


## Primary Teachers' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Continuous Formative Assessment in Teaching Lower Primary Classes

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### Abstract

This study explored primary teachers' experiences and views on the implementation of Continuous Formative Assessment in lower primary classrooms of schools in Trashigang Dzongkhag. A mixed-method approach was used, where data were collected from 85 randomly selected primary teachers through an online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed their knowledge, competencies, current practices, challenges, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of CFA. Further, six teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to gather more detailed insights. The results indicated that such substantial barriers to effective CFA implementation included competence, heavy workloads, large class sizes, and a lack of implementation guidelines. Equally significant was the dire need for extensive training and professional development programs to overcome these obstacles. These findings give useful insights into helping educators and stakeholders identify impediments to the implementation of CFA and provide practical recommendations for its effective adoption in lower primary classrooms.

### Keywords

Assessment  
Continuous formative assessment  
Lower primary classroom  
Professional development  
Mixed-method

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### Introduction

Assessment is a vital component of a teacher's role, and recent studies highlight a growing emphasis on formative assessment (Burner, 2015). Formative Assessment- referred to in Bhutan as Continuous Formative Assessment (CFA)-is increasingly replacing summative assessment in educational institutions worldwide due to its broader scope for enhancing learning outcomes. In Bhutan, CFA was introduced as early as the late 20th century (Royal Education Council [REC], 2019). Between 1998 and 2003, the Curriculum and Professional Support Division (CAPSD) trained selected school teachers in CFA, piloting its implementation in specific schools to study its impact (CAPSD, 2006). Despite these efforts, formative assessment remained a minor component of the overall assessment framework in Bhutanese schools.

In strengthening formative assessment practices, Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 phased out examinations in primary schools. Resolutions from the 19th Education Conference in 2019 further strengthened this call. Kincal and Ozan (2018) go further to note that educationally advanced countries like Finland, Germany, and Canada consider formative

assessment as the most important form of assessment. To this effect, the Ministry of Education in Bhutan introduced, in 2020, CFA as the sole mode of assessment for lower primary classes (Pre-Primary to III) in order to ameliorate the learning outcomes of students and thereby their ultimate performance.

The MoE adopted CFA as the major assessment mode for lower primary classes in all Bhutanese schools. Consequently, in 2020, almost all the primary teachers were trained through the Dzongkhag-based in-service programme (DBIP) and School-based In-service programme (SBIP) for effective implementation of the system (Kuensel, 2020). Teachers' perceptions and beliefs are important because they have a huge impact on teaching and learning (Guadu & Boersma, 2018; Trismayanti, 2021). However, no study has been conducted to find the experiences and perceptions of implementing CFA in lower primary classes in Bhutanese schools.

This study tries to fill this gap by exploring how primary teachers perceive the practice of CFA in a lower primary classroom. Its findings will highlight their experiences and make recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of CFA practices in Bhutan schools.

### **Problem statement**

Kincal and Ozan (2018) claim that it is often through the process that teachers realise the effectiveness of formative assessment. Similarly, it is documented in various studies that even though teachers are generally optimistic about the implementation of Continuous Formative Assessment in classrooms, few actually succeed in doing so (Antoniou & James, 2013; Berg et al., 2017; Dorji, 2022). Widiastuti and Saukha (2017, p. 54) point out that "a deep understanding of formative assessment is essentially required by teachers to be able to modify their teaching and learning activities." To implement effective CFA in classrooms, Stiggins (2002) points to the urgent long-term need for teacher education and training in formative assessment. This raises questions concerning the effectiveness and efficiency of the five-day workshop the Bhutanese teachers had on implementing CFA in the lower primary classes.

The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated the implementation of CFA at schools in Bhutan. In classes PP to III, teaching-learning had to be done online, which reduced the opportunity for the teachers to apply their knowledge and skills acquired from CFA workshops. When schools reopened for in-person classes in 2021, many teachers were still not confident to implement CFA. As one of the resource persons in the dzongkhag, I received numerous messages and calls from teachers seeking clarification on CFA, which shows the gaps in their knowledge and competence. Despite these challenges, Bhutanese schools continue to use CFA as the primary mode of assessment for lower primary classes.

Widiastuti and Saukha (2017) reported that teachers' understanding of formative assessment significantly influences their implementation capability, adherence to its principles, and follow-up actions towards improvement in teaching and learning. Yet, even when they

know it, teachers often struggle to do it. Widiastuti and Saukha (2017, p. 60) mention, "teachers were unable to conduct formative assessment and follow-up actions properly." Similarly, in Indonesia, a study by Listyowati et al. (2021) presents conflicting perceptions of teachers on how CFA influences the development of students' language. Some teachers found CFA helpful in developing students' language, while others did not find it sufficient for this purpose.

The research landscape presents varied experiences and perspectives on implementing CFA. Since its introduction as the primary assessment mode for lower primary classes in Bhutan in 2020, limited studies have explored teachers' experiences with CFA. Dorji's (2022) feasibility study concluded that CFA is not feasible in Bhutanese schools due to numerous barriers. However, this study was limited to a small sample of teachers from Thimphu Dzongkhag and may not represent the broader context of Bhutanese schools.

This research, therefore, tries to fill this gap by investigating how CFA is implemented by primary teachers in lower primary classrooms. The findings will provide insight into current practices, challenges, and perceptions that would inform recommendations for improving instructional and assessment practices and reducing barriers that prevent the effective implementation of CFA.

## Literature Review

### Definition of Assessment

Assessment is a concept that differs in different contexts. In the educational context, the Glossary of Education Reform (2011) defines assessment as "the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students" (p. 1). It is an integral component of teaching and learning, involving the evaluation, measurement, and guidance of students' learning. Assessment is generally categorised into two main types: formative assessment and summative assessment.

The REC report (2019, p. viii) defines formative assessment, also known as CFA in Bhutan, as an "ongoing process that teachers and learners use during instruction to understand where learners are in their learning and to take immediate action to address the learning gaps." CFA has been considered a pivotal element in enhancing the teaching-learning process for both teachers and students (Antoniou & James, 2013; CAPSD, 2006; CERI, n.d.). Further research has also gone ahead to cement that the use of formative assessment, when combined with frequent assessments and timely instructional feedback, is effective in improving student performance (Berg et al., 2017; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Stiggins, 2002).

However, Antoniou and James (2013) express the concern that CFA is defined inconsistently across various studies, sometimes losing its core essence. They suggest that to be meaningful, CFA needs to involve both teachers and students in a collaborative effort geared towards enhancing learning. Moreover, CFA should be an ongoing process seamlessly

integrated into daily teaching and learning practices, mainly through dynamic teacher-student interactions.

### **Continuous formative assessment in Bhutan**

CFA was instituted in the Bhutanese education system as early as the late 20th century (CAPSD, 2006). According to a report by the Consolidated Annual Performance Summary for Districts, 2006, selected school teachers were trained in CFA from 1998-2003, and selected schools were pilot-tested regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of using CFA. An impact study at the close of this pilot revealed that most of the stakeholders faced numerous problems in implementing CFA. Key barriers included a lack of skills, time constraints, heavy workloads, large class sizes, and other contextual limitations (CAPSD, 2006).

The National Education Assessment (NEA) 2013-14 and the Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) in 2017 highlighted concerns regarding the quality of education in Bhutan (Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment [BCSEA], 2019). These findings underscored the need for systemic reform in the assessment process. The Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-24 stressed that Bhutan's assessment system was mainly allowing students to reproduce content knowledge rather than to develop the competencies most important for them. Research in Bhutan also highlighted that CFA is worthwhile and closely connected to teaching and learning success (CAPSD, 2006).

As such, until 2019, CFA was a part of the assessment system in primary schools. However, through government decrees and a resolution from the 19th National Education Conference, summative examinations in the primary classes were to be gradually eliminated. CFA has become the sole mode of assessment for the lower primary classes w.e.f the 2020 academic session. Royal Education Council, REC (2019) recognised that while formative assessment was declared mandatory, students were groomed for tests rather than building the required competencies. This call was made to strengthen CFA practices to replace summative written examinations effectively.

In support of this move, almost all primary teachers underwent training in CFA through NBIP, DBIP, and SBIP at the start of the 2020 academic year. Similarly, the REC developed and distributed a CFA framework to guide teachers and stakeholders in implementing CFA. However, all these efforts were followed by a lack of further research or follow-up studies from the MoE or REC with respect to its implementation. The National Council of Bhutan expressed dissatisfaction and concern for the CFA's inconsistent and inadequate implementations at schools, calling for improvement by the Education Ministry (Dolkar, 2020).

Thus, it is crucial that the researcher undertakes an in-depth study that would bring forth teachers' experiences and perceptions of implementing CFA in Bhutanese schools, still an understudied context even as the practice approaches its third year of implementation in schools. This research seeks to investigate teachers' perceptions, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by CFA within lower primary classrooms.

## **Impacts of CFA implementation**

Black and Wiliam (2009) indicate that there are five powerful formative assessment strategies in practice: clarifying learning intentions, eliciting evidence of understanding, providing constructive feedback, encouraging peer learning, and fostering student ownership of learning. They have stressed that formative assessment can make a real difference in classrooms by reinvigorating them into vibrant learning settings where both students and teachers work together in knowledge construction.

According to Stiggins (2002), "formative assessment is a continuous process through which the teachers make proper adjustments in teaching and motivate students to engage more deeply with their studies. He continued to say that formative assessment influences the student's academic performance and learning outcomes in a considerable way. Supporting this view, Black and Wiliam (1998), in their extensive review of literature and studies, demonstrate that improved formative assessment raises achievement levels across diverse age groups, from early childhood to university students, in various countries. Similarly, Stiggins (2004) stresses the importance of making students responsible for their learning through ongoing classroom assessments.

Black and Wiliam (1998) further indicate that self-assessment and peer assessment form part of the ingredients in formative assessment. These practices enhance not only active participation but also critical thinking and reflective learning. Afitska (2014) points out that self and peer assessment contributed significantly to developing higher-order cognitive skills, which accelerated language learning competence. In addition, providing feedback on strengths and weaknesses, rather than grades, encourages student learning even more.

Recent research has continued to affirm the effectiveness of formative assessment in enhancing student achievement. Yasmin et al. (2021) proved that it is effective in enhancing English writing skills at the elementary level, with test averages of 94% with formative assessment and 87% without. Li (2016, as cited in Kristiani et al., 2022) also confirmed that formative assessment positively influences reading achievement.

Collectively, these findings highlight the significant role of Continuous Formative Assessment (CFA) in enhancing student learning and performance, making it particularly beneficial for lower primary classrooms.

## **Challenges in CFA Implementation**

Antoniou and James (2013) cite several United States and England Government reports and studies that indicate a generally held view that "many schools are still struggling with effective implementation of CFA". Similarly, Bhutanese schools face the same challenges in the implementation of CFA effectively (Dorji, 2022; Om, 2020). Om (2020) points out that Bhutanese schools are already struggling to find enough classrooms and space for their infrastructure; CFA is an additional challenge. This calls for the need to explore challenges faced by teachers in implementing CFA in lower primary classes.

Studies have shown that one major challenge lies in integrating three core aspects of assessment, goal setting, assessment processes, and instructional feedback, into a coherent practice (Berg et al., 2017). Teacher competency in these aspects is the key, as it has direct implications on the student's learning achievements, particularly for grades four and five. Widiastuti and Saukha (2017) claimed that for this, teachers should possess profound knowledge regarding formative assessment, including characteristics, providing feedback that is productive and useful, and skills in follow-up activities. Black and Wiliam (1998) also reiterate that good feedback should provide a sense of the wanted goal, information about the current position, and how to close the gap. Wei (2010) goes further to say that feedback should be frequently and regularly given. However, none of these practices has yet been researched in any depth in Bhutanese schools.

Black and Wiliam (1998) further emphasise that changes at the policy level, as well as in the practice of teachers, need to be carefully studied and analysed. They recommend minimising the potential problems before CFA is implemented to ensure its viability. For example, teachers generally face difficulties in formulating appropriate and specific assessment criteria for each learning attainment (Antoniou & James, 2013), which has not been explored in Bhutanese schools. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to find out how CFA is conducted by the teachers, the problems that are encountered, and perceptions that can be useful in trying to enhance the implementation of CFA.

Time constraints remain a big obstacle for the teachers. According to CERN (n.d.), most teachers consider CFA as a complex process entailing heavy procedures that consume much time. Dorji (2022) also points out that this situation is further complicated by large class sizes, rendering CFA implementation inapplicable in Bhutan. The Policy and Planning Division (2021) has targeted a reduction of the national average class size to 18 students in primary schools. Additionally, heavy teacher workloads hinder CFA implementation, with the Ministry of Education (MoE) recognising the need to reduce teachers' teaching loads as a strategy to boost morale (Dorji, 2022; Education Monitoring Division [EMD], 2021).

Stiggins (2004) asserts that valid measurement coupled with effective use of results improves students' academic performance. On the other hand, if teachers are not competent to carry out CFA, the classroom assessment practices will be negatively affected, resulting in mismeasurement of student progress, misdiagnosis of learning needs, misinformation about student abilities, and miscommunication with parents and stakeholders (Stiggins, 2002). Even though teacher competency in CFA is an important aspect, it has not been adequately assessed or researched in Bhutanese schools.

This study attempts to explore primary teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of CFA in lower primary classes, identify the challenges they face, and provide insights into the effective implementation of CFA.

## Research Questions

What are the perceptions of primary school teachers on the effectiveness of CFA in teaching in lower primary classes in schools under Trashigang dzongkhag?

### Sub-questions:

- i. How do primary teachers implement CFA in their lessons?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by primary teachers in implementing CFA in teaching lower primary classes?
- iii. What are teachers' suggestions for overcoming the challenges?
- iv. How confident are primary teachers in implementing CFA?
- v. How can teachers successfully implement CFA in lower primary classes?

## Significance of the research

The findings from this research will assist relevant stakeholders and educators in the country in better understanding the implementation of CFA in lower primary classrooms. By identifying the current barriers, the study can guide positive reforms in teaching practices. Ultimately, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of CFA and help redefine its application in Bhutanese classrooms.

## Methodology

### Research design

The convergent parallel design was employed for this study based on the pragmatist perspective. In this design, Creswell (2012) propounds that "one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weaknesses of the other form and that a complete understanding of a research problem results from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data" (p.540).

### Sampling method

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is typically employed, where researchers intentionally select participants who have experienced the central phenomenon (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). For the qualitative data, six teachers from lower primary classes across three clusters (Northern, Central, and Southern) in Trashigang Dzongkhag were selected using convenience sampling. The total population of primary teachers in the dzongkhag was 139, so the sample size, computed using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size calculation, was determined at  $n = 103$ . Applied was simple random sampling, and, using Microsoft Excel to randomly select the sample, the questionnaire was given out to 103 selected teachers through Google Forms. Of 103 teachers, 85 teachers responded to the online survey, accounting for a response rate of 82.5%.

## Data Collection Tools

### Semi-structured interview

Interviews have been considered one of the most effective tools for assessing the perceptions and opinions of individuals about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003; Punch, 2009).

Creswell clarifies that semi-structured interviews offer a flexible environment wherein both the interviewer and interviewee can pose and respond to open-ended questions; this allows for an in-depth exploration of the research issue while maintaining focus on the topic. Thus, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection in this study.

### **Survey questionnaire**

The questionnaire was emailed to the respondents, as this is a widely used and efficient method for data collection, according to Kumar(2014), which offers enormous savings in terms of time and resources. A set of closed-ended questions was developed to measure the attitudes, views, and practices of primary teachers regarding the use of CFA in lower primary classrooms.

### **Document analysis**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) define document analysis as a systematic process for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic documents. Denzin (1970) further emphasises that document analysis is often used in conjunction with other qualitative research methods to triangulate. In this study, students' notebooks and teachers' assessment records were analysed as documents to triangulate the findings from the survey and interview data.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) point out that the most common validity techniques are member-checking and data triangulation. Member-checking involves going back to the participants to verify the findings to ensure that the results reflect the accurate experiences of the participants. In this study, interview transcriptions were shared with participants to validate the data. Triangulation is when a study incorporates multiple methods of data collection (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In this study, triangulation occurred through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and documents relevant to the study.

The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test on 25 participants, and the data were subjected to a scale test. The Cronbach alpha value of 0.818 indicated strong internal consistency, which is acceptable and reliable since a reliability coefficient greater than 0.7 is considered acceptable generally.

### **Data analysis procedures**

The analytical procedures for mixed-methods studies involve combining various methods, dependent on the data collection methods as well as the way the findings are to be presented. According to Creswell & Plano-Clark (2011) and Kumar (2014), the researcher analysed and presented the descriptive statistics using the SPSS, Version 21. This was done through simple aggregations such as frequency distributions and statistical measures, including means, percentages, and standard deviations. Such a step would provide a better comprehension of the data.

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) provide six procedures for qualitative data analysis that were adopted for this study. The purpose of the study was an investigation of the CFA



practices of teachers; hence, the qualitative data were analysed inductively through thematic analysis. In addition, document analysis was used to triangulate the questionnaire and interview data. Student notebooks and assessment records were reviewed to check on the quality of feedback provided and the assessments recorded.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethics are an important consideration in research, both before, during, and after the actual collection of data. Approvals were sought and obtained from relevant stakeholders and participants before commencing this study. The aims and objectives of the research and participants' right to withdraw at any time were clearly explained. During the collection of data, the interests of the participants, their readiness, and their views were put into consideration, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their identity. The purpose of the research was explained to all participants.

The research findings were represented honestly, and no data were falsified. Sieber (1998, as cited in Creswell, 2009) suggests that research data should be stored for 5 to 10 years after the research is completed. As such, once the study is complete, all data will be treated as confidential and disposed of through appropriate destruction methods after the retention period has expired.

### **Findings and Discussions**

The discussion is presented in light of four themes derived from the five research questions: teacher's knowledge and competence in the implementation of CFA, current practices of CFA, challenges in CFA implementation and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of CFA.

#### **Teachers' Knowledge and Competence in the Implementation of CFA**

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that participants generally perceived themselves as having a good understanding of Continuous Formative Assessment (CFA) and were well-informed about its principles. However, during the analysis of interview data, it became evident that many respondents admitted to lacking confidence in implementing CFA effectively. This disparity suggests that while teachers may be familiar with the concept, their practical understanding and application of formative assessment remain underdeveloped.

One contributing factor could be the limited opportunities for hands-on practice with CFA during their undergraduate studies at colleges of education. Although the concept of formative assessment was introduced in their training, the lack of practical exposure appears to have hindered the development of necessary skills and confidence.

These findings highlight a critical gap: despite their self-reported knowledge, many teachers lack the competence and confidence required for effective implementation of CFA in

the classroom. This underscores the need for targeted professional development and practical training to strengthen teachers' abilities in applying CFA practices.

### Use of assessment tools

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data highlighted how CFA was used by primary teachers in classrooms. The key finding of the study is the contradiction between the findings from the two data sources. Despite quantitative data indicating that a majority of the respondents claimed to use CFA frequently, interview data showed huge variation in its practice across schools. While some schools practised it every day, others did so once or twice a week.

The quantitative results further underlined an average mean score of 4.01 with a standard deviation of 0.674 for items six, seven, and eight that, assessed the use of relevant tools and techniques presented in Table 1. This would suggest that most respondents agreed they utilised and developed appropriate and diverse assessment tools and techniques.

These findings underscore the inconsistency in CFA practices among schools despite general agreement on the importance of employing diverse assessment methods. This variability points to the need for standardised guidelines and consistent training to ensure uniform and effective implementation of CFA across schools.

**Table 1**

*Current Practices of CFA*

Items	Mean	SD
5. I use CFA in my class regularly.	3.93	.856
6. I use appropriate CFA tools and techniques to assess different language aspects.	3.94	.761
7. I use diverse assessment tools and techniques in my class.	4.05	.615
8. I can create assessment tools based on the needs.	4.04	.645
9. Students have separate portfolios/files to record their assessment sheets.	3.86	.861
10. I record and file all the assessment records.	4.12	.644
11. I give them feedback immediately all the time.	4.02	.672
12. I meet the students and their guardians during quarterly reports.	3.64	.884
13. I refer to the CFA implementation guide to get better ideas on CFA.	4.06	.730
14. I find the CFA implementation guide helpful.	4.04	.715
15. My school has a CFA committee.	2.95	1.079
16. The CFA committee is aware of the roles and responsibilities.	3.11	1.012
17. The CFA committee renders necessary support and guidance for a fair assessment.	3.12	1.005
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>0.806</b>

Note: 1.00 - 1.80 = Strongly Disagree, 1.81 - 2.60 = Disagree, 2.61 - 3.40 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 3.41 - 4.20 = Agree, 4.21 - 5.0 = Strongly Agree

However, the interview and document analysis data indicated that teachers mostly used a few assessment tools, such as rubrics and checklists, for assessing students. According to one of the interview participants, other tools like the anecdotal record were not easy to use because the classes had big numbers, which made only a few tools like rubrics and checklists feasible for a teacher to manage. Also, the responses for item 15, "My school has a CFA committee",

recorded the lowest mean score of 2.95 with the highest standard deviation of 1.079, indicating great variability of responses. This indicates that some schools do not have a CFA committee, or respondents were unaware of the existence of the CFA committee.

This is concerning, as the Royal Education Council (REC, 2019) emphasises the necessity of a CFA committee in schools to ensure the effective implementation of CFA practices. The absence or lack of awareness of such committees could hinder the proper execution of CFA and highlight a critical area requiring attention for improved coordination and implementation.

### **Feedback**

The study found that teachers were well-informed about the advantages and scopes of giving feedback in the class, and it was found that teachers practised feedback as an everyday activity in the class. Similarly, this study found that teachers provided constructive feedback immediately. For instance,

*Participant CS1P1 said: “Earlier, since I did not have much idea about constructive feedback, I usually wrote good, great, and even remarked with A+ and all. After exploring and receiving CFA training, I give constructive feedback to students.”*

The participant also asserted that their feedback supported and accelerated students’ learning all the time. However, the document analysis of students’ notebooks and worksheets showed that not much constructive feedback was given on students’ tasks. Moreover, the teachers shared that verbal feedback was instant and effective for lower primary students.

*Participant NS2P1 stated: “What I found out was, more than the written feedback, verbal feedback was more effective because, in our case, there is a language barrier, and written feedback did not work.”*

However, some teachers also provided written feedback, evident from the feedback given on students’ notebooks and worksheets.

### **Recording and reporting**

Recording and reporting are critical components of Continuous Formative Assessment (CFA). Teachers and schools are required to report students’ learning progress quarterly through conferences with parents and students (REC, 2019). The study found that teachers recorded students’ progress both digitally and in hard copies using a variety of assessment tools and techniques. However, teachers expressed confusion regarding the processes of recording and reporting assessments. These ranged from the required quarterly reporting as required by the REC in some schools to others that reported twice a year. This is greatly because of a lack of clear-cut instructions from the Ministry of Education, resulting in different schools applying different methods.

This process of quarterly reporting, where parents and teachers together with students confer about the learning progress, is what it should ideally be. In some schools, however, social media platforms were used, mainly Telegram, to communicate the progress of students. Class group messages would inform parents about the learning progress of their children and how they can provide the necessary support at home. This approach did allow for greater communication but also exposed a gap in the formal reporting system and the need for clearer guidelines to standardise practices across schools.

### Teachers' competence and confidence

The quantitative findings of this study, as represented in Table 2, indicate that teachers generally believed they understood CFA well. However, qualitative data analysis contradicts this. Some participants, CS1P2, CS2P1, NS1P1, NS2P2 and SS2P2, expressed that despite having been trained on how to implement CFA, they still did not have the confidence to do so in their classrooms.

Teachers' inadequate training and knowledge in the full enactment of formative assessment has been a significant factor that continues to affect classroom assessment practice (Stiggins, 2002). The study further reported that although teachers did not experience major challenges in selecting appropriate assessment tools and techniques for use, they faced difficulties in developing and adapting these tools due to the pressures of time. Teachers are encouraged to create and use a range of assessment techniques and tools aligned to curriculum learning standards and objectives, as well as the assessment techniques and tools embedded within their subject areas (REC 2019).

**Table 2**

#### *Teachers' Knowledge of CFA*

Items	Mean	SD
1. I have very good knowledge of CFA.	3.69	.831
2. I am aware of the five guiding principles of CFA.	3.73	.851
3. I am aware of the CFA tools and techniques.	4.01	.645
4. I can give immediate and constructive feedback on a student's tasks.	4.13	.613
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>0.735</b>

Note: 1.00 - 1.80 = Strongly Disagree, 1.81 - 2.60 = Disagree, 2.61 - 3.40 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 3.41 - 4.20 = Agree, 4.21 - 5.0 = Strongly Agree

### Teacher Workload and time constraints

Both quantitative and qualitative data analyses showed that primary teachers were overloaded with various academic and non-academic roles and responsibilities, which hindered the effective implementation of CFA in their classrooms. Because of these various commitments, it was challenging for teachers to devote enough time to engage in formative

assessment practices. Most of the teachers were observed to teach more than the 18 hours per week suggested by the MoE; see Table 3. This is in agreement with what the MoE reported, as only 25% of the primary school teachers were teaching less than 16 hours a week; EMD, 2021. Besides the management of several teaching subjects, teachers were observed to often assume many non-academic and even administrative tasks. Moreover, the continuous shortages of teachers in primary schools aggravated their already heavy workloads.

**Table 3**

*Teaching Hours*

Items	Frequency	Percent
Less than 18 hours	5	5.9
18 – 23 hours	46	54.1
More than 23 hours	34	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Class Size**

Class size was a major barrier to the effective implementation of CFA, as identified in the previous studies by Dorji (2022) and EMD (2021). While most classes had fewer students than the national average class size of 18, as recorded by Policy and Planning Division (2021), and below the targeted class size of 24 students for primary schools outlined in the Education Blueprint 2014–2024, as documented by Policy and Planning Division (2021), teachers still considered the number of students in their classes to be an obstacle. The study also showed that many teachers favoured smaller class sizes, citing that the use of formative assessment tools with a large group of students was very challenging.

**Teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of CFA**

The research reported here showed that primary teachers were indifferent to the effectiveness of CFA in lower primary classes. However, they acknowledged that the effect of CFA on learning outcomes among students was good. They highlighted a few challenges to the implementation of CFA and said that if those were resolved, they would be able to implement CFA more effectively than is possible in the present conditions.

The key issues brought out included the need for more training on CFA since 43.5% (n=37) of the respondents had received no formal training in CFA. Second, teachers' workloads needed attention to give them adequate time to attend to CFA. Third, assessment reporting needed to be systematised across schools; a few schools reported only twice a year, whereas other schools did quarterly reporting.

**Table 4**

*Teachers' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of CFA*

Items	Mean	SD
25. I feel the CFA in Bhutanese class is successful.	3.32	.759
26. CFA has a positive effect on students' learning.	3.93	.737
27. I need more training on CFA to implement it successfully.	4.38	.672
28. I think there is a need to assess the efficacy of CFA implementation in schools.	4.06	.643
29. I think the Ministry needs to reduce the classroom strengths for successful implementation of CFA.	4.07	.897
30. I think the Ministry and relevant agencies need to consider the teacher's workload for effective implementation of CFA.	4.54	.646
31. I can effectively implement CFA if I am given only the lower primary classes to teach.	3.75	1.057
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.01</b>	<b>0.773</b>

Note: 1.00 - 1.80 = Strongly Disagree, 1.81 - 2.60 = Disagree, 2.61 - 3.40 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 3.41 - 4.20 = Agree, 4.21 - 5.0 = Strongly Agree

It is the requirement of the REC 2019 that schools establish a CFA committee for the purpose of reviewing CFA practices quarterly, conducting annual assessment audits, supporting teachers in the implementation of CFA, reviewing consolidated student learning results and records, and making recommendations for the continuous improvement of CFA practices. Hence, schools are advised to establish a CFA committee for the betterment and refinement of CFA practices within the school system.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Continuous formative assessment is extensively used in lower primary classes with great success and has greatly enhanced the development of the learners. Because it is continuous, formative assessment enables the teacher to keep close track of the student's progress and offer timely feedback for further improvement. The study of current practices, challenges, and teachers' perceptions about CFA has greatly enhanced the researcher's understanding of how formative assessment is implemented.

Teachers acknowledge the positive impacts of CFA on teaching and learning and that if the existing barriers are removed, its effectiveness can be further improved in lower primary classrooms. Despite the challenges, the teachers are still implementing CFA in their classrooms to a great extent.

Thus, this research has given me a brilliant opportunity to delve deeply into the perspectives of primary teachers on the effectiveness of CFA in lower primary. Indeed, through this process, awareness of the key issues lying at the heart of an implementational drive for formative assessment has been developed. Contact and negotiation with practising teachers from different schools will enrich my knowledge and concomitant insights pertaining to assessment.

### **Recommendations to teachers**

The findings showed that teachers lacked competence and confidence in implementing CFA, and thus, teachers needed to explore and enhance their proficiency. Teachers should be aware of what formative assessment is and understand it clearly so that they can adjust teaching and learning activities accordingly (Widiastuti & Saukha, 2017). It is recommended that teachers employ a variety of assessment tools since this would give a broader view of the progress of students in learning and, consequently, inform instruction. Document analysis also showed that there was a lack of written constructive feedback for students' tasks. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should focus on giving constructive feedback since it is an important aspect of formative assessment.

### **Recommendations to Schools**

It is recommended that the schools form a CFA committee that would monitor the effective implementation of formative assessment in the school. The committee is also recommended to discuss and solve challenges that teachers face in practising formative assessment. Since teachers are found burdened with several non-academic tasks and roles, it is suggested that school administrators negotiate the responsibilities to the supporting staff. It is also recommended that schools need to timely assess the effectiveness of CFA.

### **Recommendations to the Ministry of Education**

It is recommended that a CFA committee be formed to guide the practice of formative assessment effectively in schools. The CFA committee should also address the problems faced by a teacher while practising formative assessment. Teachers have many responsibilities other than teaching. School administrators could consider shifting some of them to supporting staff. Moreover, schools should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of CFA to ensure that its implementation is continually improved.

### **Recommendations to future researchers**

Several aspects of formative assessment and teachers' perception of CFA were beyond the time scope of this study. Future research provides an avenue to further establish how well CFA works in children's language learning within Bhutanese classrooms and compare it with studies elsewhere. At present, research on the effect of formative assessment on the four language strands in the Bhutanese context remains scanty. It is desired that further research be done by other researchers to delve deeper into the role that CFA plays in the development of languages in Bhutan.

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