stories regarding the letter grading system. The conclusion of the research was drawn based on the discussion under the generated themes through text transcription, constructing meaning, and identifying major ideas through coding and categorizing similar codes, generating the different themes for discussion. I visited my participants multiple times to satisfy my purpose of study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data cleaning step is important because it helps researchers understand the stories better and find important ideas. For data cleaning, I carefully reviewed all the stories and information collected. It is done to tidy up messy information to ensure its correct and makes sense. I looked closely at the stories to find any mistakes or errors that might have happened when getting the information.

The data collected from the participants are presented in the most reliable method. As a narrative researcher, I coded the collected data, categorized similar codes, and developed different themes for the discussion. This process made it easy to analyze and interpret the data. As the study was based on theoretical aspects, narrative tools, i.e., the development of stories of the participants were used to analyze and interpret the responses (Krauss, 2005). The findings of this research were drawn depending on the opinions reflected by the participants. Since this research was interpretive in design, trustworthiness and authenticity were the key quality standards.

### **Quality Standards**

By reviewing other scholars' ideas, conducting intensive one-to-one discussions among participants, and finding meaning, I created new knowledge that added a bit of credibility to my research. A researcher needs to value temporality, sociality, place, and trustworthiness at the time of information collection.

### **Temporality**

Every student had a different background regarding their past, influencing their present practices and future behavior. As a narrative researcher, I fully respected the participants' prevailing situation. I attempted to gather the concurrent incidents and their influences on the research topic. The trustworthiness of the research findings

depends upon temporality (Creswell & Poth, 2016). So, temporality encompasses the chronological structure of a story but also goes beyond that to explore how individuals interpret and make sense of time.

### **Sociality**

Analyzing sociality in my research involved examining how social dynamics and relationships impacted the narrative's content, style, and meaning. I formed the natural societal context to get the responses from the participants (Vanner, 2015). The natural setting of the particular place helped to collect the stories of the research participants effectively. There was no artificial setting or window decoration to collect the information but the focus was on what types of societal contexts were comfortable for them.

### **Place**

Place in my research was declared as per the context and need of the researcher. To fix the place, I had taken the prior consent of my research participants. (Tracy & Robles, 2013). Place plays a crucial role in collecting narratives from the participants. As a narrative researcher, I guaranteed first that there was no influence on the place to collect the stories.

### **Trustworthiness**

I gathered the real stories of the participants. The participants' stories were organic and non-window-decorated (Schwandt, 2001). To make this study more realistic and valuable I had been working with text that I had collected beautiful stories of the research participants through intensive interviews. It means the text was transcribed, constructing meaning and identifying major ideas through coding, categorizing similar codes, and generating different themes for discussion. The conclusion of the research had to be drawn depending on the discussion on themes, which increased the credibility of my study.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Ethics, in general, is the person's behavior, which is set by the individual morals. As per Clandinin and Murphy (2007), regarding ethical considerations, the responses were selected in a very friendly manner and I didn't become judgmental ensuring that the researcher did not have any inclination toward the opinions reflected by the participants so that it guarantees the organic taste of the research procedure and findings. The research participants were minors, so I obtained consent from their parents to involve them in my research study. Besides, the participants' approval was

also taken before the information collection procedure because it is very inappropriate to obtain the consent of the participants once the data has been collected (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). I informed all the participants about their confidentiality of their own. I assured them I would not use their details and names anywhere, so I used pseudonyms. I fully followed the ethical guidelines (See Appendices A, B & C) as stated by Simon and Usher (2000). Further, I maintained the ethical considerations that a qualitative researcher must follow per the KUSOED dissertation guidelines.

## CHAPTER IV

### TEXT INTERPRETATION AND MEANING-MAKING

This chapter portrays the narratives collected from the various participants. The narratives here are presented in a very organic and natural form, obtained during discussion and in-depth interviews with participants. While doing so, I critically analyzed and interpreted their experiences, including my critical self-reflection and the various literature (Mezirow, 2018). The in-depth interview's central focus was to capture participants' experiences regarding their perceptions of the letter grading system.

With the help of the research guidelines, I interviewed participants to explore their perceptions of LGS. Besides, I tried to explore the opportunities and threats that the students faced during their assessment. By being involved in several interview phases, I tried to explore their views, perspectives, and experiences by going deeper into their thoughts.

#### **Participants' Responses to the Topic**

Participants' perceptions of the topic have been studied many times until the data became saturated. Early research focused on how participants provided information about the particular topic, including their motivations and the accuracy of their reports. With the advent of new technology, how participants responded to questions and the depth of their responses has been further explored. My research examined how participants' responses were shaped by social, cultural, and political influences and their personal biases and experiences. The narratives collected here are based on the interview guidelines I already formed (See Appendix A). Narratives collected in this way are supposed to help to make effective discussion later in the next chapter. Additionally, the research investigated how participants' responses were affected by the questions they were asked and the context in which they lived (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013).

#### **Exploring Aakriti's Perceptions of Letter Grading System**

On Saturday morning at around 10 am, the sky was fully open and morning rays of the sun were showering the earth. The atmosphere was very pleasant at the same time I entered Aakriti's home, one of my participants as per the schedule we had fixed the previous day by phone call. When I reached her house, she was sitting on



her terrace enjoying the sunlight of the winter day. I asked her how the day was going, and she replied that she had sat for Saturday's exam at school, had just returned from school, and was sunbathing after lunch. I asked her about her preparation for SEE. She replied that the preparation was going well and extra classes were going on regularly from 9 am to 6 pm. She added that their school was also regularly conducting exams every Saturday.

I asked her how the evaluation system was in school education as she was a student in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and had completed the primary and lower secondary level and might have experienced different kinds of evaluation systems used in school education. I also requested her to share her opinion on the evaluation system adopted by the school from the past up to then whether the same or different. She replied:

*Our primary level evaluation had been done by the marks system where we used to get marks in each subject and the results used to be published based on the marks obtained in each subject.*

However, after going to the lower secondary level, there had been a slight change in the evaluation system, according to which continuous assessment had been done for evaluation. A system called CAS (Continuous Assessment System) was used. Giving marks from the Reza system had also been developed based on their obtained marks. In the Reza system, Reza is used to evaluate students' achievement. The students who get three Reza are those with a clear concept of the topic. Accordingly, based on the marks they had obtained and the regular evaluation done by the teachers, an arrangement was made to publish their results as a whole. But she was at a secondary level then. So, as per her own experience, grades 9 and 10 were being evaluated according to the letter grading system. She added that the current grading system was internationally recognized and valid.

After getting her response, I wanted to know what she knew about the numeric and letter grading systems used in the student evaluation system. Responding to my query, she said *the numeric system was applied when we were up to class eight, but after we reached classes 9 and 10, our school implemented a letter grading system.* This grading system was implemented in her school and simultaneously by the Nepalese government throughout the Kingdom of Nepal. She further added:

*I also know that in this system, none of the students, even if you cannot know how many marks you have obtained in a particular subject, can just know which level or group the student is in according to the marks obtained by*

*him/her. We used to know that we were ahead or behind our friends by the marks, but this is not the case in the letter grading system.*

The grading system determines different grades with a difference of 10% marks. It means that our grade group will be the same even if there is a difference of up to 10 marks in a subject between our friends. It is likely to demoralize the students when there is high competition between two or more. After knowing her views, I further asked what type of assessment system was currently used in her school. She revealed:

*According to the government of Nepal and the National Examination Board, the same letter grading system is being used throughout Nepal in school education; based on that policy, the same letter grading system was implemented by our school as well.*

According to her, using a letter grading system created other problems for the students habituated to evaluating the scoring system. This was because their parents and even their parents did not understand the letter grading system. However, all her school students were being evaluated by the letter grading system.

Then I asked, “Which of the evaluation systems is better either the letter grading system or the numeric system used in school education?” She said *we have been accustomed to using the numeric system as we used it for a long time. We find the numeric system easier.*

She further added

*After we have taken the exam, if I get the highest marks and my friend also gets higher marks, we can easily evaluate it in our own way. When it is evaluated according to the letter grading system, there is no difference in the marks we get. We only know that we are in particular groups based on letter grades. In a way, the letter grading system is fine because it is also applied internationally. Still, when there is a difference in our evaluation, we feel that the evaluation environment is unfair. In the numeric system, even if there is a difference of only a 1/2 mark among our friends, there used to be a difference in the result.*

After getting her response, I learned that she was not satisfied with the evaluation of the letter grading system as this system could demoralize the students who performed higher due to the margin of marks to distinguish grades.

Finally, when I wanted to know her opinion regarding the positive and negative aspects of the letter grading system, she opined that there wouldn't be any excessive pressure to obtain full marks in the letter grading system as only the targeted marks could help to achieve the highest grade. But disappointedly, she finally mentioned that even though it was widely used and regarded as an advanced evaluation system, there would not be transparency in the letter grading system. As a result, it can decrease the performance of the students and can demoralize them.

She repeatedly mentioned that, *in the scoring system, we get different marks in any subject. We know what marks my friend got and what marks I got.* From this, in the case of competition between their classmates, even if it is by one point, which is ahead and which is behind? It is also known, but as far as I understand, the scoring system is not an internationally recognized evaluation system these days. She revealed that:

*When the letter grading system is used in school, the grades we get among our friends are largely the same, especially among our friends who have the same grades in the competition; we are getting the same grades in most subjects. The grading system categorizes or divides the overall students into different groups by dividing their abilities into different groups.* (Based on my field note: Feb. 18, 2023)

### **Exploring Kshiring's Experiences and Opinions on Academic Evaluation**

The sun shone brightly as I followed my respondent in the school per our previous informal discussion. The air was cool and refreshing, a stark contrast to the dusty heat of the day before. I was filled with anticipation and excitement as we entered the classroom. My respondent seemed excited, and I soon realized that he was the same young boy I had seen on my way in. When I asked him if he had taken his tiffin, he nodded in response. The school premises were bustling with activity, and I was instantly impressed by the enthusiasm and energy of the students. My respondent settled into his seat and began to chat with his classmates. I watched as he shared his tiffin with them, eliciting laughter and happy chatter. His kindness and generosity struck me, and it was clear that he was well-liked by his peers. After some time, I asked him a few questions about his experience in school. He spoke enthusiastically and confidently, and his answers revealed a deep understanding of my topic. I was deeply impressed by his intelligence and insight.

We went to the beautiful garden near the school's main building. The boy was a 10th grade student attending the same school for the past four years and had the same teachers for most of his classes. I was eager to hear his experiences and opinions on the research issue we were about to discuss, so we settled down and began our conversation.

We began our conversation with casual chit-chat. As the conversation progressed, I asked him about his preparation for the upcoming SEE exams. He told me all the courses the teachers had covered material and that it was time to focus on revising the topics. He assured me that he was doing his utmost to ensure good results.

My friend recently told me about his school's assessment system, and I was curious to know more. He informed me that the system was based on a grading scale that ranged from NG to A+. Each assignment was marked on this scale and the average determined the final grade. This system has been in place for the past four years and I was quite familiar with it.

He also mentioned that it was not uncommon for teachers to use rubrics and checklists to evaluate their work. This system provided clear guidelines for what was expected from each student and allowed for a thorough evaluation. He fondly remembered that the teacher often used this system to give constructive feedback and help them improve their work. Finally, he mentioned:

*Sometimes, our teachers would use a more informal approach to assessments. This system involved having conversations and discussions with the students about our work and how we could improve it. These conversations were often more meaningful than the traditional evaluation systems, allowing for more personal interaction between the student and teacher.*

Overall, he was glad that the current evaluation system was in place, providing a more comprehensive way of assessing students' work. He felt that the combination of different evaluation systems allowed for a more thorough assessment of students' work and more meaningful conversations between teachers and students.

He informed me that he preferred the numeric assessment system over the letter grading system, which gave him a better understanding of his overall grade. He found it easier to identify areas of improvement and made the necessary changes to get the desired marks. I then asked him about his opinion on the letter grading system of assessment. He was very confident in his reply and believed that the numeric

evaluation system was far better as it gave a more detailed indication of how well a student was doing in a subject. He also pointed out that it was easier to interpret numbers like 85, 80, or 75 rather than a letter grade like A, A+, B, or B+. I discussed his understanding of the numeric and letter grading assessment system with my respondent. It is easier for students to understand the numeric evaluation system as it is more straightforward. This clarified his understanding of the two assessment systems and his preference for the numeric evaluation system.

To further assess my respondent's understanding of the pros and cons of the numeric system, he explained that its advantage lay in the ease of comparison between students' grades due to the numerical values allowing for direct comparison. Furthermore, it encouraged students to strive for better marks. Conversely, its disadvantage was that it does not provide a detailed analysis of the student's performance and understanding of the subject.

He also noted that this numeric assessment system is more effective and beneficial than the grading system in the case of assessing students. He said it gave a clear picture of a student's effort into a course and the skills they developed, not just the grade. This system also keeps the students motivated, as they are evaluated not only on their marks but also on their effort and progress. Overall, his preferred assessment system was a much better way of evaluating learning than the modern grading system. It rewarded students for the effort they put into their studies and recognized their true potential and skills. It also helps students remain motivated as their efforts and progress are considered.

As we continued to talk, I asked him what he would change about the current letter grading system if he could. He revealed:

*I would like to see a more holistic approach to grading, one that recognizes the effort and progress I have made. I would like to see a system that rewards students for improving, even if they are not achieving the highest grades. The system should recognize not just the grades but also the effort put in to learn a subject and reward the grades and the effort with a balanced score.*

This inspired me to ask him what he thought would be the best way to implement this idea. He added:

*Educators should encourage students to reflect on their learning process and show appreciation for their effort to learn a subject. Providing feedback and recognition for the effort to learn can motivate students to keep trying and*

*learn more effectively. Educators should focus on helping students to develop their skills rather than just teaching them facts and skills. Students will be able to understand their subject better and apply their knowledge in their daily lives.*

He was concerned about understanding the descriptors of the letter grading system. He explained that letter grades are typically assigned on a scale from A+ to NG with A+ being the highest grade and NG being the lowest. Each letter grade was associated with a set of descriptors that indicated the level of proficiency a student achieved in a course. For instance, an A+ grade indicated that the student performed exceptionally well, deeply understood, and mastered the material. A C+ grade, on the other hand, indicated that the student performed above average. When asked about the latest amendment made to the current letter grading system by NEB, he mentioned that *the amendment introduced the NG grade which is classified as a failing grade*. The amendment encouraged students to develop reading habits and improve their academic performance.

His insights were invaluable and gave me a unique perspective on the topic. We talked for half an hour and I felt I'd known him for much longer than I had. The interview began a great friendship between us, and I left the school that day with a newfound appreciation for the power of conversation (Based on my field note: Feb. 25, 2023).

### **Rabin's Narratives on the Letter Grading System**

I arrived at Rabin's house on a crisp spring afternoon. The leaves had just begun to change colors, and the sun was setting earlier than usual, casting a soft orange glow over the neighborhood. As I rang the doorbell, I could feel my heart pounding in anticipation. When the respondent opened the door, I was taken aback by his appearance. He was a tall, slim teenager with a mop of curly hair and a bright smile that lit up his face. The ten-graded boy welcomed me warmly into his home, decorated with photos of him and his family. We settled in the living room, and he immediately began telling me about his life. He talked about his school, friends, hobbies, and dreams for the future. I could see the enthusiasm in his eyes as he spoke, and I felt his genuine passion for the topics he discussed. The respondent was eager to answer my questions and was honest and open about his experiences. As the evening wore on, I could see how much he had grown up in the past year. He had developed a sense of responsibility and was eager to take on new challenges.

In my first question, he replied that the current assessment system followed by their school involved various methods to evaluate student knowledge and progress. Standardized tests are used to measure overall academic achievement. These tests are typically standardized both within and between schools, allowing for the comparison of student performance on an equal basis. In addition, schools used a letter grading system for the evaluation and used portfolios, presentations, and projects to measure a student's mastery of a particular subject. Teachers also used traditional assessments, such as quizzes and exams, to evaluate student progress. Schools used surveys and other data collection tools to assess student attitudes and engagement in the learning process. These assessment tools were used to evaluate student learning and inform instruction. Addressing another concern, he explained:

*I had been experiencing the various systems including the traditional numeric system, a common evaluation system where the students were graded on a scale of 0-100.*

Later, he experienced the use of a letter grading system. He shared that *there was the practice of peer evaluation where we used to evaluate our friends ourselves as well. This allows us to gain feedback from our peers and helps us identify improvement areas.* He added that there was the practice of self-evaluation as well. This system required the students to assess their work and identify areas of improvement.

In my question about how he perceived the numeric and the letter grading system, he replied that numeric grading systems measured academic performance based on a numerical scale, typically ranging from 0 to 100. This system allowed for a more precise and objective assessment of the student's work, clearly indicating their progress. On the other hand, letter grading systems used letter grades, such as A+, A, B+, B, etc., to indicate performance levels. This type of evaluation is more subjective and sometimes more difficult to interpret. However, letter grades provide a more holistic view of the student's performance, considering other factors such as effort and attitude. Ultimately, both systems are used to measure the student's performance, and each has advantages and disadvantages.

Both systems give students an indication of their level of achievement, enabling them to compare their work with their peers. However, letter grading tends to be more subjective and can be open to interpretation, whereas numeric grading is

more precise and consistent. Both systems are useful for evaluating learners and can help students understand how their work has been assessed.

My other concern to my respondent was his preference for the evaluation. I asked him which method he prefers among the numeric and letter grading systems and why. He replied that *he preferred the letter grading system because it offered a more detailed breakdown of a student's performance*. It allowed teachers to accurately assess a student's ability compared to their peers and recognize the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student. It also gave students a clear understanding of what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade and encouraged them to strive for excellence. Moreover, letter grades were more meaningful than numeric grades, making it easier for students to understand their academic progress. Letter grades were more widely accepted and understood by colleges, universities, and employers, making them the preferred grading system for most educational institutions.

Talking about the challenges faced due to the current practice of the letter grading system, he said that *the letter grading system was a source of significant stress for students*. Grades can affect the student's self-esteem, motivation, and overall performance. It can also cause anxiety about their academic performance and prospects. The letter grading system did not consider the student's effort and hard work in a course. It also created competition among students, making them feel judged and compared. Grades also create a false sense of success when students fail to achieve their full potential. The letter grading system can also lead to a lack of creativity and risk-taking in learning; students become afraid to explore new ideas and concepts or take risks that could lead to a lower grade.

Regarding the various descriptors of the letter grading system, he mentioned that the grades are given on a scale of A+ to NG, with A+ being the highest and NG being the lowest. A+ is given for scores above 90% and NG for scores less than 35%. The letter grading system was used to determine if the student was qualified for admission to the next level of education or the award of any degree. It is also used by employers to assess the academic performance of potential employees.

He was much more aware of the latest amendment made by NEB and stated that Nepal's current letter grading system was recently amended to be more inclusive and flexible. The new system, known as the 'four-point grading system,' assigns letter grades from A+ to NG. This grade allows students who have not achieved the minimum required score to be recognized and rewarded for their efforts. Nepal's new



four-point grading system is more effective and transparent, providing students with a clearer representation of their academic performance.

The discussion with the respondent of my research had been an insightful experience. Hearing the respondent's perspectives and stories on the topic was a pleasure. After hearing the respondent's stories, it became clear that there were many different points of view on the topic. Going forward, it was important to consider the respondent's insights when constructing further research in this area. The discussion was a great opportunity to understand the topic better and further develop the narrative research (Based on field note: March 18, 2023).

### **Exploring Diya's Interpretation of the Letter Grading System**

The sun shone brightly through the window, illuminating the room in a warm, golden glow. I sat at my desk, my eyes scanning the literature before me. My research topic was Students' Perceptions of LGS, and I was eager to delve deeper into this fascinating field. My brain was buzzing with ideas and I couldn't wait to begin exploring them. I felt a sense of anticipation and excitement as I prepared to embark on this exciting journey of discovery. I went to Diya's residence.

As per our previous discussion, Diya was waiting for me with her parents, sitting in her living room, decorated with posters of her favorite celebrities. She was a grade ten student, just admitted this year to the school; before that, she completed her studies in a private school until grade eight. She had her laptop open and was playing a game. She was wearing a pair of jeans and a plain T-shirt. The walls of her room were painted pale pink with white trim. A stack of books and a notebook were visible on her bedside table. The sun was streaming through her window, giving the room a warm and inviting atmosphere. She glanced up when I entered the room and smiled. We greeted and introduced each other. During our talk, her mother brought me a cup of tea. After a few minutes of informal talk, we started discussing the research topic.

My first query about my research was, "What are the different assessment systems followed by Nepalese government schools"? She answered that there were various evaluation systems being followed by schools such as School-Based Assessment, the most commonly used system of assessment in Nepalese government schools. It involved assessing students' performance based on their performance in class and other activities. Another was the National Assessment Test, an annual test conducted by the Department of Education, Nepal to assess students' performance across the country. The most popular evaluation system was Teacher-Made Tests, in

which teachers designed tests to assess the performance and progress of students in their particular subject. She added that there was a standardized practice of having a final test for grade ten students in which the government set up the National Examination Board (NEB) to conduct final examinations at school levels. The results of these examinations were used to assess student's performance at the school level.

When I asked her opinion about the two assessment systems, she told me that the letter grading system was more appropriate, helpful, and easier for students to understand and interpret. It allowed for a more accurate representation of a student's performance. Besides, it helps motivate students to strive for higher grades and gives students a better understanding of their overall performance throughout the course instead of just a numerical score. She said *LGS also helps the students to improve their weaknesses and build on their strengths. Moreover, it helps them set achievable goals and keep track of their progress.* Talking about the cons of LGS, it does not provide enough information about a student's exact performance. It can be discouraging for students who are not performing well and it can be subjective and open to bias. Regarding her perceptions of the numeric system of evaluation, she interpreted:

*The numeric system has certain strengths as it provides more detailed information about a student's performance. It encourages students to strive for higher scores and can accurately measure a student's progress over time. The weaknesses of the numeric system are that it could be confusing for some students to understand and interpret, could be time-consuming for teachers to grade, and could lead to increased competition among students.*

She concluded that she preferred the letter grading system more than the numeric evaluation system. After that, I was eager to know her perceptions of numeric and letter grading systems. I asked her about this and she replied that the numeric evaluation system was transparent as it was easily understood and comparable to all her colleagues. She added that there was no secrecy and even one mark formed the hierarchical level of achievement. She informed me that though the school used to take the examination of hundred marks her grade limits were only up to 4.0. Her focus was that if they would be distributed the grade sheet, they must also see the full marks in the grades in the question paper. She told me she became more aggressive when the students were ranked in the same grade, though their marks differed up to nine points.

In the issue of the pros and cons of numeric and letter grading systems, she shared:

*The numeric system is easier to understand it is easy to use, and guardians understand the system easily. However, this system is regarded as the traditional system of evaluation. In contrast, the letter grading system is more comprehensive and focuses on the grades, not the numbers and categories of students' achievements in different groups. The letter grading system is the latest system that most countries are adopting.*

In between our discussions, I asked her preferred evaluation system, and she confidently replied *that though both have their pros and cons, I prefer the grading system*. As the stakeholders were used to the numeric evaluation system, they felt uneasy about the letter grading system. She added that, though it is new and difficult to understand and categorize the number of students in similar groups it is more helpful to motivate the learners.

While talking about the challenges faced by the students due to the current practice of the letter grading system, she forwarded the following facts:

*The letter grading system does not accurately assess a student's academic performance. It does not consider the individual student's strengths and weaknesses or the difficulty of the course material. The letter grading system lacks consistency and transparency.*

Different schools and universities may use different grading systems and criteria, making it difficult for students to compare their achievements accurately. LGS offers limited feedback on how to improve. Knowing where to focus their efforts to improve can be difficult without a more detailed assessment of a student's performance. LGS can be demoralizing because the letter grade system can be discouraging for students who do not achieve the highest grades. This can make students feel demoralized and less likely to strive for better academic results. The letter grading system can be unfair as the grades may be affected by factors such as the teacher's personal bias or the student's socio-economic background. This can cause students to be unfairly judged and create feelings of injustice.

As a narrative researcher, I further attempted to dig out her understanding of the various descriptors of the letter grading system. She replied that she was aware of the various descriptors and added that each descriptor had a unique meaning and discriminated the learners' achievement. She was familiar with the latest amendment

made by the National Examination Board, which was eliminating the D grade and inserting the NG grade. She mentioned if anyone failed to obtain marks of at least thirty-five they were supposed to fail in the assessment of the particular subject.

After our discussion, I thanked my respondent for allocating time and participation. I reiterated that her input was invaluable and would be used to enrich my research. I also informed the respondent that I could contact her if I had any questions or concerns about the research. I assured the respondent that her input had been heard and would be considered in the final research analysis (Based on my field note: March 25, 2023).

### **Suraj's Unfolding over the Topic**

Yesterday's strong storm created more than a bit of disruption and an inconvenient life. It confused me when I had to decide whether to meet my interviewee, Suraj, as previously agreed upon. I decided to brave it and I made my way to the school where I was to meet him. When I arrived, I found that he was already waiting for me. We informally discussed our research topic before he told me about the damage the storm caused near his house. He mentioned how a few houses had their entire rooftops torn off while the trees were subject to its fierce wraps, although he had escaped any loss himself. The student I spoke to was intelligent up to grade seven before his academic level dropped. He attributed this to his change in focus to playing different types of games and a lack of effort given to his studies.

Talking about the different evaluation systems he experienced in previous classes, he shared that he used to go to a school that assessed students using a number system. He explained:

*This system was easy to understand, using numbers between 0 and 100 to indicate the student's achievement level. A recent change to the letter grading system was more difficult to understand. I initially had no idea how the letter grading system worked, but I have appreciated its beauty since then. I couldn't provide a definitive opinion on which system was better as it was entirely down to a personal basis. It was more realistic to assess a student's level of achievement over a full calendar year rather than just using a number.*

Each system of evaluation has its pros and cons. To my question concerning the pros and cons of the different assessment systems, he expressed his opinion as:

*The numeric system is largely accepted and understood across the country. However, it has its shortcomings. It is not a comprehensive method of*

*assessing students' progress as it does not consider other elements such as effort or non-academic achievements. On the other hand, the letter grading system provides a more accurate assessment of a student's performance. It provides a more comprehensive view of how well a student is doing by considering his or her levels in all aspects of education. Furthermore, the grades are presented in an easier-to-read format.*

As a narrative researcher, I was more excited to explore more about the topic from him. So, with the help of some probing questions, I tried to dig out more from him and he added:

*Both evaluation systems seem to have their merits, and it is up to the individual school to decide which system is most suitable. While the numeric system is broadly accepted and easier to understand, the letter grading system provides a more comprehensive assessment of a student's performance. Ultimately, it is up to the teacher's discretion to decide which system will work best for their class. The letter grading system has also been gaining acceptance worldwide in many schools, universities, and educational systems. It is a more scientific and comprehensive way of evaluating a student's overall level of achievement. Letter grading reflects the student's comprehension of the material better than a numerical system and allows educators to make more accurate predictions about the student's potential.*

The discussion was interesting, as he mentioned that the current letter grading system is far better than the previous numeric evaluation system. I further wanted to be clear in this regard and he explained that letter grades could provide a more honest assessment of effort and progress. Using letter grades to grade students offered more consistency and organization in the assessment process, making it easier for them to understand their performance. According to him one of the primary challenges with letter grade systems was the difficulty in converting numerical scores into letter grades. Deciding what score constituted a C grade or the exact boundaries between a D and an F could be difficult. This often led to confusion and subjective judgments when assigning grades, which could be unfair to students.

Concerning my question about the challenges faced by them due to the current practice of the letter grading system, he mentioned, there were also concerns that letter grades might lead to grade inflation as teachers were more likely to give out higher grades to enhance their reputations or help their students gain acceptance into a

desired school or program. At the last discussion, I wanted to know whether he was aware of the latest amendment to the current letter grading system. He said that the National Examination Board (NEB) recently amended its letter grading system. Most notably, eliminating the 'E' grade created an automatic failure for students who scored less than 35.

Suraj said this change helped clarify the system and create a level playing field for all students. Despite its challenges, the letter grading system is a more comprehensive way to assess student performance and potential. It gives students and educators a more informed view of how well a student understands the material and provides a clearer indication of their effort and progress. The NEB's amendments to its letter grading system have helped to clarify it further, although some issues may still exist. Despite this, the letter grading system is still a highly advanced and effective way to rate student achievement (Based on field note: April 1, 2023).

### **Presenting the Assessment System through the Lens of Renuka**

It was a typical humid evening in the heart of Damauli Bazaar. The sun had just begun to dip down towards the horizon, casting a warm light onto the street and casting long shadows. The city's hustle and bustle had given way to a quiet evening for reflection. I met my respondent, Renuka at a small cafe on the corner of the street. She was an elderly woman with wisdom beyond her years and a presence that commanded attention. She wore a white T-shirt and blue jeans; her graying hair was tied neatly. We sat down at a table in the corner of the cafe, and just as I was about to begin our conversation, a light rain started to fall, creating a calming atmosphere around us. I smiled and asked her to start with her narrative. She breathed in deeply, her eyes glinting in the fading sunlight before she began her story.

I started to talk by asking her what type of assessment system is being applied in her school nowadays; she replied that there had been the practice of a Letter Grading System for the last few years. Talking about the advantages of the letter grading system, she responded that it helped her to get an idea about her level of achievement quickly. Even though the numeric system provided the exact marks, the letter grading system helped students to understand quickly. As in school assessment was not the only target of the student; they needed to muster grades along with other activities such as sports and teaching-learning activities. According to Renuka:

*The letter grading system has proven to be an effective way of calculating grades for a student. It allows for competition and brings out the best in the*

*students. This shows that our teachers give assessments based on effort and understanding of the individual, without biased judgments. This system encourages us to improve. It is a way of motivating us to perform better and achieve more. Further, the letter grading system also helps teachers better understand their students.*

The assessment helps teachers understand the level of students and does not discriminate between them. The main purpose of the letter grading system is to make a student understand that assessment does not discriminate between them. It just helps them understand their level to better prepare for future competition. It helps bring out the best in students and helps them understand the importance of learning.

Talking about the drawbacks of the letter grading system, she mentioned that this system affected the psychology of the students as some got very disheartened after getting C and D grades. In contrast, others got over-confident by getting A and A+ grades and losing focus. Another disadvantage of this system was that the student scoring slightly low in some subjects could get the same grade in other subjects. In contrast, the numeric system could easily differentiate them in the same subject. She further went on to say:

*The letter grading system is not perfect, but its implementation in our school has made a precious contribution to improving the assessment system in my school. There may be a few drawbacks but the teachers and the students are learning gradually to cope with these minor eccentricities and adjusting to the new system with improved strategies. The numeric and letter grading systems are different approaches to assessing academic capabilities. While the numeric system is an easy-to-understand and straightforward system with easy-to-interpret empirical data, the letter grading system brings more flexibility into the mix.*

The letter grading system introduces differentiation and allows for more customized assessment practices; a unique feature of this system is that it helps to avoid any form of humiliation or discrimination amongst students based on their marks, and instead, it provides a more objective way to differentiate between students in terms of academic capabilities. This has been the primary motivation behind educators, students, and stakeholders favoring the letter grading system.

She is well familiar with the latest amendment made to the current letter grading system and she mentioned:

*The NEB recently amended the letter grading system, introducing the 'None Grading (NG)' system. This system is aimed at distinguishing between poorly performing and low-achieving students. The NG system helps to ensure transparent and consistent assessment of students, helping to avoid discrepancies in students' judgment.*

Adopting the letter grading system promises a more competitive environment for students. It not only works better in terms of assessing and judging students' abilities, but it also offers a more motivating atmosphere. A student who performs better than his/her peers no longer feels as if s/he has been shoved into the same grade as less-studious peers, which subsequently serves as a source of motivation for that student. Regarding this, Renuka further added,

*In grade ten, I obtained ninety-nine marks in mathematics while my friend got ninety-one. We were awarded the same grade despite the noticeable difference in our scores.*

This lack of differentiation between high and low-achieving students threatened to significantly reduce my motivation levels, something that the amended letter grading system thankfully eliminated. Comparing the numeric and letter grading systems, she said:

*I can conclude that it is indisputable that the widespread implementation of the letter grading system can benefit both students and educators. Increased competitive environment and objectivity in the assessment are hugely advantageous features of the letter grading system. I truly believe that it is essential to promote and continue using this system for the best interests of all associated parties (Based on my field note: April 8, 2023).*

### **Letter Grading System: Policy Formulator's Perspectives**

As I was very excited by the different opinions on the same issue from the different participants, I was very eager to know the expert opinion from one of the policy formulators. For this, I visited one of the officers of NEB to get responses to certain guideline questionnaires (See Appendix B). In response to my question, the NEB officer expressed his opinions below.

*From the beginning of the policy formulation of LGS in Nepal, I have inspected its developmental phases. The inspiration for developing LGS stemmed from the need for a comprehensive and consistent method to assess student performance and identify areas requiring improvement. The LGS*



*assigns letter grades to students based on their academic achievements in evaluations, whether internal or external. The process involves establishing criteria to grade achievements, with standard criteria set by NEB. The LGS is useful for informing policy decisions and providing a clear performance breakdown to identify improvement areas. Challenges include establishing consistent criteria and monitoring adherence. However, the widely practiced LGS provides a transparent and objective way to evaluate performance, ensuring fair and consistent policy implementation. Suggestions for improvement include incorporating stakeholder feedback and refining criteria for greater specificity. When implementing the LGS, careful consideration of benefits, drawbacks, and open dialogue with stakeholders is advised (Based on my field note: April 15, 2023)*

He discussed developing and implementing a letter grading system for assessing student performance. According to him, the motivation behind the system was the need for a comprehensive and consistent method of evaluating students and identifying areas of improvement. The letter grading system assigns grades based on academic achievement in internal assessments by external examinations, with standardized criteria established by the National Examination Board.

The letter grading system is valuable for informing policy decisions, providing a clear performance breakdown, and facilitating policy implementation. However, challenges exist, such as establishing consistent assessment criteria and monitoring adherence to grading standards. Nevertheless, the widespread practice of the letter grading system globally highlights its transparency and objectivity in evaluating performance. Suggestions for improvement include incorporating stakeholders' feedback and refining the criteria for assigning grades to enhance specific student performance and achievement.

### **Implementing the LGS: Insights from an Experienced Policy Implementer**

Additionally, I became more enthusiastic to reach out to one of expert of the policy implementers of LGS to check out how they were feeling about the implementation aspect of LGS. For this, I talked with the education officer of the Vyas Municipality based on the interview guidelines (See Appendix C). After a few minutes of informal discussion, we formally discussed the topic. In my different queries, he responded as below.

*As the implementer of the letter grading system, key challenges we encountered included gaining support from all stakeholders, collecting data and resources needed to ensure successful implementation, and ensuring that the system is communicated effectively. To successfully implement the letter grading system, we have employed several strategies. For example, we have organized workshops for teachers to learn more about the system and how it will be implemented. We have created resources and guidelines for teachers and students to help them understand the system. We have also conducted surveys and focus groups with stakeholders to get feedback on the system. Feedback should be provided at least once in each terminal examination to ensure students regularly know their performance and progress. To ensure that the letter grading system is successfully implemented, we suggest that the criteria used to determine the letter grades should be communicated to students and parents. Finally, we suggest that the school establish a communication system with the students and parents to ensure that they are aware of their performance and progress (Based on my field note: April 22, 2023).*

He further elaborated that, *for the successful implementation of the letter grading system, we employed various Strategies. For instance, we conduct workshops to educate teachers about the system and its implementation. We develop resources and guidelines to aid teachers and students in understanding the system.* He said they were conducting surveys and focus groups to gather stakeholder feedback. Multiple metrics were employed to measure the system's effectiveness, such as tracking successful implementations, completed training, and student goal achievement.

Implementing the letter grading system requires clear criteria for determining letter grades based on student performance, which should be communicated to students and parents. To ensure regular awareness of the performance, students receive feedback at least once during their evaluation through written comments conferences, or recorded grades. Parents are informed of their children's progress through communication methods like progress reports or parent-teacher conferences. The final grade considers the criteria, internal examination feedback, and progress reports.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The letter grading system is a means of communication of assessment used in educational institutions of Nepal to measure student performance. It is a method of categorizing student achievement into letter grades, and then used to determine a student's overall grade. However, the system has come under scrutiny in recent years, with some students arguing that letter grades fail to accurately reflect their level of comprehension or performance (Marzano, 2006).

#### **Different Themes Emerged from the Narratives**

To better understand students' perceptions of the letter grading system, narratives were collected from the students of public schools. Through these narratives, several themes emerged that can be discussed further. These include the perceived fairness of the letter grade system, the impact of the system on student motivation, and the system's overall effectiveness in evaluating student performance. This discussion provides a platform to explore these themes in depth and better understand how students perceive the letter grading system.

#### **Comparative Analysis of Numeric and LGS in School Education**

Aakriti has narrated that the numeric assessment system has been used in school education for a long time and has been the traditional way of evaluating students' academic performance. This system is based on the marks obtained by students in each subject and the results are published based on the marks obtained in each subject. On the other hand, the letter grading system is more recent and used in school education. In this system, students are divided into groups based on their marks, with a difference of 10%. This system is internationally recognized and valid, but it is not easily understood by the parents of the students and the students themselves (Wormeli, 2018).

As per the opinion of Kshiring, the discussion on the comparative analysis of numeric and letter grading systems in school education should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each system. The advantages of the numeric system should be discussed, such as its clarity, easy comparison of grades, and its ability to encourage students to strive for better marks. The disadvantages of the numeric system should also be discussed, such as its inability to provide a detailed analysis of the student's

performance and understanding of the subject. The discussion should also include comparing the two systems, highlighting their differences and how they are used to assess students.

Robin has forwarded his opinion that numeric and letter grading systems are two popular methods for evaluating student performance in school education. The numeric system assigns a numerical value to different levels of achievement, typically ranging from 0 to 100, with a specific score indicating the quality of the work. On the other hand, the grading system assigns a letter grade to the work, with A+ being the highest and NG being the lowest. Both systems give students an indication of their level of achievement, enabling them to compare their work with their peers.

Diya's sharing was slightly different as she shared that the comparative analysis of the numeric and letter grading systems in school education requires closely examining both systems and their respective advantages and disadvantages. When comparing the two systems, it is important to consider the impact on students' motivation and performance, the fairness of the system, and the benefits of each system for student learning. Both systems have their strengths and weaknesses, and it is important to consider the context of each system to assess which system is more appropriate for school education effectively.

Suraj explained:

*This system was easy to understand, using numbers between 0 and 100 to indicate the student's achievement level. The letter grading system provided a more accurate student performance assessment. It provided a more comprehensive view of how well a student was doing by considering his/her levels in all aspects of education.*

According to him, one of the primary challenges with letter grade systems was the difficulty in converting numerical scores into letter grades, and this often led to confusion and subjective judgments when assigning grades, which could be unfair to students. Additionally, he mentioned that letter grades could provide a more honest assessment of effort and progress.

Renuka articulated her view on comparing the numeric and letter grading systems. Both systems are important in assessing students since they are based on different objectives. The numeric system gives accurate marks, while the letter grading system helps to assess a student's performance and encourages a more

competitive environment. Ultimately, implementing the letter grading system will help bring out the best in students and nurture a healthy learning environment.

This comparison of the narrative with Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory and McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle demonstrates that using the numeric and letter grading systems in school education follows constructivist principles. According to Vygotsky's Constructivist theory, the role of instruction is to facilitate understanding and motivate students to develop their capacity for self-directed learning. Based on this premise, the numeric and letter grading systems should be used to foster student autonomy and promote inquiry-based learning. Similarly, McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle stresses that assessments should be meaningful, valid, reliable, and fair. As such, using the numeric and letter grading systems should align to provide accurate and meaningful feedback to help students achieve their learning goals. Furthermore, these assessment tools should be used fairly and equitably to ensure that the assessment process does not discriminate against students.

The above narratives blend with the literature review mentioned in the previous chapter by providing context on the current discussion around numeric and letter grading systems in school education. They provide a comprehensive comparison of the two systems, including their advantages and disadvantages, and how they are used to assess students. The narratives also touch on the importance of training and providing orientation to teachers on the letter grading system and the need to consider fairness when assigning grades. Additionally, the narratives provide insight into the perceived attitudes of students and teachers toward the letter grading system. This helps to put the research from the literature in perspective, as it shows how different stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the letter grading system.

### **Advantages of Letter Grading System**

Regarding the strengths and weaknesses of LGS, Aakriti focused on some of the advantages of letter grading in school education; LGS removes the pressure of obtaining full marks and provides a more accurate evaluation of the student's performance. It is also internationally recognized and valid. When discussing the advantages and disadvantages of letter grading in school education, Kshiring shared that the conversation should focus on how the letter grading system clarifies how well a student is doing in a particular subject. The discussion should also include how the

letter grading system is used to give constructive feedback and help students improve their work.

Rabin shared that the letter grading system has many advantages. It offers a more detailed breakdown of a student's performance, allowing teachers to accurately assess a student's ability compared to their peers and recognize the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student. It also gives students a clear understanding of what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade and encourages them to strive for excellence. Moreover, letter grades are more meaningful than numeric grades, making it easier for students to understand their academic progress. Letter grades are more widely accepted and understood by colleges, universities, and employers, making them the preferred grading system for most educational institutions.

Diya focused that the letter grading system offers several advantages in school education, such as providing a more accurate representation of a student's performance, motivating students to strive for higher grades, and better understanding their overall performance throughout the course.

Suraj mentioned that the letter grading system is a preferred way of assessing students' overall performance by considering their efforts, comprehension of material, and progress. A change towards the letter grading system from the previous numeric system is often difficult for students to understand. But the benefits are abundant once they can understand how the system works. The letter grading system provides more clarification and consistency in the evaluation process compared to the previous numeric system. It also provides a more comprehensive view of the student's performance, considering various elements such as effort and non-academic achievements.

Renuka strongly believes that the letter grading system offers a transparent and fair assessment system with several benefits. It helps motivate students, promotes competition, eliminates subjectivity and discrimination in judging students' capabilities, and ensures that each student gets fairly assessed for his/her efforts and understanding.

The above narratives of the students blend with Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory, which posits that learning is a socially mediated process whereby new knowledge is constructed based on the information given, and McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle, which states that feedback must be timely, clear, and self-regulated. The students share their thoughts and opinions on the advantages

of the letter grading system and its implications for student learning. They also acknowledge the system's strengths, showing how they consider their experiences and opinions to evaluate the system constructively. Moreover, their discussion demonstrates that they can use their own experiences to understand the implications of the letter grading system for student learning, an example of self-regulated feedback.

### **Disadvantages of Letter Grading System**

Aakriti claimed that some disadvantages include that it can be difficult to understand, there is no transparency in the evaluation, and it can lead to student demotivation. Regarding the demerits of the letter grading system, Kshiring shared that the chief drawback of the system is its potential to be unfair to students who may not have access to the same resources or knowledge.

Rabin opined that the letter grading system also had some drawbacks. It could be a source of significant stress for students, as grades could affect their self-esteem, motivation, and overall performance. While talking about the disadvantages of the letter grading system, Diya added that there were some disadvantages associated with the letter grading system, such as not providing enough information about a student's exact performance, being discouraging for students who were not performing well, and being subjective and open to bias.

Suraj claimed that this system is considered a more accurate and scientific way of assessing student achievements despite some of the associated challenges, such as grade inflation and difficulty in converting numerical scores to letter grades. Renuka shared that the letter grading system was imperfect - it had weaknesses compared to its numerical counterpart. It might not serve as the best solution under all circumstances.

The given narratives blend well with the literature as they address the various aspects of letter grading systems. The narratives provide in-depth insight into different perspectives on the weaknesses of letter grading systems while outlining their various disadvantages. The literature review is important to research the attitudes of both students and teachers toward letter grades. It discusses how fairness is an important factor in assigning and evaluating grades and how it is influenced by context and external pressures. The narratives provide a comprehensive review of the subject matter, supported by the literature review, and demonstrate a clear understanding of the topic.

### **Examining the Impact of LGS on Students' Motivation**

Regarding the impact of LGS on students' motivation, Aakriti expressed her opinion that the letter grading system could impact student motivation and performance in several ways. On one hand, it could provide a more accurate evaluation of the student's performance, leading to better motivation and higher performance. On the other hand, the lack of transparency in the evaluation could lead to demotivation and lower performance.

Kshiring posited:

*In examining the impact of the letter grading system on student motivation and performance, the discussion should focus on how it provides students with a clearer indication of their progress, which can motivate them to keep trying and learning more effectively.*

He further focused on how the conversation should include how the letter grading system could encourage students to reflect on their learning process and how it could reward them for their effort and progress.

Rabin explained:

*The letter grading system can significantly impact student motivation and performance. It can give students a clear understanding of what is expected of them and encourage them to strive for excellence.*

Additionally, he shared that LGS allows students to compare their work with their peers and gain teacher feedback. Moreover, the letter grading system can motivate students, as they can strive to achieve better grades and be rewarded for their efforts. However, the letter grading system can also hurt student motivation and performance. It can create a sense of competition among students, making them feel judged and compared. It can also create a false sense of success and lead to a lack of creativity and risk-taking. Furthermore, the letter grading system can be a source of significant stress for students, leading to anxiety about their academic performance and prospects.

Diya claimed that the letter grading system had the potential to impact student motivation and performance in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, it could encourage students to strive for higher grades, build on their strengths, and set achievable goals. On the other hand, it could lead to increased competition among students and could be discouraging for students who are not performing well.



Additionally, it could be subject to bias and lack of transparency, leading to feelings of injustice.

Suraj had experienced the letter and number grading systems in his school career. He preferred the letter grading system, as he found it more comprehensive, clearly indicating his effort. He found the numbers easier to understand, but they didn't give an overall view of student achievement. He discussed the pros and cons of each system, and his opinion was that each system had its merits and it was down to the individual school to decide which system was the best. This ensures a level playing field for all students and accurately indicates a student's potential and progress. Although there are issues such as grade inflation and difficulties in converting scores to letter grades, the letter grading system is still a highly advanced and effective way to rate student achievement.

According to Renuka, many schools have embraced the letter grading system for grading students' performance, and it has successfully motivated students to work harder than ever before. It creates a more competitive environment as each student is judged according to their efforts rather than in comparison to their peers. Students love being rewarded for their hard work and the letter grading system ensures that every student gets a grade that accurately reflects his/ her intellectual capabilities. Furthermore, the letter grading system emphasizes the importance of the learning process, showing students that becoming better educated is more important than receiving an A or a B grade. There is no doubt that the letter grading system has had a positive impact on students' motivation.

Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory states that knowledge is acquired through interactions, experiences, and tools. According to this theory, students learn best when they can actively construct knowledge through problem-solving and collaboration. The discussion in this narrative highlights the importance of providing students with a clear indication of their progress and reflecting on their learning process, both elements of the constructivist theory. Likewise, McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle suggests that assessment should be used to improve student motivation and performance. This principle is evident in the narrative, as all the participants praised the letter grading system for motivating students to work hard and push themselves forward. Furthermore, the narrative addresses the potential pitfalls of the grading system, emphasizing the importance of transparent evaluation and recognition of individual strengths and progress.

The narratives support the given literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the letter grading system on student motivation and performance. The narratives provide further insights into the perspectives of various individuals, such as Aakriti, Kshiring, Rabin, Diya, Suraj, and Renuka, on the letter grading system. These perspectives are backed by the research findings discussed in the literature that have revealed the attitudes of students and teachers towards the letter grading system and the need for orientation and training for effective implementation. The narratives also raise important issues related to grade inflation and difficulty converting scores to letter grades. Thus, the given narratives help to justify further and elaborate research findings about student motivation and performance and provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues surrounding the letter grading system.

### **Assessing the Fairness of LGS in School Education**

To assess how the students perceive the fairness of LGS in school education, I asked a few queries of my participants. Different respondent expressed their opinions as below:

*The letter grading system can be seen as a fair evaluation system as it removes the pressure of obtaining full marks and provides a more accurate evaluation of the student's performance.* -Aakriti. However, it can be argued that the lack of transparency in the evaluation can lead to unfair results and demotivation among students.

Kshiring shared his opinion when assessing the fairness of the letter grading system in school education. *He felt "The discussion should focus on how the system can be biased and potentially unfair to certain students."* This can include a discussion on how the system can be affected by student resources and how it can be affected by the teacher's personal biases.

Rabin shares that the fairness of the letter grading system in school education can be assessed by looking at how it measures student performance and how it is implemented in the classroom. The letter grading system should be applied fairly and consistently across the school, considering individual student capabilities and efforts. The system should also be transparent and open to interpretation, with clear criteria for each grade. The letter grading system should also provide students with a clear understanding of what is expected from them to achieve a certain grade. Furthermore, the system should consider the effort and hard work put into a course rather than

focusing solely on the result. Finally, the system should be flexible and inclusive, allowing students who have not achieved the minimum required score to be still recognized and rewarded for their efforts.

On the same topic, Diya explained:

*The fairness of the letter grading system in school education is an important consideration when assessing its effectiveness. While the letter grading system can provide a more accurate representation of a student's performance, it can also be subject to bias and lack of transparency.*

She also focused on the LGS; it could lead to increased competition among students and could be discouraging for students who were not performing well. It is important to consider these factors when assessing the fairness of the letter grading system.

Suraj's focus on upgrading the letter grading system has been the NEB's response to an increasingly demanding school system. It is a far more comprehensive approach to assessing students' progress, as it considers effort, comprehension, and performance in all aspects of education rather than just using a number. The letter grading system gives educators a more accurate prediction of students' potential and provides a clearer, easier-to-read presentation of their grades. Furthermore, it eliminates the potential for confusion and subjective judgments when grading students, making it a more fair and equitable system than its numerical counterpart.

Renuka's perspective was a powerful testimony to the fairness of the letter grading system. She shared her experiences of how this system allowed for more objective assessment and was free from personal bias. Her appreciation of how this system provided a more competitive environment that motivated students to improve stood out to me. It was also refreshing to note her understanding that limitations remained with this system, but she was hopeful for its continued application. This further solidified the fairness of the letter grading system in my opinion.

Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory and McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle both focus on the importance of assessment in a learner-centered setting. Therefore, this narrative blends well with the two theories because it could be seen as a case study of how to assess the fairness of the letter grading system in school education. The discussion going on in the narrative highlights the importance of engaging students in the assessment process. The narrative demonstrates how assessing the fairness of the letter grading system involves looking at student performance about individual capabilities and effort. The multiple perspectives given

in the narrative also emphasize the importance of considering various factors when assessing the system to ensure fairness. This study examines the system's fairness transparently and openly, aligning with the constructivist theory and fundamental assessment principle.

The narratives provide evidence of how students and teachers perceive the letter grading system as fair evaluation. At the same time, they are also aware of the potential bias and lack of transparency in the evaluation. The literature further supports this notion with studies demonstrating how fairness is an important factor in assigning and evaluating grades and how this is affected by various contextual factors. Furthermore, the literature underlines the need for training and orientation of teachers to implement the letter grading system effectively.

### **Strengths of LGS in Assessment**

Aakriti mentioned that the letter grading system has many strengths, providing many benefits to students in school education. It can provide a more accurate evaluation of the student's performance, leading to better motivation and higher performance. It also removes the pressure of obtaining full marks and is internationally recognized and valid.

Kshiring added to the same concern when exploring the strengths of the letter grading system in school education; the conversation should focus on how the system helps keep students motivated since their efforts and progress are considered. The discussion should also include how the system rewards students for their effort and progress and how it helps recognize their true potential and skills.

Rabin explained the letter grading system has numerous strengths for students in school education. Moreover, letter grades are more meaningful than numeric grades, making it easier for students to understand their academic progress. Finally, the letter grading system can be more inclusive and flexible, allowing students who have not achieved the minimum required score to be recognized and rewarded for their efforts.

Diya shared her opinion:

*The letter grading system has several strengths in school education, such as providing a more accurate representation of a student's performance, motivating students to strive for higher grades, and giving students a better understanding of their overall performance throughout the course.*

Additionally, it can improve communication between teachers and students, allowing for easy comparison of grades. Finally, it can provide more detailed feedback on improvement, allowing students to focus on their efforts and strive for better academic results.

Suraj expressed that the letter grading system had many strengths for assessment as it provided a comprehensive overview of how a student was performing, taking into account all aspects of their performance rather than just academics. It was a more scientific and realistic method of evaluating a student's overall level of achievement and was becoming increasingly popular with educational institutions. Some may argue that it leads to grade inflation, so managing expectations and setting boundaries is important to ensure fairness.

Renuka's narrative highlighted the letter grading system's strengths in motivating students and providing a competitive academic environment. It also emphasized the need for transparent and consistent assessment of students. The letter grading system also provides more flexibility when assessing academic capabilities and promotes objectivity compared to the numeric system. It eliminates any discrimination between high and low-achieving students and is a more motivating system for those students who perform better than their peers. It also helps educators and students understand their achievement levels better. Ultimately, the letter grading system is a beneficial assessment method for all associated parties and should continue to be implemented.

The narratives presented above blend well with both of these theories, as they focus on the strengths of the letter grading system in motivating and encouraging students to strive for success and providing an accurate and objective overview of their academic performance. The narratives also emphasize the importance of consistency and transparency and the need to eliminate discrimination between high and low achievers. Ultimately, the letter grading system offers a meaningful, authentic, and helpful assessment method that can be useful for both educators and students.

The narratives emphasize the various strengths of the letter grading system in school education, such as providing a more accurate evaluation of student performance, motivation, recognition of true potential and skills, objectivity and flexibility, and better communication between students and teachers. The literature provides additional insights by exploring the attitudes of students and teachers

towards the letter grading system, as well as examining issues such as fairness, classroom management, learning values, external pressures, and the consequences of grade usage. Additionally, the literature reveals the need for training and orientation of teachers to effectively implement the system, which is also addressed by the narratives. Therefore, the given narratives and literature blend well, providing comprehensive information on the letter grading system and its implications in school education.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTION

This chapter portrays the conclusion drawn so far from the in-depth study of the research. Similarly, the study has certain implications that would benefit the concerned stakeholders. Moreover, this chapter displays the researcher's reflection on the study.

#### **Conclusion**

After analyzing the participants' interpretations of the topic, it can be concluded that the letter grading system is commonly used in school education to assess student performance. While this system offers many advantages and can be beneficial for a school, it is essential to consider and address both the advantages and disadvantages of the system to ensure fairness and success for all students. The letter grading system can be an effective tool in assessing student performance and offers several advantages for students, such as providing a clear understanding of expectations, measuring performance more accurately and objectively, and being recognized and accepted by universities and employers. Additionally, letter grades are more widely accepted by colleges, universities, and employers, making them the preferred choice for many schools.

However, there are potential drawbacks to the letter grading system as well. These include creating competition and stress, a lack of transparency in the evaluation process, and the potential for unfairness. To ensure fairness in the letter grading system, it is important to apply it fairly and consistently across the school, considering individual student capabilities and efforts. It should also be open to interpretation and provide students with an understanding of what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade. Ultimately, it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of both numeric and letter grading systems and weigh them against the school's needs before deciding. The letter grading system should recognize and reward effort rather than solely focusing on the result. It should be transparent and open to interpretation, with clear criteria for each grade. Additionally, it is crucial to consider the individual context and needs of the school when assessing which system is more appropriate.

The letter grading system offers several advantages for students and can benefit a school. Additionally, it is important to ensure that the system is applied

fairly and consistently and that it recognizes and rewards effort rather than solely focusing on the result. By considering these considerations, letter grading systems can be used effectively and fairly to assess student performance in school education.

Moreover, Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory emphasizes learning as a social process. He believed that learning is a collaborative process between the learner and their environment and that the teacher should act as a facilitator. According to Vygotsky, the goal of education should be to create meaningful learning experiences for the student rather than just focusing on the result. The teacher should provide feedback, guidance, and support to help the students reach their full potential. For the letter grading system to be meaningful and valid, applying it fairly and consistently across the school and considering individual student capabilities and efforts is important. Students are encouraged to strive and put in their best effort by recognizing and rewarding effort. This aligns with McMillan's principle that assessment should measure what is being taught, not just the result. By considering these considerations, letter grading systems can be used effectively and fairly to assess student performance in school education.

In conclusion, grades 10, XI, and XII students have mixed feelings about the letter grading system implemented in school education. On the one hand, they recognized the system's advantages, such as clearly understanding expectations, measuring performance more accurately and objectively, and being recognized and accepted by universities and employers. On the other hand, they also faced certain challenges due to the current practice of the letter grading system, such as creating competition and stress, a lack of transparency in the evaluation process, and the potential for unfairness.

This study shows that the letter grading system can provide meaningful feedback that encourages student engagement and motivation. It is also important to ensure that the system is valid, reliable, and fair to promote a safe and equitable learning environment. As such, educators and administrators must collaborate and consider information from multiple perspectives, including their own experiences as learners, to ensure that the grading system is implemented consistently, objectively, and fairly.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

A letter grading system is an important tool that is used in schools to measure the performance of students in their academic learning. While this system is used



widely, there is much debate among parents, educators, and students on how the letter grading system is applied to measure individual student capabilities and efforts. Grades 10, XI, and XII students in the early stages of high school need to understand the expectations of the letter grading system, which can help motivate them and reward their efforts. Letter grading can lead to student competition, a feeling of being judged, a lack of creativity and risk-taking, and increased stress. Additionally, letter grades can lead to a lack of transparency in the evaluation process and potential unfairness.

Overall, the letter grading system can be an effective and successful way to measure student performance. However, schools, parents, and other stakeholders must be involved to ensure that the system is being applied fairly, transparently, and in a manner that is beneficial to all students. By working together, Grades 10, XI, and XII students can better understand expectations and be adequately rewarded for their efforts.

Moreover, students may feel that formal letters used to represent academic performance can be challenging to use as a basis for comparison as evaluative terms. Additionally, the research shows that letter grades can negatively affect student motivation, as they may become fixated on a particular letter grade rather than engaging meaningfully in the learning process. Educators must be aware of these implications to support their students better. For instance, they can provide more individualized and comprehensive feedback to students rather than relying solely on letter grades, offer students more autonomy in their learning, and avoid placing too much emphasis on letter grades in general. Through this, educators can help students use letter grades as a constructive tool to facilitate learning rather than a limited measuring stick to determine worth.

A supportive environment free from competition and stress can help foster a student's motivation and performance. Schools should strive to create meaningful learning experiences and a culture of trust where students feel comfortable taking risks and demonstrating what they have learned. Additionally, parents and other stakeholders must remain informed about the letter grading system and provide guidance and support to their children as they progress through their education. Therefore, it is necessary for schools and teachers, along with parents and other stakeholders, to take extra steps to ensure that the system is applied fairly and consistently.

Assessments based on Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory and McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle should be meaningful, authentic, relevant, and helpful. They should promote motivation and self-directed learning while eliminating discrimination between high and low achievers. Furthermore, assessments should be done fairly and equitably to ensure that the assessment process does not discriminate against students.

### **Reflection**

Grades 10, XI, and XII students often struggle understanding the letter grading system. Based on a range of letters, the letter grading system can be confusing and difficult to compare. This system is more subjective than the numeric grading system, as it is based on performance levels and can be open to interpretation. Furthermore, the letter grading system can be difficult to interpret, as it does not provide students with a clear understanding of what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade. This can be a challenge for students, as they may not be sure what is expected of them to achieve their desired grade.

The numeric grading system is more straightforward and simpler to compare than the letter grading system. It is based on a numerical scale, which can be easily compared to other students. The numeric grading system can also give students a better understanding of their progress and areas of improvement. However, this system may not be as effective in providing a detailed description of a student's performance, as it does not clearly understand what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade.

When deciding which grading system is best suited for a school, it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of both systems. The letter grading system can be more accurate and provide students with a better understanding of expectations, while the numeric grading system is simpler and easier to compare. Ultimately, the system best suited for a school will depend on the individual context and needs of the school. It is important to ensure that the system is applied fairly and consistently while providing students with an understanding of what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade. Furthermore, the system should be flexible and inclusive to ensure that students are not punished for their mistakes but encouraged to strive for excellence.

Additionally, the letter grading system can be more subjective than the numeric grading system, as it is based on performance levels and can be open to

interpretation. The difficulty interpreting the letter grading system can be a challenge for students, as it does not clearly understand what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade. LGS is based on a numerical scale, which can be easily compared to other students. The numeric grading system can also give students a better understanding of their progress and areas of improvement. However, this system may not be as effective in providing a detailed description of a student's performance, as it does not clearly understand what is expected of them to achieve a certain grade.

I can take away from this discussion the importance of understanding the implications of assessment and paying attention to equity and fairness in the assessment process. Furthermore, it has also reinforced the essence of utilizing assessments to provide accurate feedback and help students improve their learning outcomes. Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory and McMillan's Fundamental Assessment Principle provide important lessons on how the assessment process can effectively provide feedback that promotes student autonomy and learning. It is also important to understand the possible disadvantages of assessments and their potential to be discriminatory or unfair. Overall, this discussion has given me a better perspective on the letter grading system and how it may influence student learning.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix-A**

#### Interview Guidelines for Participants (Students):

- Student's short biography
- The current assessment system followed by their schools
- Different types of evaluation systems they experienced in previous classes
- Perceptions about the numeric assessment system
- Perceptions about the letter grading assessment system
- Students' understanding of numeric and letter grading assessment system
- Pros and cons of the numeric system
- Pros and cons of the letter system
- Their preferred assessment system
- Reasons behind the preferred assessment system
- Challenges faced by them due to the current practice of the letter grading system
- Participants' understanding of the different descriptors of the letter grading system
- Latest amendment made to the current letter grading system

**Appendix-B**

Interview guidelines on policy formulation of the letter grading system

1. What inspired you to develop the letter grading system for policy formulation?
2. Explanation of the working procedure of the letter grading system
3. Factors considered when designing the letter grading system
4. How does the letter grading system help to inform policy formulation decisions?
5. The challenges encountered in implementing the letter grading system
6. How has the letter grading system been received by stakeholders?
7. Ways that can be considered for the further improvement of LGS
8. Advice would you give to others considering implementing the letter grading system

**Appendix-C**

Interview guidelines on policy implementation of the letter grading system

1. Your role in the implementation of the letter grading system.
2. Key challenges you faced in the implementation of the letter grading system.
3. How do you ensure that the letter grading system is communicated effectively to all stakeholders?
4. Strategies that you adopt to ensure the successful implementation of the letter grading system
5. Ways of measuring the effectiveness of the letter grading system
6. Criteria used to determine the letter grades
7. How often will students receive feedback on their performance?
8. How will students and parents be notified of progress and performance?
9. Way of determining the final grades
10. Suggestions that you have for improving the implementation of the letter grading system