Voices from the Classroom: Exploring the Secondary School Teachers' Perception Towards Formative Assessment Practices

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Abstract

The present study focuses on exploring the teacher's perception about formative assessment practices at secondary school. For this study investigator purposively selected 39 participants for study form 23 secondary schools of Mayurbhanj district. The study employed semi-structured interviews schedule for data collection. Collected data were analysed by content analysis and presented by thick descriptions. The study revealed that most of teachers have been four categories of formative assessment strategies have been used by the teachers such as Periodic Paper-Pencil Test, Multiple Assessment Practice, Portfolio Assessment and Subject Enrichment Activities. Further study found most of the teachers were satisfy with the infrastructural facilities of the school. Most of the teachers perceive that students are benefited in their achievements, actively participating in classroom discussion, aroused their interest for better understanding of the concept, able to know their strengths and weakness, fearless for exam and get opportunity to learn again by formative assessment. However most of them not satisfy with in-service training and parent supports for conducting formative assessment practices. Most of the teachers face problems like; absence of remedial teaching, student's absenteeism in test or classroom, managing time to complete course, language barrier, low economic background of students, and lack of in-service training to teachers. It is suggested that, short term courses, workshops, seminars and, other necessary in-service training activities should be organized by the concern authority for professional development of teachers in formative assessment strategies. Therefore teachers will effectively implement the formative assessment practices in secondary schools.

Keywords: Formative Assessment Practices, Secondary School, Perception

1.0 Introduction

Modern education system emphasizes continuous assessment for students, focusing on on-going feedback to enhance learning. To stay competitive globally, our schooling system needs to prioritize improving students' academic performance. Shifting from tests that focus solely on memorization to more regular, competency-based assessments is crucial (NEP 2020). Formative assessment has been fostering student learning and academic achievement through its provision of timely feedback and identification of areas for improvement. These assessments should encourage learning and test higher-order skills like critical thinking. Currently, secondary school exams and coaching culture prioritize exam preparation over true learning, limiting students' growth (NEP 2020). Various committees and

reports stress the need for continuous formative assessment that covers all aspects of student development. Reforms such as internal assessments, semester systems, and continuous evaluation have been recommended. However, successfully implementing these reforms depends on factors like teachers, infrastructure, parental support, and teacher training. However teachers' perspectives on classroom assessment play a significant role in shaping their actual assessment practices (Brown, 2004; Chester & Quilter, 1998; Ndalichako, 2015; Halali, Singh, Saeed, & Making, 2017). Rahman (2018) emphasizes the pivotal influence of teachers in implementing effective approaches, highlighting the importance of their perceptions regarding classroom practices. Redondo, Bueno, and Figuerres (2017) suggest that evaluating teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment methods is key to understanding and valuing their assessment strategies. This integration of perceptions forms the basis and reasoning behind the assessment techniques utilized in classrooms, offering insights into how students' learning is impacted. Chester and Quilter (1998) stress the importance of examining teachers' perceptions of assessment, providing insights into the use and potential misuse of various assessment forms, and offering avenues for improvement. Furthermore, it's essential to recognize that perceptions significantly shape behavior (Ahsan & Anjum, 2012; Cillessen & Lafontana, 2002). The way teachers perceive their roles in the classroom has an impact on how they used formative assessment techniques (Asare, 2021). However, its effective implementation requires a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perception on its effectiveness and the challenges faced by them. Therefore the study focused on the importance of formative assessment practices in secondary education and aimed to understand how teachers perceived and implemented these practices. By investigating these perceptions, the research aimed to contribute to the improvement of educational quality at the secondary level. Examining the perceptions of secondary school teachers specifically in the Indian context provided valuable context-specific insights that complemented and enriched the global body of knowledge. By contextualizing the research, this study sought to provide evidence-based recommendations and solutions to problems of implementation, fostering a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with formative assessment practices in secondary schools.

2.0 Rationale of the Study

The overarching issue addressed in this research article revolves around the persistently low average learning levels among students in schools, particularly highlighted through assessments conducted for accountability purposes such as the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). The data reveals a noticeable decline in learning levels as student's transition from primary to upper primary and from upper primary to secondary grades (Chomal, Banerjee, 2019). Despite several policy initiatives, the root causes contributing to these subpar learning levels encompass multifaceted factors. These factors include the instructional approach employed in classrooms, the choice of textbooks, and a lack of initiatives for developing teacher capacities. One critical aspect contributing to the identified problem is the manner in which assessments are conducted and utilized in classrooms. The research cites studies on the implementation of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) conducted by ASER (Sinha, 2016) and TESS (McCormick, 2014) in various Indian states, providing substantial evidence that assessments primarily serve grading purposes. The predominant focus of assessments appears to be on the recall and reproduction of content from textbooks, leading to a limited impact on genuine learning outcomes. The issue is further exacerbated by the prevailing practice in most Indian schools, where formative assessments are reduced to a series of

short written tests, with marks obtained being aggregated solely for grading purposes. The crucial concept that formative assessment results could be harnessed to enhance learning, subsequently improving summative results is notably lacking in the educational landscape (Raj, Banerjee, 2019). Therefore, the research aims to delve into these intricacies and gaps, examining how the current assessment practices and their utilization contribute to the overall challenge of low average learning levels among students.

3.0 Research Questions

1. What are the formative assessment practises practised by teachers in secondary school?
2. How do teachers perceive about infrastructural facilities available for formative assessment practises?
3. How do teachers perceive about Benefits of formative assessment practices for their students?
4. How do teachers perceive about Parental Support for implementing formative assessment practices?
5. How do teachers perceive about In-service Training for implementing formative assessment practices?
6. What are the perceived Problems encountered by teachers for implementing formative assessment practices?

4.0 Methodology

To address the research questions this study was employed qualitative research approach, following Denzin and Lincoln's (2011, p. 3) definition of qualitative research as an interpretive, naturalistic study of phenomena in their natural settings, with a focus on understanding meanings people attribute to them. A qualitative approach provides an avenue to capture rich, detailed, and context-specific information about a phenomenon, enabling researchers to explore complexities, generate insights, and lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the subject under study.

4.1 Participants

In this study, purposive sampling was employed as a specific qualitative approach for participant selection. Purposive sampling involves selecting information-rich cases that can provide valuable insights into the central issues of the inquiry (Patton, 2015, p. 264). The research aimed to capture a wide range of teachers' perspectives on various dimensions of formative assessment, including Infrastructural Facilities, Benefits to students, Parental Support, In-service Training, and Problems Encountered by Teachers. In this study there were 39 teachers purposively selected from 23 secondary schools across various blocks in Mayurbhanj district. Ethical research practices were maintained to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Written consent forms were prepared, and all participants were informed about the study's objectives and assured of their anonymity.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The research design involved semi-structured interviews to investigate the perspectives of secondary school teachers, aiming to gain in-depth insights into their views and experiences within authentic educational contexts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed to explore the different dimensions of formative assessment. The interviews allowed participants to freely express their ideas, and each interview lasted between 30 to 35 minutes. Data analysis involved qualitative content analysis, which helped in identifying codes and organizing them into categories based on their relationships (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Themes were derived from the analysis, and the

findings are presented through a thick description of the different aspects of formative assessment practices. Additionally, classroom observations and document analysis (questions paper, answer sheets, etc.) were conducted to know the actual formative assessment techniques and infrastructural facilities available in the schools.

5.0 Results and Discussion

The results of this study presents the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants. The participants revealed valuable insights regarding the Infrastructural Facilities, Benefits to students, Parental Support, In-service Training, and Problems Encountered by Teachers when adopting formative assessment practices. The responses of the teachers have been presented below:

1. **What are the formative assessment practises practised by teachers in secondary school?**

The results from the study on existing formative assessment practices in secondary school revealed that present, four categories of formative assessment strategies have been used by the teachers such as 1. Periodic Paper-Pencil Test (Formative-I, II, III and IV which includes objective, short answer and essay type questions), 2. Multiple Assessment Practice (Maps, Oral Test, Graphics, Group/Individual Assessment, Assignments , Activities etc.), 3.Portfolio Assessment (Work done by the student, like drawing, poems, collection of different materials, self-made objects, story writing, problem solving) 4. Subject Enrichment Activities (These includes activities like debates, experiments, Organising quizzes, role play, field visit, model preparation, drawing, chart preparation, map preparation and biography writing). Therefore it can be say that teachers are using more and less formative assessment strategies to optimize teaching learning process as well as improving the student attainment. However high majority of teachers have been frequently discussing feedback with students, engaging students in effective class participation, using the question and answer technique continuously during classroom lecture and helping the students to plan for their next step of learning. The findings of the current study supported with the outcomes of the study conducted by Volante and Beckett (2011) in Canada on elementary teachers' formative assessment strategies in the contemporary classroom. Their research findings revealed that teachers are increasingly acquainted with a variety of formative assessment techniques, such as questioning and providing feedback without assigning grades. Additionally, they are consistently implementing these strategies in their classrooms. In addition, the findings of the current study are in line with findings of Asare, (2021) who stated that the majority of teachers employed a range of formative techniques in their classroom like; Quizzes, group work, pair conversations, assignments, a teacher-made test, and oral questioning.

On the contrary, an important area that needs to be looked at is the practices that were least practiced by teacher and the peers assessment, self-assessment, descriptive feedback and remediation less frequently which are essential practices of formative assessment. Those findings are aligned with Asare, (2021) study that include encouraging students to do self-assessment, engaging students to do self-assessment, encouraging students to do peer -assessment and engaging students to do peer assessment. Teachers should be encouraged to engage students in these practises, as Asare, (2021) advised that peer and self-assessment may be utilised to help students, particularly low achievers, improve their classroom performance.

2. **How do teachers perceive about infrastructural facilities available for formative assessment practises?**

Basic instructional facilities and support are essential for successful execution of formative assessment practices in schools. In this regard, the researcher has interacted with the teachers and found that 27out of 39 teachers unequivocally reported below mentioned instructional facilities available in their schools.

Table-1: Instructional Facilities and Support Available for Formative Assessment

Instructional Facilities and Support Available for Formative Assessment	
• Smart board, • Power point subject wise provided or self-made • Sample question papers from the office of DEO • Internet • Laboratory • E-library • Smart classrooms • Computers	• Textbooks • Science lab • Hard disk/ pen drive • Obedience of students and manageable students • Co-operative staff • TLM • Handbook • Art work • Mud work of eminent personalities

Further query regarding the utility of the above facilities in assessment practices reported by the teachers as follows:

During interaction, one teacher commented that

...Smart board help me to teach content quickly using PPT and I get sufficient time to assess the students learning in my classroom. Further sample questions from OSEPA, UTKARSH helps me do better formative assessment practices...

Another teacher stated that

...I get help from formative assessment question bank which are available by OSSTA, paniksha Darpan, UTKARSH application...

Another teacher commented that

...the students of my class are obedience and manageable. They do the entire task what I give. Therefor I can monitor their progress...

For conducting formative assessment, school need an encouraging and enjoyable environment. Infrastructure as well as instructional facilities play important role to create favourable environment for assessing student progress. Classrooms, library, science lab, TLM, and textbook etc. are basic infrastructural facilities need for creating a favourable environment to engage in different learning activities. This favourable environment gives maximum opportunities to the teacher to monitor the students learning and identify the learning gap and help to take remedial measures. It was clear from the interaction with teachers and observation that much more facilities available from the basic requirement. Further interaction with the teachers revealed that staff, concern authority and students are supportive. Taking into consideration of above teachers views we could conclude that teacher's perception about available infrastructural facilities and support provided by the school and concern authority is favourable.

3. **How do teachers perceive about Benefits of formative assessment practices for their students?**

It is important to know how teachers perceive about the benefits of formative assessment to the students. The success of formative assessment squarely depends on the teachers. Their attitude and attached value to different formative assessment practices will bring success to the formative assessment. The common benefits of the formative assessment for the students as informed by the teachers during interaction have been listed below.

Table-2: Perceived Benefits of Formative Assessment by Teachers

Perceived Benefits of Formative Assessment by Teachers	
• Students gain topic wise knowledge and understanding	• Regularity in attendance
• Students do well in final examination	• Increases academic competitiveness among learners
• Familiarized students with different question pattern	• Get chance to identify slow learners and learning difficulties
• Increase interest of the students to learn	• Student became serious about their learning
• Promote deeper understanding	• Know their strength and weakness
• Students get chance for self-assessment	• Academic performance improved
• Promote continuous improvement of student performance	• Reduces exam related farness
• Active participation of students in classroom teaching.	

During interaction, one teacher commented that

...when I give project or portfolio to my students they engage in different co-curricular activities as well as practical work like model, project work, therefore they actively participate and interested to learn more...

Another teacher stated that

...when I give portfolio with explanation of image I think it increases their imagination power of students...

Another teacher narrated as follows

...they aware about their achievement and recognize their strength as well as weakness by feedback received from teachers as well as their peer groups...

Another teacher stated that

...due to formative assessment, students are more engage in teaching learning process and perform very well in summative exam...

Another teacher informed that

...I am frequently assessing my student's performance using multiple formative assessment tools therefore they go through the each contents multiple times. They get concept clarity related to their subject...

Another teacher stated that

...I think formative assessment practice will be benefited to students as this assessment help students to how they are improving themselves in certain topic...

Another teacher stated that

...they aware about pattern of different questions, conscious about exam, and development of different qualities like creativity, social qualities, co-operation...

Another teacher stated that

...Students get multiple opportunities to show what they have learned...

So far benefit of formative assessment is concerned; teachers have said that formative assessment practices have helped the learners in multiple ways. When they employ formative assessment practices, students were actively participating in classroom discussion, students revise same contentment multiple times therefore they get deep knowledge about the topic increase their achievements and aroused their interest for better understanding of the concept. Also teachers said when they provide feedback they able to know their strengths and weakness. Apart from that student became aware about pattern of different questions, conscious about exam, and development of different qualities like creativity, social qualities, co-operation became fearless for exam and get opportunity to learn again. However interaction with the teachers revealed that students achievements are gradually increase, actively participate, motivate to learn, better understand the concept, able to know their strengths and weakness, fearless for exam and get opportunity to learn again and increase their performance. But some of the benefits of formative assessment to students like developing self-assessment skill, peer assessment skill and effective learning strategies skills are not perceived by the teachers. Those benefits are helping them to became a lifelong learner by develop learning to learn skills.

4. How do teachers perceive about Parental Support for implementing formative assessment practices?

Parental support, concern and involvement are essential for success of formative assessment in schools. Therefore, the researcher was interested to know how parents have showed their concern at formative assessment practices. In order to gain deeper understanding about the involvement parents during formative assessment of their wards, the researcher interacted with teachers to reflect on nature and magnitude of parental support to conduct formative assessment.

One of the teachers commented that

…some of the parents have been coming to the school to know about how do their childeren have been performing in school and what type of support they can provide for better performance etc...

Another teacher stated that

…Parents are not taking responsibility related to their childrens project, they do not provide required materials like thermo coal, and colours papers etc. for complete the project or portfolio…

Another teacher explained that

…after giving frequent reminder to students, few students never come to school. Therefor I inform their parents about irregularity and problems of irregularity in class still they not send their student…

Another teacher stated that

…No, I am not satisfied with parents support to conduct formative assessment as students are not doing well in formative assessment. Parents must guide their children at home sincerely…

Another teacher lamented that

…there is no communication between teachers and parents regarding the performance of their children, majority of the parents have not been coming to school to inquiry about the performance of their children. Very few parent members have been attending SMDC meeting...

Another teacher stated that

…some parents are supportive they obeying the instruction given by the teachers, helps in project work of their students, sending their students to schools, observe student progress…

Another teacher stated that

… I satisfy with parents support but their economic status hamper in project work of students, their quality of materials used in projects can be good if they spend money on project materials…

Most of the common problems relating to parental involvement in formative assessment have been listed below as informed by the teachers during interaction

- Lack of seriousness among some parents about their children learning
- Lack of interest among parents to know about their students strength and weakness
- Not cooperating
- Not attending PTM meeting

For successfully implementation of formative assessment in school parents support is very important. Parental involvement ensures the regularity and good behaviour of students in school. Also provide scope to learn at home and take curricular related decision. For effectiveness formative assessment parents should send their children, regular monitor their students' progress, and fulfil required materials for their projects and assignment. Despite that parents should communicate with school teachers to know about their children needs and what they can do for their children. However interaction with the teachers revealed that most of the parents are not communicate with teachers and parents regarding the performance of their children, majority of the parents not came to the parent-teachers meeting, if some of them come as maintaining formality. Further interaction with the teachers revealed that some of the parents are not obeying the feedback and helps their students to complete the assignments and projects. Some of the teachers said after giving frequent reminder to students, few students never come to school. Therefor they inform their parents about irregularity and problems of irregularity in class still they not send their students to schools. It was worse situation for teachers to managing time for remedial teaching as well as conducting periodic, unit tests. Despite that parents should communicate with school teachers to know about their children needs and what they can do for their children. However interaction with the teachers revealed that some of the parents are not supportive, they don't communicate with teachers about their students learning and cooperative. Therefore students are failed to produce desirable quality of work. Some students were not getting extra support from their parents. So we could say that lack of parents supports to conducting formative assessment in secondary schools.

5. How do teachers perceive about In-service Training for implementing formative assessment practices?

Continuous professional development is necessary to build the competency of teachers to implement different tools and techniques of formative assessment. Thus the researchers interacted with the teachers to elicit their response about the frequency and quality of the in-service programme to enhance their competency to implement formative assessment practices. The obtained responses have been presented and discussed below:

As such there was not any particular in-service training provided them to execute formative assessment. They have oriented about formative assessment under different training program like 5T and leadership and Capacity Building Training Programme. These programmes have been conducted by the office of DEO at district headquarters 5 days in one academic session.

During interaction, one teacher commented that

…I am not satisfied with the online mode of training programme; I was oriented by online mode for 2 to 3 hours about assessment procedure of schools in which they told about different formative assessment method and procedures…

Another teacher stated that

…Yes only one day where they oriented about assessment procedure of session 2021-22…

Another teacher stated that

…there is no training provided for particularly formative assessment. I think, if training will be provided than I can use it more conveniently and professional way…

Another teacher stated that

…I have not attended any assessment related training, if training will be provided I could do better in formative assessment practices…

Another teacher stated that

…one meeting, one discussion was conducted where we discuss about how to give marks and use different techniques like, portfolio, multiple assessment technique, subject enrichment and periodic test…

Another teacher stated that

…I am satisfied with one day in-service training that has been provided. I think I could do better if I will be provided with one or two more training session about formative assessment…

Another teacher stated that

…training has been provided about assessment, curriculum, dual class teaching, learning, listen reading sequencing writing and conducting remedial class to fulfil learning gap of students due to covid-19. I am satisfied with all training program…

Another teacher stated that

…I am partially satisfied with training program of assessment because they only oriented about guideline of assessment…

For effective implementation of formative assessment, teachers should have to up-to-date knowledge, skill, attitude and beliefs, and improving instruction and strategies. Therefore rigorous in-service training should be provided time to time to build competency and confidence among teachers to carry out the formative assessment practices. It was found no specific in-service training programme was organised for teachers. Some of the teachers were oriented about formative assessment procedures by a meeting. All teachers perceived that they could do better if they provided in-service training. However, the need of professional development on formative assessment cannot be fully met with a one day orientation and integrated training with other program. Further Teachers cannot perform new formative assessment practices in classroom without support of intensive in-service training. It was found from interaction with teachers that no such specific in-service training program on formative assessment tools and techniques was organised by the appropriate authority.

6. What are the perceived Problems encountered by teachers for implementing formative assessment practices?

It is necessary to know the overall problems encountered by the teachers to implement formative assessment practices. The commonly perceived problems by the teachers have been presented in table 3.

Table-3: Problems Encountered by Teachers to Implement Formative Assessment Practices

Problems Encountered by Teachers to Implement Formative Assessment Practices	
• Digital equipment service problem	• Courses are not complete in-time
• Irregularity of students	• Language barriers
• Time managing problem if students are irregular	• Lack of parent awareness about students
• Low Economic background	• Parents absent in PTM

hamper in portfolio	• Some of students not doing assignment
• Parents are not aware about students' progress/ performance	• Lack of TLM
• No communication between parents and teachers	• Preparing sample questions regarding FA
• Not getting project materials by the students	• Text book provided being delayed
• Residential nature of schools	• Some materials not available in library and lab
• Learning gap of students due to covid-19	• Technical operating knowledge about smart rooms
• Electrical equipment are sometime not working	• Absent in exam/ test
• No technical staff	• Some students are not interested and serious about their study
• Basic literacy of students	• Shortage of in-service training
• No basic level of understanding of students about their subject	• Guardians are uneducated

During interaction, one teacher commented that

…few students are facing problems regarding project work and portfolio. They do the work but not satisfactory level due to unavailability of materials. Their guardians are not providing any equipment to complete the projects. Their guardians are illiterate…

Another teacher stated that

…To arrange the remedial class is difficult for me because I have to cover whole syllabus in time. If I take remedial class than syllabus remains uncover…

For the smooth functioning of formative assessment in our education system we have to address the problems faced by the teachers. The above problems faced by teachers are related to student, their parents, concern authority, technical and teacher itself. During interaction with teachers, it was found that major problems are to conduct remedial teaching, students absent in test or classroom, time consuming, language barrier, low economic background of students, in-service training, non-co-operative parents, no basic level of knowledge of students and preparing sample questions regarding FA. However those problems could be overcome by introducing different interventions. It was fond that from the study teachers are facing difficulties in managing their time because they feel that formative assessment need continuous effort to assess student strength and weakness accordingly prepare their instruction. When students are not present in test and classroom they have to arrange another valuable time for tracking their progress. Further they perceive difficulty to arranging remedial teaching with limited knowledge. Teachers also revealed students are belong to low economics status, therefore they don't afford good project and assignment works. However study found some major problems in implementing formative assessment were absence of remedial teaching, student's absenteeism in test or classroom, managing time to complete course, language barrier, low economic background of students, and lack of in-service training to teachers. The finding of the study supported by (Sidhuet al., 2018) in Malaysian secondary schools found that time constraints, classroom enrolment, heavy workload, and lack of training as their main challenges against the effective implementation of the CEFR aligned SBA. Futher studies in South Africa (Rahman, et al. 2021; Byabato & Kisamo, 2014; Kanjee & Sayed, 2013;

Omorogiuwa & Aibangbee, 2017) also added that there were time constraints and a lack of resources, as well as teachers' inadequate knowledge and training as barriers to a successful implementation of SBA.

6.0 Conclusion

The study revealed that secondary school teachers employ a variety of formative assessment strategies, including Periodic Paper-Pencil Tests, Multiple Assessment Practices, Portfolio Assessment, and Subject Enrichment Activities. The study also highlights teachers' satisfaction with the infrastructural facilities of schools and their perceptions of the benefits of formative assessment for students' achievements and engagement in the learning process. However, despite these positive aspects, several challenges were identified, including dissatisfaction with in-service training and lack of parental support for formative assessment practices. Teachers also face obstacles such as the absence of remedial teaching, student absenteeism, time management issues, language barriers, and economic disparities among students. To address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of formative assessment practices in secondary schools, the study suggests the authority of short-term courses, workshops, seminars, and other relevant in-service training activities for teachers. Such professional development initiatives can equip teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to overcome obstacles and effectively implement formative assessment approaches in their classrooms. By addressing these challenges and providing adequate support, secondary school teachers can maximize the benefits of formative assessment practices, leading to improved student learning outcomes and a more engaging and effective learning environment.

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