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How Secondary English Teachers Employ Formative Assessment and Feedback to Scaffold Students' Odyssey in English Learning

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The practice of formative assessment and feedback to scaffold student learning in secondary school English classrooms is either neglected or underestimated in the literature.

Purpose: This study reports how secondary English teachers reflect on their practice of formative assessment and feedback in English language teaching. It examines the nexus that teachers make between formative assessments and continuous feedback to promote students' learning.

Method: A semi-structured interview was employed to investigate the teachers' implementation of formative assessment and strategies for giving feedback to students' English learning activities. Classroom observation explored how teachers provided immediate feedback to students' classroom activities. This article examines the data through Lajoie's scaffolding framework.

Results: Findings indicate that teachers' continuous feedback to students' English learning activities and frequent language assessments have become effective in promoting students' English language learning. Despite the limited training they receive, teachers' motivation to learn innovative teaching techniques is crucial for connecting formative assessments with students' English language learning.

Conclusion: The article aims to contribute to the practical understanding of the potentially significant roles of continuous feedback and formative assessment in foreign or second language teaching and learning. It further contributes to the ways the English language is taught in similar contexts.

KEYWORDS

formative assessment, feedback, scaffolding, ELT, case study

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INTRODUCTION

Formative assessment serves as a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning, particularly in English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms (Leenknecht et al., 2021; Sardareh & Saad, 2012). In various educational contexts, teachers employ formative assessment as a crucial tool to track student learning and adapt their teaching strategies to more effectively address individual needs and enhance learning outcomes (Yan, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Gathering and utilising evidence of student learning is crucial for identifying learning gaps, providing targeted feedback and ultimately foster-

ing greater language proficiency (Alqah-tani & Rahman, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Effective formative assessment practices also foster collaboration between teachers and students, empowering students to become active participants in their odyssey, a learning journey (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Despite the established benefits of formative assessment in global EFL contexts (Estaji & Mirzaii, 2018; Ozan & Kincal, 2018; Xiao, 2017; Xiao & Yang, 2019), the success of its implementation depends on teachers' understanding and practical application (Yan et al., 2021). In particular, teachers' capability of utilising



what formative assessment offers in English language instructions determines students' progressive learning. While an extensive body of research has explored the theoretical underpinnings and potential of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998) in EFL, a critical gap remains in our empirical understanding of how EFL teachers actually act out these principles in their everyday classroom practices, particularly concerning the provision of feedback to scaffold student learning. Prior studies often focus on teacher perceptions and the impact of specific formative assessment techniques, leaving a need for in-depth investigations into the nuanced ways teachers integrate formative assessment and feedback to guide and support student progress within the classroom setting.

This study attempts to address this knowledge gap by investigating the lived experiences of secondary English teachers in Nepal as they implement formative assessment and feedback to scaffold student learning. Specifically, this research aims to understand the strategies teachers employ and the ways in which their formative assessment practices contribute to the scaffolding of English language learning in classroom settings. The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the practical realities of formative assessment implementation and its potential to enhance student learning in this specific educational context.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ#1: How do secondary English teachers in Nepal utilise formative assessment and feedback in their classrooms?

RQ#2: In what ways do these formative assessment practices and feedback scaffold students' English learning?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development

This study adopts sociocultural perspective on learning, grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The central to this framework is the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights the gap between a student's current abilities and their potential with support (Vygotsky, 1978), provides the foundation for this approach. Formative assessment aligns with the ZPD by identifying student strengths and weaknesses, allowing for targeted feedback within their learning zone (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009). This feedback serves as a scaffolding mechanism, guiding learners towards their goals (Wood, 2010). In addition, formative assessment fosters interactive and collaborative learning environments that promote dialogue among students and teachers. This dialogue facilitates discussions about students' learning trajectories, current levels of understand-

ing, and strategies for advancing their knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Mahn, 2015; Demekash, 2024). Based on this framework, this research argues that effective teacher-learner interactions, particularly those employing formative assessment and feedback within the ZPD, are significant in facilitating student learning in EFL. These interactions allow teachers to determine students' present proficiency levels and their potential with assistance, thereby enabling the modifying of instructional support to bridge the identified gap.

Formative Assessment as a Mechanism for Scaffolding

Formative assessment is a systematic process of gathering information about student learning during instruction (Black & Wiliam, 2009) with the aim of guiding subsequent teaching and support (Yongqi Gu & Lam, 2023). Aligning with learners' ZPD, formative assessment enables teachers to provide targeted, timely, and meaningful feedback as a scaffold for student learning. Scaffolding, defined as the temporary support provided to learners to assist them in achieving higher levels of competence (Michell & Sharpe, 2005; Wood et al., 1976), includes various forms and activities like questioning, observation, peer assessment, modelling, prompting, and written or oral feedback, allowing teachers to identify gaps in understanding (Asamoah et al., 2022; Ruan, 2015) and tailor support accordingly (Cauley & McMillan, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The supports can be provided by teachers, peers, or even technology (Lajoie, 2005; Wood et al., 1976). Within this framework, formative assessment plays a vital role in identifying students' needs and informing the nature of scaffolding required (Atjonen et al., 2024; Li & Yongqi Gu, 2023). In this way, formative assessment becomes an interactive process through which teachers and students co-construct learning.

Lajoie's Framework for Adaptive Scaffolding

Drawing on Lajoie's (2005) framework for adaptive scaffolding, this study analyses how secondary English teachers adapt their formative assessment and feedback practices to promote student learning, particularly in Nepal's EFL context. This framework highlights several core dimensions like the provision of support, the use of individualised assessment, the activation of prior knowledge, the identification of learner interests, and the monitoring of developing understanding. These dimensions emphasise the nature of scaffolding and that feedback must be continuously modified, aligning with learners' changing levels of competence and engagement. In the EFL context, this framework explains how feedback and scaffolding diverge in form, purpose, and timing, ranging from simply correcting specific language errors to encouraging reflective thinking and fostering learner autonomy (Dever et al., 2023; Noroozi et al., 2018). Drawing on the relationship of these dimensions, this study examines how teachers adapt their formative practices to provide

timely and appropriate support to student learning. Lajoie's framework, thus, informs the analytical categories used to interpret classroom interactions, enabling a systematic analysis of how formative assessment and feedback function as scaffolding mechanisms in EFL teaching.

Challenges and Opportunities in Scaffolding through Formative Assessment

While formative assessment offers numerous advantages and is widely endorsed for its role in scaffolding, its successful implementation presents several challenges. These challenges encompass various aspects, including the assessment process itself, feedback delivery, student uptake of feedback, and the integration of scaffolding within the broader learning (AlMofti, 2020; Rahman et al., 2021; Widiastuti et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021). Crafting clear, actionable, and timely feedback can be time-consuming, especially in large classes (AlMofti, 2020; Rahman et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021). Maintaining consistent feedback quality is another challenge (Ali & Al-Adawi, 2013).

Moreover, teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding formative assessment play a significant role in its successful implementation (King & Lam 2024; Widiastuti et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021). Finally, student receptiveness and willingness to integrate feedback into their learning process are crucial factors for successful implementation (Sadler, 2010; Yan et al., 2021). Sultana (2019) highlights inadequate academic preparation in assessment practices, potentially limiting teachers' ability to effectively utilise assessments for instructional improvement. Similarly, Figa et al. (2020) point out that a lack of appropriate teaching materials can further hinder the effective implementation of formative assessment and feedback in the students' learning of English.

Local Context: Formative Assessment in Nepali EFL Classrooms

While Nepal's school system has acknowledged the importance of formative assessment (Curriculum Development Centre, 2018; Khaniya et al., 2015), the actual practice of formative assessment of how secondary English teachers, who teach from Class 9 to 12 (Year 9 to 12 in western countries), actually utilise it in their classrooms is still unknown. However, the development and implementation of formative assessment are highlighted in in-service teacher training programmes. Based on our participation in teacher professional development programmes, we expect that English teachers are capable of utilising their formative assessment knowledge and skills in their instructional activities. Previous studies (Dawadi, 2018; Rana & Rana, 2019) highlight the neglect of formative aspects, particularly in listening and speaking skills. There is limited literature, particularly in the context of Nepal about how teachers utilise feedback within formative assessment practices. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the practices of formative assessment in

Nepali English classrooms, particularly its role in scaffolding student learning. This study further seeks to contribute valuable insights into the current state of formative assessment in Nepal's English classrooms and its potential for enhancing student learning.

METHOD

This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews with eight secondary English teachers and eight students from eight secondary schools in five districts, and observation of teachers' classes. In particular, a case study has been useful to explore teachers' experiences of implementing formative assessment as a means of giving feedback on students' English language learning and to investigate how teachers linked the results of formative assessment with their continuous teaching activities and students' learning of the English language (Yin, 2015). The case study design enabled us to excavate rich data and describe the case in detail.

Participants

For this study, 16 participants – one teacher and one student from each school – were purposively selected from eight community schools in rural areas of Nepal. The target population comprised English language teachers and students. We focused on eight schools from five districts in the Hilly region. Following verbal consent from headteachers, we conducted sequential visits to each school, inviting English teachers and students to participate in the study. The selection of the participants followed a 'first-come-first-served' approach. We obtained informed consent from headteachers, English teachers, and students before the data collection. In the case of students, we contacted their parents and explained the participation of students and the aim of the study. Their consent led to the involvement of the students in this study. The following Table 1 summarises the participants and the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

The schools participating included Adharshila School (Tanahun), Barahi School (Kaski), Gaurishankar School (Kaski), Nava Jyoti School (Syangja), Annapurna School (Syangja), Bhoj Prakash School (Syangja), Gyanmandir School (Ramechhap), and Devwani School (Makawanpur).

The teacher participants were all male, with ages ranging from 30 to 42 years. They possessed a variety of qualifications, including Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degrees. Their teaching experience spanned from 6.5 to 11 years. The student participants exhibited diversity in both gender and grade level. The group comprised seven males and one female, representing grades 9 through 11.

Selection of participants from a range of schools and grade levels aimed to ensure a representative sample of the Nepali

educational system. This diversity facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by encompassing various perspectives and experiences within the EFL learning environment.

Data Collection Procedure

With the idea of Cohen et al. (2007), both teachers and students were interviewed to investigate how the teachers employed formative assessments and implemented the results of such assessments in their classroom teaching, and students were interviewed to find out their experiences of learning the English language. The interview with the students strengthened the data collected from teachers. After we had obtained informed consent from the participants, we scheduled interviews with the participants at their convenient time and place. Most of the interviews took place in informal situations outside the school premises at local cafeterias and their homes. Each interview was held for about half an hour on average. However, we followed participants depending on the issues they raised in the first cycle of the interview. An interview schedule (See Appendix 1) was used to conduct interviews with the participants. Interviews with the participants were recorded on an audio recorder. As suggested by Hancock et al. (2007), five classes of each teacher were observed to complement interviews in about a month. The information collected through observations enriched the interview data. In particular, we collected data through observations for the crystallisation of interview data. Classroom observations were noted in a diary.

In this study, we frequently switched our positions from insider to outsider and vice versa. By approaching schools and participants and building relationships with them, we became an insider being in the same profession. We maintained the insider position during the interviews and observations, ensuring that the data was authentic and trustwor-

thy. However, we held an outsider position in the process of data analysis to prevent bias and ensure fair results.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009) was followed to transcribe, translate and code the audio recording of the interviews and analyse the data including observations. We transcribed audio records which were dominantly in the Nepali language and then translated them into the English language. We emailed the transcription of the interviews to each participant for the verification of the information they provided. After receiving their email responses, we analysed the data. The scaffolding framework of Lajoie (2005) provided a conceptual guideline throughout the research. The conceptual framework offered key elements – support provided by a teacher, individual assessment, identification of students’ learning interest, activation of prior knowledge, and monitoring emerging understanding – to the analysis of the data from this study. Table 2 below summarises the application of the key elements generated based on Lajoie’s adaptive scaffolding concept to the analysis of the data. The implications of applying this framework are discussed elsewhere in the following sections of this article.

RESULTS

The study revealed some findings (see Table 2 below) related to the practice of formative assessments in ELT classes at secondary schools in Nepal. For example, interviews with teachers explicitly reflected how they connected the results of various forms of formative assessment with their classroom teaching, created a learning environment, provided support to individual students in their learning activities, learned skills of assessment and feedback from training, and overcame challenges of teaching the English language.

Table 1
Participant Schools, Teachers, and Students

School	Districts	Teacher	Qualification	Age	Year of Teaching	Students	Class
Adharshila	Tanahun	Nimesh (Male)	M.A.	37	11	Ishwor (Male)	9
Barahi	Kaski	Arjun (Male)	M.Ed.	32	8	Sabin (Male)	10
Gaurishankar	Kaski	Narayan (Male)	M.A.	30	7	Saroj (Male)	9
Nava Jyoti	Syangja	Dhan (Male)	M.Ed.	32	6.5	Prem (Male)	11
Annapurna	Syangja	Bhupen (Male)	B.Ed.	40	9	Sabina (Female)	10
Bhoj Prakash	Syangja	Prakash (Male)	M.Ed.	40	10	Shishir (Male)	9
Gyanmandir	Ramechhap	Kiran (Male)	M.Ed.	42	10	Kamal (Male)	10
Devwani	Makawanpur	Ujjwal (Male)	M.Ed.	35	8	Bishnu (Male)	9

Table 2*Application of Key Elements*

Elements	Application to Current Research Data
Support	Diagnosed learning issues with individual students and helped students individually.
Individual assessment	Classwork, class tests, and homework. Oral questions to individual students when teaching.
Identification of interest	Not visible.
Activation of prior knowledge	Repeatedly teaching the same lesson.
Monitoring emerging understanding	Involved students in various group activities.

Teachers' Assessment and Feedback Strategies

The analysis of data from interviews and observation revealed that teachers practise various forms of assessments in ELT classes for mainly identifying students' understanding of lessons, learning difficulties and weaknesses, and for supporting them in their learning of English lessons. Teachers posed oral questions to students during or at the end of the lesson to identify their understanding of a lesson delivered or taught in the classroom. Moreover, they focused on written exercises in the classroom rather than oral communication. For example, participants recalled:

We often ask students oral questions to check whether or not they understood the lessons we taught. Apart from this, we provide homework, classwork, and sometimes even project work to students. [Dhan, teacher]

For assessing students' learning, we generally use various assessment forms like a class test, classwork and homework. Mostly we ask oral questions to our students. [Arjun, teacher]

Teachers frequently ask us questions when teaching, usually give classwork and homework. Sometimes we have class tests. [Saroj, student]

The majority of the participant teachers expressed that they were unable to adequately practise formative assessments and provide immediate feedback on students' learning activities. Students' responses affirmed that teachers' feedback on their learning of English was inadequate. However, they hesitated to disclose why they were unable to immediately provide feedback. For example:

We often check students' work, but it is sometimes difficult to provide immediate and effective feedback to students due to some reasons. [Narayan, teacher]

Teachers had a lack of understanding of formative assessment affordances in their teaching of English as a foreign language and students' learning process. Instead, they had a structured mechanism of grading students' holistic learning through terminal examinations such as first term, second term and final or annual exams.

We distribute test papers to students just to let them quickly see what they have done, and provide feedback but they cannot take them home. [Prakash, teacher]

Students have to sit for frequent tests and terminal exams, but they are not offered specific feedback. It depends on students if they want immediate feedback. [Ujjwal, teacher]

We do various class works, homework, class tests and terminal exams. We rarely get feedback on our terminal exams. If we request to have our exam papers, we can have a look. [Sabina, student]

Although findings from the teachers' class observation indicated that teachers attempted to provide feedback on students' work after written or oral tests in the class, it was not adequate for students to improve and develop their learning. Teachers' responses indicated that they would only provide, particularly verbal feedback when students sought feedback on their work. We understood that they either did not have adequate knowledge of utilising feedback as an instrument or knowingly did not implement it to scaffold students' English learning.

Cooperative Learning Environment

Social interaction in a collaborative learning environment can significantly accelerate students' learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Both teachers and students' reported information indicated that students worked in groups to develop language skills, and that peer feedback improved their learning of the English language in the classroom. However, the majority of teachers, except Arjun, engaged students in individual learning activities rather than involving them in teamwork. Moreover, teachers preferred to assess students' continuous performance based on the one-to-one approach and provide feedback that way. On the other hand, the majority of students appreciated the idea of grouping them in various numbers and involving them in interactivities. Moreover, students' expressions reflected that they would prefer peer work or group work to individual work in the classroom to share ideas in solving problems of learning. For example:

We divide students into small groups and encourage them to learn in a collaborative environment. When students work in groups, students can share their ideas and solve any sort of problems. [Arjun, teacher]

Teachers sometimes assign us some group tasks. Especially more competent students are given the responsibility to assist other students particularly weak students. [Prem, student]

Teachers' initiative to engage high-performing students to support their low-performing friends, albeit limited, seemed to be a potential aspect of teaching strategies in the classroom. However, their expressions reflected that their teaching was much more oriented to examinations and grades that the students are awarded. Moreover, their reported information indicated that there was little connection between the result and its reflective practice in regular teaching of English courses.

Support to Students in Learning

Participant teachers talked about how they employed various teaching strategies to meet the needs of students and expressed how they utilised the results of class tests and other occasional tests in their ELT classroom. Figure 1 below illustrates secondary English teachers' ways of scaffolding students' learning of English courses in the classroom. In these schools, teachers tended to be cooperative with students by individually reaching their students in the classroom. Both teachers and students' responses indicated that teachers' approaches to the teaching of English lessons were student-centred and democratic. Some of the teachers involved in this study repeated their previously taught lessons with the demand of students to help them learn English lessons.

Teachers' communication with individual students more than group learning seemed to be helpful for students' individualistic learning. However, the level of support they tried to provide to students was found to be more isolated and unidealistic because students would learn English much better in groups of many by interacting with their friends and correcting their mistakes in a natural way. For example:

If students cannot understand a lesson or a topic I teach, I make adjustments in teaching techniques and reteach the lesson. I talk to students individually and support them in their learning. [Nimesh, teacher]

I try my best to assist my students to learn better. I individually ask questions about lessons when teaching to find their learning progress and sometimes give them tests to investigate learning problems. I reteach lessons when needed in different ways. [Dhan, teacher]

Teachers sometimes repeat their lessons with more emphasis if we fail to understand them in one class. [Ishwor, student]

Our observations of teachers' classrooms found that although teachers tended to cooperate with students in all cases when students asked them to help in the classroom, individual support to them seemed to be effective only in written activities but such strategy was doubtful to develop students' communicative skills. However, some teachers shared some issues such as the large size of the class, workload, limited time, and lack of headteacher's monitoring that influenced their teaching strategies and responsibilities. Probably the issues raised by these teachers are common to many school teachers across the country as there is no provision of assistant teachers in Nepal's schools. For example:

We sometimes cannot check students' homework and class-work and provide feedback on their work in time due to a large number of students and limited time. [Prakash, teacher]

I normally provide feedback on students' work in time, but sometimes I cannot because of a large number of students and limited time. [Narayan, teacher]

It is really difficult to give assignments to students every day and provide timely feedback on their work as we have to teach 5 to 6 out of 8 periods. [Ujjwal, teacher]

Findings from teachers' class observation indicated that teachers seemed to have limited knowledge about how various forms formative assessments they followed in the ELT classroom would be made productive means of scaffolding students' English language development. It was much obvious from their consistent teaching and feedback approach that although students appreciated interactivities, teachers' less emphasised strategy of teaching in this study, and immediate feedback on their work, teachers usually offered verbal feedback and referred to their friends for consultation.

Strategies for Giving Feedback to Students

Secondary English teachers in the schools involved in this study generally preferred to use the Nepali to the English language to provide feedback on students' English learning activities in the classroom and assignments. Moreover, the majority of them used both written and oral modes of feedback depending on the nature of students' work and classroom learning activities. Despite the fact that teachers teaching and students learning the English language, both teachers and students were found to be comfortable using the Nepali language for giving and receiving feedback. It triggered how students developed English competency with the help of feedback in the Nepali language. For example,

It depends on the nature of work to provide feedback on students' work. I give both written and oral feedback. [Arjun, teacher]

I often provide oral feedback in the Nepali language because students can understand much better in their native language than in English. [Kiran, teacher]

We normally get feedback on our work in a group, and the feedback is given orally. Teachers give feedback in both English and Nepali languages. I prefer Nepali to English in receiving feedback. [Kamal, student]

Teachers often give feedback in Nepali because we easily understand what mistakes we need to correct. [Bishnu, student]

Although the majority of the participant teachers confidently talked about how they provided both written and oral feedback to students, few teachers confessed that they were unable to give immediate feedback on students' classroom activities, as well as assignments. It was confirmed that some of the students shared how their teachers advised them to consult the works of their friends.

I have to teach 5 periods every day. It is really difficult to give assignments to students every day and provide feedback on

their work in time. The off periods are not enough for me to check students' work and provide feedback in time. [Bhupen, teacher]

We get feedback in time. In case, the teacher cannot provide feedback on our work in time, they suggest having a look at the work of others. [Ishwor, student]

The findings indicated that none of the teachers used any means of ICT to provide feedback to students. Although all the teachers acknowledged the affordances of formative assessments and timely feedback to students in their English language learning is essential to accelerate their systematic development of English competency, they seemed to have a lack of necessary scaffolding skills to support students' learning of the English language. For example, it was observed in the classes that students' incorrect answers were corrected but the reasons behind their incorrect answers were not explained well. We also understood that teachers in this study did not have adequate skills to manoeuvre feedback and assessment to scaffold students' learning of English.

Teacher Training on Assessment and Feedback

Teachers from these community schools did not receive any training that particularly emphasised the skills of formative assessment and feedback. However, they wished they had been provided training on such skills. Their responses reflected that teacher professional development (TPD) training needs to cover skills of assessment and feedback to make the teaching of English effective. However, their responses raised questions about the quality of government teacher training programmes. For example:

I never got an opportunity to participate in training and workshop on assessment and feedback. [Dhan, teacher]

To be frank, I have never attended training and workshops, especially on assessment and feedback. I know such training and workshops help us develop our skills in student assessment and feedback. [Bhupen, teacher]

Participant teachers also commented on the possible way of giving feedback on students' consistent English learning in the classroom, but it would only be effective if they were trained to do so. Their response was at some level contradictory to the government policy that has mandated compulsory in-service training and refreshers for each teacher working in government schools. Their comments indicated two things that either the training teachers received did not cover how to manoeuvre feedback and formative assessment to improve students' learning of English or they were unable to translate the knowledge they gained from training.

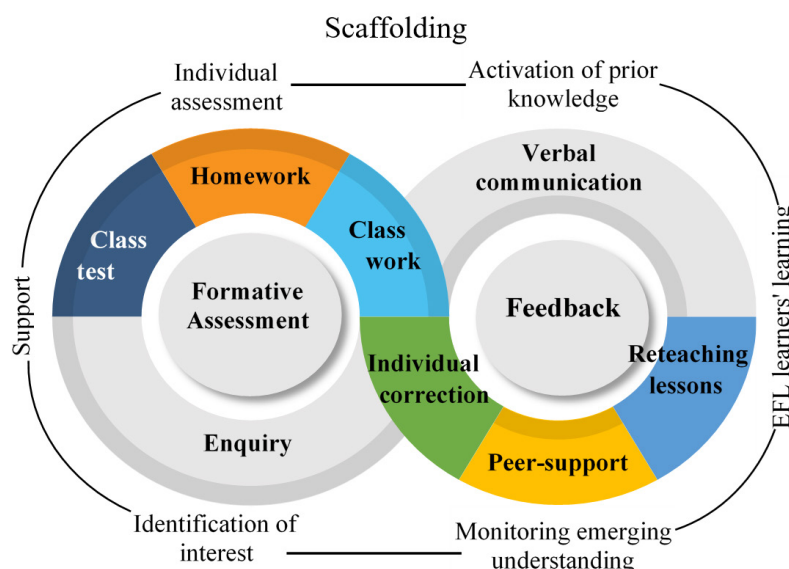
DISCUSSION

It was found that secondary English teachers employ various formative assessments guided by *individual assessment* approach such as an inquiry system when teaching English, class test after teaching certain content, classwork, and

homework mainly to investigate students' understanding of lessons and learning problems. However, the majority of the teachers involved in this study were unable to reflect the affordances of formative assessments in their feedback strategies. Moreover, the teachers loosely connected the results of formative assessments with their teaching activities. Although evidence suggests linking formative assessments with students' learning activities (Cauley & McMillan, 2010), teachers in this study needed to learn to utilise the results of class tests and verbal inquiries in the teaching of the English language in the classroom. Rana and Rana (2019) suggest teachers be proactive in developing their pedagogical knowledge and translating the knowledge into their teaching activities. Zhang and his colleagues (2024) emphasise the importance of EFL teachers having sufficient experience in using formative assessments to facilitate students' learning progress. However, repeatedly teaching the same lesson, a strategy of *activating students' prior knowledge*, was appreciated by students. Their support, a one-to-one approach, could not be effective in the large size class and they were unable to provide adequate support to students, although the majority of teachers intended to reach each student to support them in the classroom learning activities. Moreover, they could not provide immediate feedback on students' learning activities such as reading English texts and class exercises. Although students demanded constructive feedback on their English learning activities (Dawson et al., 2019; Maniati et al., 2023), teachers mostly relied on verbal comments, particularly in the Nepali language. It provoked how the students can develop English language competency with their teacher's feedback in the Nepali language.

The implementation of various forms of tests such as monthly tests and terminal exams was usually aimed to improve students' performances in terms of marks or grades in annual results. However, the results had little connection with students' continuous learning of the English language. Teachers' strategies (see Figure 1 below) to support individual students by identifying their learning problems through enquiry strategies, classwork and homework are consistent with the idea of Lajoie (2005). Although students expected group learning activities and direct feedback from their teachers, teachers' frequent advice to them to consult their friends to get support in their work resembled the findings in Tanzania (Kyaruzi et al., 2019). Although the classroom resources including blackboard (whiteboard in this study) do not belong to the teacher alone but are shared tools for teaching and learning activities (Millonig et al., 2019), teachers in this study were unable to utilise such materials to create a communicative learning environment in the classroom. Similar to the findings in Japanese schools (Thompson & Woodman, 2019), teachers in this study needed to be trained to apply scaffolding techniques to teach English more effectively.

Teachers' initiatives such as *monitoring emerging understanding* to give feedback on students' learning activities, limited though, depending on the nature of students' works and

Figure 1*Scaffolding Model Illustrating Relations between Formative Assessment and Feedback*

situation indicated that they had some level of scaffolding knowledge, although randomly followed, to support students' continuous learning of English. None of the teachers in this study received such training that focused on the skills of formative assessment and feedback strategies although they attended teacher professional development (TPD) training. Several studies (Bezukladnikov et al., 2019; Gipps, 1999; Lantolf, 2007) suggest preparing foreign language teachers to follow social learning principles. Alqahtani and Rahman (2024) emphasise that it is important to provide sufficient training and support to English teachers in non-English speaking countries. This will enable them to effectively utilise corrective feedback in students' learning and improve their teaching techniques. However, although teachers in this study expected training programmes to cover skills specifically of formative assessment and feedback, Rana et al. (2020) doubt whether or not the teachers will be able to transfer the skills they receive from training programmes. It suggests that future studies may investigate how training programmes specific to formative assessment and feedback skills for English teachers can add value to their teaching of English.

Lajoie (2005) suggests that teachers need to *identify learners' interest* in learning and provide support to them accordingly. However, teachers in this study focused on particular content oriented to individual practice rather than the individual student's interest in developing English language competency. Their instructional activities were much guided by examination and students' achievement. The findings indicate that teachers' heavy workload, large size classes, and lack of administrative monitoring of teachers' teaching activities have influenced teachers' ability to provide feedback on students' work in time. The lack of Nepal's government school principals' concentration in mentoring, training, and

improving teachers' performance is consistent with the report of the World Bank (Bétéille et al., 2020). However, teachers could promote peer or group activities, their less prioritised area reported in this study, and make their instructional activities much more effective. The findings suggest that teachers need to identify the nexus between students' choice of content and teaching strategies.

Teachers involved in this study repeatedly focused on students' performance in writing as it matters in their examination results. Their voices reflected their innocence of not knowing how to develop students' English competency. Moreover, teachers echoed that they would have been able to provide continuous feedback on their students' class-work, as well as homework. Although various studies (Magno & Lizada, 2015; Ozan & Kincal, 2018) suggest teachers consider formative assessments as a way of improving their instructional strategies and increasing students' learning achievement, the teachers in this study were found to have either a low level of understanding the value of formative assessments or were unable to develop the connection between the formative assessment and pedagogy. Teachers could connect the affordances of formative assessment as feedback to develop their instructional strategies and to increase students' learning of English. However, findings suggest that teachers need to develop their instructional efficacy, as well as the capability of utilising the affordances of formative assessments in the English classroom.

CONCLUSION

The current level of practices of various forms of formative assessment and feedback has been achieved by the initiatives of the teachers who have tried to develop a connection

between assessments and feedback in the ELT classroom. Particularly enquiry strategies and classwork when teaching English lessons have become an effective means of promoting students' learning. Had they got specific training support for developing various types of formative assessments, providing feedback on students' continuous learning of the English language, and linking both assessments and feedback, they would have been able to utilise the affordances of formative assessments in their classroom teaching. Teachers' strategies of teaching English, although limitedly based on scaffolding structure, had to some extent the potential to scaffold students' learning of the English language. We argue that various forms of formative assessment and teachers' strategies for providing feedback can be channelised in a structured way to accelerate students' English learning. Moreover, teachers teaching various subjects including English can consider formative assessment as a means of improving and transforming their instructional strategies.

We have argued that adaptive scaffolding is not only useful in explaining how secondary English teachers are already practising various formative assessments and feedback in the ELT classroom but also this model helps teachers identify the potential of both assessment and feedback in teaching and learning activities. This model, if followed systematically in an English classroom, can enable learners to achieve learning goals in an order of scaffolding. Adaptive scaffolding, a flexible model, provides teachers with an opportunity for identifying students' interest in learning, choosing a necessary strategy to support, activating prior knowledge, monitoring emerging knowledge, and assessing individual performance. The model carries an implicit expectation that the channelised mechanism of these elements when enacted in teaching and learning activities, can be contextually productive. We also argue that further development of this model can accommodate the implication of teacher training focused on assessment and feedback skills.

Limitations and Future Research

This study highlights the formative assessment and feedback practices utilised by secondary English teachers in Nepal. However, limitations provide opportunities for future research to broaden our understanding.

The first limitation lies in the sample size. Data were collected from only eight secondary schools located in Nepal's hilly regions. These schools were all community-based institutions, and the participant population consisted of just 16 individuals – eight teachers and eight students. The second limitation is the study's focus on formative assessment and feedback practices within the context of scaffolded student learning. While interviews and classroom observations were conducted with teachers and students to understand their experiences and practices, a deeper exploration of participant variables, such as previous feedback experiences, at-

titudes towards feedback, and epistemic beliefs could be beneficial. Future research could dedicate more attention to these factors within a similar context. Finally, the study lacked gender balance among participants. All participants, except one student, were male. This imbalance could potentially influence the findings. Future research should strive for a more balanced representation of genders to ensure the trustworthiness of results.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study holds potential to contribute to the theoretical understanding of formative assessment and feedback in second language acquisition (SLA). By drawing on sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as outlined by Vygotsky (1978), the research can illuminate how formative assessment practices can identify student needs and provide targeted feedback within their learning zone (Black & Wiliam, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This targeted feedback can then act as scaffolding, a temporary support system that bridges the gap between a student's current abilities and their potential with support (Banihashem et al., 2022; Black & Wiliam, 2010; Noroozi et al., 2018). The research findings can further refine our understanding of how different forms of scaffolding, from teachers, peers, or technology (Lajoie, 2005; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013), can be implemented within the ZPD framework to promote student learning in a specific context – secondary English classrooms in Nepal.

The research has the potential to provide practical guidance for EFL teachers in Nepal and beyond. By examining how teachers utilise formative assessment and feedback in their classrooms, the study can offer insights into effective strategies for identifying student strengths and weaknesses, providing targeted feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998), and implementing scaffolding techniques. This knowledge can be used to develop and improve teacher training programmes, curriculum materials, and classroom practices that promote effective language learning through formative assessment and feedback. Furthermore, the research might identify areas where additional support is needed for teachers, such as specific scaffolding techniques or integrating technology into their formative assessment practices.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Kesh Rana: conceptualisation; methodology; literature review; data collection and analysis; writing original draft; review, and editing.

Karna Rana: conceptualisation; literature review; visualisation; data analysis and validation; writing final draft; review, and editing.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview questions for secondary English teachers

1. Could you describe what sorts of assessment do you use in English classes?
2. Could you please describe types of formative assessment you regularly use in your English classes?
3. How do you decide which type of formative assessment strategies to use?
4. How do you provide feedback to your students?
5. How do you scaffold your students for advancing their learning?
6. Please share an example of a lesson where you applied formative assessment? What did it look like?
7. Do you believe formative assessment supports students' English learning? If so, how?
8. Have you noticed any changes in student performance or engagement as a result of using formative assessment?
9. How do you adjust your instruction based on what you learn from formative assessment results?
10. What kinds of feedback (oral, written, peer, self-assessment, etc.) do you give to students, and why?
11. How do you ensure that feedback is timely and useful for students?
12. Do you differentiate feedback for students with varying levels of English proficiency? How?
13. What role does student self-assessment or peer-assessment play in your classroom, if any?
14. How do students respond to the feedback you provide? Do they act on it?
15. In your experience, what feedback practices are most effective in helping students improve in reading, writing, speaking, or listening?
16. What challenges do you face in implementing formative assessment and feedback in your classroom?
17. Have you received any training or professional development related to formative assessment? If so, how has it helped?

Interview questions for students

1. How does your English teacher check your understanding during or after lessons?
2. Can you give an example of an activity in class that helps you understand how well you are learning?
3. What kind of feedback do you usually receive from your English teacher? (Written comments, corrections, oral feedback, etc.)
4. How often does your teacher give you feedback on your work?
5. Do you think the feedback your teacher gives helps you learn English better? Why or why not?
6. Can you share a moment when your teacher's feedback helped you improve in reading, writing, speaking, or listening?
7. Have you ever changed or improved your work based on feedback from your teacher? Can you give an example?
8. What kind of feedback do you find most helpful for your learning?
9. How do you feel when your teacher gives you feedback on your mistakes?
10. Do you feel more confident in English after receiving feedback? Why or why not?
11. Do you set goals for improving your English? If yes, how does your teacher help you with them?
12. Do you ever assess your own work or give feedback to classmates? How do you feel about that?