

Teachers' Experience on the Contributions of Formative Assessment in Students' Learning

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Abstract

Assessment is one of the significant and inherent parts of teaching to improve the entire teaching-learning activities. It is also an essential component of language teaching which provides feedback to teachers and learners. This paper aims to explore teachers' experiences with the contributions of formative assessment in students' learning and the problems that they face in implementing it. To accomplish the objectives, we used the narrative inquiry research approach. To capture the participants' life experiences of FA, four English instructors from four community schools in Rupandehi were purposively chosen as research participants. We employed semi-structured interviews to gather information from them. This study explores that formative assessment significantly contributes to students' success by motivating them, identifying their weaknesses, and fostering continuous improvement. It enhances teacher effectiveness by providing insights into student progress, enabling adjustments to teaching strategies. FA offers constructive feedback that benefits both students and teachers, improving classroom activities and promoting self-directed learning. Various FA methods, such as group work and assignments, positively contribute to academic performance. However, challenges like curriculum overload, time constraints, and insufficient support hinder its full implementation. The implications of this study can offer insights to policy makers, students and teachers in the efficiency of using FA practices exploring their inadequacies and focusing on areas that require more attention and work.

Keywords: Academic achievement, feedback, formative assessment, motivation

Introduction

Formative assessment is a continuous and dynamic activity that collects information about students' performance and instructors' and students' growth via the use of teaching, observation, or conversation. Teachers utilize FA to monitor their pupils' achievement, determine how far they are proficient and what they have learnt, and then employ this information to change their strategies (Hughes, 2003). The greater the detail teachers know about their pupils, the more accurate their assessment of achievement. The information acquired is utilized to detect gaps in performance and learning requirements and then modifications are made in the ensuing teaching and learning process to improve students' learning. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that FA in this paper is primarily concerned with classroom evaluation.

Formative assessment is a systematic technique for continually gathering data and providing comments (Heritage et al., 2009). In grade nine and ten compulsory English, internal evaluation is weighted 25%, whereas external assessment is weighted 75% (Secondary Education English Curriculum, 2021). FA, as a continuous assessment method in teaching and learning, seeks to improve students' learning by gathering data on their progress. The quality of English language instruction and learning can be enhanced by the efficient use of formative assessment techniques (Yazidi, 2023).

Similarly, formative evaluation involves instructors and students in identifying strengths and areas for improvement (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). It is crucial to include the desired goal in the pupils' learning process to develop their teaching methods and strategies to achieve great educational outcomes with high performance. Formative assessment is a procedure in which educators and pupils provide input during instruction to help manage the process of instruction and learning and improve student accomplishment (McManus, 2008). The FA analyzes students' strengths and shortcomings, assists and guides them in their learning process, revises their work, and increases their responsibility for learning (Heidy & Cizek, 2009).

Teachers consider formative assessment essential in language learning because it offers continuous feedback, boosts student participation, and customizes instruction to meet individual needs. Feedback given during formative assessments helps students recognize their strengths and identify areas needing improvement, promoting a growth mindset and boosting their motivation (Ramasamy, 2021). It cultivates a supportive atmosphere, encouraging risk-taking and fostering autonomy through self-

assessment. Formative activities can help create positive educational experiences and improve student learning and growth (Morris et al., 2021). Additionally, it enables teachers to collect data for more personalized and effective teaching. Emphasizing frequent, low-stakes assessments rather than final exams reduces student anxiety and enhances language acquisition.

The objectives of this paper were to explore teachers' experiences on the contributions of formative assessment in students' learning and the problems that they face in implementing it. This study had the following research questions.

1. How do teachers experience the contribution of formative assessment in EFL students' academic achievement?
2. What problems do teachers face in implementing formative assessment in the classroom?

Review of Literature

Under this section, we conceptualize formative assessment, discuss the need for it for teachers and students and review some previous studies related to the study.

Conceptualizing Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a crucial part of effective instruction and learning for it encourages participation from students; makes rapid feedback possible, and helps students' ongoing academic progress. Shepherd (2005) defines formative evaluation as a lively procedure in which supporting instructors or peers assist learners to progress from what they currently know to what they can achieve next, utilizing their zone of proximal growth. It is a continual, diagnostic collaborative process that occurs during instructional activities that determine learners' knowledge and competencies to improve their present learning state. Formative assessment is an approach for encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and comprehension (William, 2013). He identified five key formative assessment strategies: clarifying, communicating, creating learning goals and advancement requirements, achieving achievable conversations in class, activities, and educational tasks that illustrate that learning has taken place, providing input that adjusts the learning upward, allowing pupils to be instructional assets for one another, and enabling students in their learning. Formative assessment attempts to discover and eradicate students' learning shortfalls and obstacles, as well as to improve their learning as they continue their studies (Baird et al, 2017). To be formative, an

evaluation should be utilized as feedback to assist learners bridge the gap between what they already know and what they require to learn (Vogt et al., 2020).

Formative assessment is used to determine if learners have completed their learning objectives or whether more intense learning augmentation is required (Widiastuti & Saukah, 2017) and modify existing educational and instructional activities. An assessment functions as a formative test when information regarding student accomplishment is collected, analyzed and used by educators and learners to inform decisions about the course of instruction that are more likely to be sound or well-founded than those they could have made without any kind of information (Wiliam, 2011).

Need for Formative Assessment for Teachers and Students

Formative assessment is crucial as it identifies learning requirements, promotes active engagement, and gives instructors and students immediate feedback. It personalizes learning, monitors and enhances the learning process continuously and works as a critical instrument for assuring the quality of learning. Karimi (2014) firmly believed that formative assessment is the greatest prominent technique to enhance the teaching and learning procedure by measuring students' comprehension, learning requirements, and learning improvement regarding a certain part of learning resources. Formative assessment is designed to diagnose, forecast, and evaluate the performance of teachers and students to enhance the teaching and learning processes (Black & Wiliam, 2009). It is a process in which teachers collect information about their student's progress and learning achievement using various techniques that reflect, in addition to achievement, students' motivation and attitudes toward instructional relevant activities to explain how pupils transform following the learning process (Zaim et al., 2020). It is also extremely helpful for improving the pupils' learning ability addressing the shortcomings of poor pupils and offering them feedback in their studies so that they may continue to grow.

Formative assessment assists students in developing a deeper comprehension of the topic under consideration. Formative evaluation is a continuing method that offers learners constructive feedback on time, assisting them in achieving their learning objectives and improving their performance (Vogt et al., 2020). It fosters lifelong learners by giving them the power and abilities to begin and examine their learning, as well as identify methods to develop in an autonomous setting during the instructional process. It accomplishes this by transforming the learners from inactive

to active learners, enabling them to establish and often verify their learning objectives (Clark, 2011). FA can be used to provide feedback to both students and teachers. It assists students in identifying their language learning shortcomings to enhance their teaching strategies and procedures.

Review of Previous Studies

Empirical research has also confirmed that instructors' facilitative roles and constructive comments are quite important in assuring any assessment to improve learning. Narayan (2014) in his study found that the majority of instructors had a positive attitude toward formative assessment. However, a considerable proportion of instructors have a negative attitude toward class-based evaluation. In this regard, a study by Shrestha (2014) found that teachers in primary schools have a positive and improving view of continuous assessment in the current evaluation system. It was shown that the majority of instructors had a beneficial influence on both teachers and pupils. Neupane (2015) in his study, found a lack of technical expertise and fully educated CAS teachers. Similarly, limited time, resources, manpower, and economic criteria all provide challenges to efficient CAS deployment.

Similarly, Sapkota (2016) discovered that among the several CAS methods, classwork and homework are the most commonly used to strengthen the writing abilities of basic-level pupils. Huisman (2018) explored the impact of FA on students' learning. The results showed that FA approaches employed in the classroom had a favourable influence on students' learning. Sahibzada and Himat (2019) found that teachers include assessments in their class plans and provide time for students to assess one another. However, the study found that instructors favoured summative testing rather than formative testing. It was also revealed that formative evaluation has a favourable influence on pupils' academic achievement.

A study by Bhandari (2020) in Nepal showed that FA enables teachers to better identify and focus on students' problematic areas resulting in a more effective teaching-learning process and improved learning performance. Furthermore, it enhances students' learning outcomes since it provides helpful feedback on how to improve and monitor their deficiencies in language acquisition. Teachers employ a variety of FA methods, including class exams, short tests and quizzes, group exercises, project work, home assignments, group exercises, exercises with multiple choice answers, and classwork.

A recent study by Saud et al. (2024) found that internal assessment typically lacks the spirit of assessment, as evidenced by a content analysis of curriculum assessment features. Big class and absence of professional decency appear to be critical issues in not using internal assessment as a true means of assessing learners and incorporating it into summative evaluation. Teachers use conventional methods of assessing pupils before the conclusion of official teaching and learning sessions. Another recent study by Foster (2024) in the United Kingdom shows that formative assessment is a valuable method that greatly improves student learning by offering ongoing feedback, encouraging self-directed learning, and boosting involvement. Its benefits, evident in various educational settings, highlight its crucial role in contemporary education. By overcoming challenges and refining its application, teachers and policymakers can fully leverage formative assessment to enhance student success and promote fairness in education.

There are many research works at home and overseas on FA and they explored teachers' positive perception, and the impact of FA on students' learning pointing out their problematic areas in their respective contexts but they did not explore the effects of FA on EFL students' academic achievement. This study attempts to explore the effects of FA on students' academic achievement. The above-reviewed research studies in the same discipline familiarized us with research practices related to it. Very few previous researchers have researched the effects of FA in the Nepalese ELT context. While FA has been demonstrated to improve the achievement of students in classrooms, there is little evidence to support its efficacy in the Nepalese context. The available research studies are silent on this issue. Therefore, our study is different from others as we intend to find out teachers' experiences on the contributions of formative assessment in students' learning and the problems that they face in implementing it.

Methods and Procedures

For this study, we used a narrative inquiry research method because it allows us to delve into the social environment and culture in which teaching and learning occur (Webster & Metrova, 2007) and is linked to our participants' actual experiences. We collected data through semi-structured interviews to explore the impact of FA on students' academic progress, as well as the possibilities and challenges that it presents. We purposively chose four trained instructors who were teaching in four community schools in Rupandehi, Nepal, to connect with people who are well-versed in certain

issues. Two of them were males, and two were females. We utilized the participants' pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. We conducted in-depth interviews because it is the best and most effective way to deliver extensive information on the subject planned by the interviewer while maintaining open communication with each other (Morris, 2015). The interviews were conducted in a relaxed and supportive setting, allowing teachers to narrate their lived stories of FA. We interviewed each English instructor in Nepali to collect information about teachers' experiences on the contributions of formative assessment on students' academic progress, as well as the potential challenges they face in implementing it in class. We recorded the information on our mobile phones obtaining their consent. We listened to the data many times and transcribed them from Nepali to English. The data received from interviews were analyzed and arranged under two broad thematic categories to generate common themes. The data was reported descriptively, then analyzed and interpreted thematically.

Results and Discussion

Based on the interview data, two major themes emerge about teachers' experience with the contributions of formative assessment in students' learning and the challenges that the teachers face in implementing it. Three sub-themes from the main themes experienced by English instructors are analyzed, discussed, and interpreted as follows.

Teachers' Experiences of Using Formative Assessment

Teachers have both positive and negative experiences of formative assessment. They allow educators to monitor and transform their pupils' progress as well as their teaching methods. It enables students to self-monitor their progress toward learning objectives, modifying and improving work outputs, and increasing comprehension. Some experiences that participants have reported about FA are discussed as follows.

Providing Constructive Feedback for Improvement

Both students and teachers receive constructive feedback to improve their learning and classroom pedagogy through FA. It supports teachers in remedial teaching after assessing the problematic areas of their students. In this regard, Sanju revealed,

Formative evaluation decreases student repetition in class and develops a positive attitude toward class. After giving the lesson, I asked students

pertinent questions and provided comments based on their answers. Besides, I use group work, classwork, homework, presentations, and project work as assessment tools in the classroom. These activities assist students to increase final test marks.

Sanju's lived narratives made it clear that FA is designed to extend and encourage learning and make improvements in classroom practice. It minimizes the class repetition rate and arouses a positive attitude towards class. Her view is consistent with McManus (2008) who stated FA involves teachers and students providing comments to enhance learning outcomes and meet instructional objectives. Assessment tools the teachers use in the class such as group work, assignments, homework, presentations, and project work have a positive impact on the academic achievement of learners and increased scores on final exams.

In this line, Shristee asserted, "Students get comments about their progress to enhance their learning from both the instructor and their classmates. Furthermore, they are actively engaged in classroom activities." Formative evaluation may be both encouraging and motivating, serving as a feedback giver both to the teacher and students. In a more casual and pleasant environment, it is much simpler to give pupils advice that they will follow. Feedback is a technique used in this process to assist students makes sense of their learning experience (McFadzien, 2015). Another participant, Prem proclaimed, "I normally offer students an assessment on completion of every unit to get information about their learning. My teaching goal is to make the students understand the subject matter so that they can gain high scores in summative tests. " His personal experience shows that he normally administered this type of test after the completion of each unit of a course to help the pupils comprehend the subject matter and to improve their learning so that they may get a good score on the summative test. His main emphasis of FA was to improve learning activities. Pastore et al. (2019) contended that data and information gathered through formative assessment may be used to improve student learning. Participation in learning activities is encouraged via formative evaluation.

Regarding the contribution of formative assessment, Shiva believed, "Surely, I believe feedback benefits both students and teachers. Individualized feedback increases student satisfaction. While providing feedback, I often inform students about their progress in a specific area, followed by an individual discussion of strengths and weaknesses." From this, we revealed that ongoing feedback is

significant to improve students' satisfaction. The efficacy of teaching may be increased by teachers by modifying their lesson plans in real time in response to feedback. Feedback is regarded as an action within a dialogic method of teaching and learning (Perry et al., 2020). The study revealed that formative evaluation increased student involvement, motivation, and learning achievement. Shiva added, "We provide feedback to pupils throughout classroom instruction, assignment checking, and after the completion of terminal examinations." His response informs when he provides feedback on checking assignments and terminal examinations. FA offered students immediate feedback, encouraging them to replicate their learning and find spaces for growth. As a result, pupils were more interested and eager to study, and their academic performance increased (Santos & Serpa, 2020).

Feedback helps both students and teachers to update students about their progress in a particular area. His view is in harmony with Elliott and Yu (2013). They stated FA is designed to provide feedback to instructors and pupils on teaching processes and to monitor the gaps between the learning process and the targeted learning outcomes. He frequently updates students on their progress in a given area, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses.

Prem stated, "We use the result of the formative test as the foundation for improving our teaching style, approach, and learning material for the next lesson." They utilized the outcome of FA as the foundation to build their instructional style, method, and learning content for the subsequent class. He further added, "Formative assessment is beneficial since it allows me to revise and enhance my teaching approaches, ensuring that the learning objectives are met effectively and thoroughly. It can be implemented as a technique for maintaining classroom discipline." Formative evaluation is beneficial to teachers because it allows them to make adjustments and improvements to their teaching approaches, ensuring that the learning objectives are met effectively and thoroughly. FA is employed as a technique for maintaining classroom discipline. They presented how they applied the findings to develop their instructional strategy, method, and learning materials for the forthcoming lesson. FA assisted them in enhancing their teaching materials to be fit for the students and help them comprehend the lesson more easily.

Reducing Student Dropout Rates

Usually, students leave their studies before completing it as they fail the exams frequently. FA increases regularity by reducing the dropout rate of the pupils

minimizing the anxiety of taking tests and decreasing their stress levels. Regarding the effects of FA, Shristee viewed, "Formative assessment increases student attendance and lowers dropout rates. It reduces their test-related anxiety and tension." The excerpt of this interview indicates that FA maximizes the learning achievement on the progress of students' learning and increases the desire for learning among the students as it helps them learn from peers. Academic drive, self-regulation learning abilities, and anxiety control during tests were all much improved by formative evaluations (Ismail et al., 2022).

In this vein, Prem shared his experience, "I utilize the formative assessment results to adapt my teaching method and build my teaching materials so that students can easily comprehend the lesson." He claimed that he employs the FA findings to change his teaching technique and construct instructional resources so that pupils easily understand the lesson. He added, "FA assists my students to know about what they have learned and take responsibility for their learning." He claimed it motivates students to evaluate what they have learned and take charge of their learning.

Student Motivation and Engagement for Quality Learning

Formative assessment supports the students towards their quality learning by increasing their motivation and developing their confidence. Sanju mentioned, "Formative assessment helps my pupils who are weak and less motivated focus on learning to boost their drive to learn by building their confidence." This shows that it improves and increases the student's performance and success as they are involved in learning. As teachers give more time and concern to low-achieving children, FA improves the students' performance by diagnosing their learning difficulties in time and offering them some information about their degree of comprehension. Her view is consistent with Petty (2009) who stated motivation is a requirement for effective learning. She added, "I use homework, classwork, and terminal tests as the tools of FA and provide comments immediately. *These valuable comments help students enhance their English skills.*" Homework, classwork, and terminal examinations are employed as evaluation tools of FA that support students to improve their English.

In a similar context, Prem expressed, "I frequently give my pupils the essential comments to motivate them to study more so that I can modify my pedagogical practices." He claimed that he provides comments to his students in the areas where they require feedback for improvement and transforms his instructional practices.

Problems in Implementing Formative Assessment

Three major problems that participants have reported in implementing formative assessment are analyzed, discussed, and interpreted as follows.

Overloaded Curriculum and Time Constraints

Curriculum and time are critical components in the application of formative assessment. Time is needed for preparation, testing, and feedback to successfully implement FA techniques. Teacher participants reported FA is not effective due to an overloaded curriculum and time constrain as they have to complete the curriculum on time. Regarding time constrain, Sanju believed, "In addition to teaching, we must prepare question papers, check our students' assignments, involve them in extracurricular activities, and check answer sheets and provide feedback. Therefore, we are unable to organize our teaching time." Her expression made it clear that teachers cannot manage and balance teaching time as they have to set question papers, check their students' homework, engage them in extracurricular activities and check answer sheets frequently. Compared to summative assessments or other more traditional kinds of evaluation, educators and students view formative assessments as excessive overload (Atienza et al., 2016).

Managing teaching time is difficult for the teachers though they are responsible towards their duties as the FA system provides an extra burden to the students. In this regard, Arun admitted, "We are not familiar with classroom assessment techniques so it is difficult to implement it in large classes. Since there are more than 60 pupils in a class, I have to take five to six periods throughout the day." His narration indicates that teachers are not familiar with classroom assessment techniques to implement FA due to a high number of students and overwork in a day. Instructors are unable to apply FA in their classrooms due to huge class sizes and time constraints (Noori et al., 2017). Besides this, the concerned authorities also do not provide proper guidance to the teacher. Prem stated his ideas, "We are under stress to ensure students pass the SEE exam as part of their curriculum." Teachers were under pressure to ensure students passed the SEE exam as part of their curriculum. The primary objective was to assess students' performance and help them prepare for the final exam.

Difficulty in Providing Personalized Instruction

Personalized assistance for each student in a diverse classroom might be difficult to offer. Instructors need to foster an encouraging and positive learning atmosphere to promote student involvement and figure out how to deal with students

with diverse levels of knowledge and differentiate their learning. Regarding this, Prem narrated,

There are learners of diverse abilities in my class so it is quite difficult to address their needs, interests, and pace of learning and provide immediate feedback. I use different tools as a formative assessment but I have not maintained a portfolio of individual students properly.

His lived story shows that he could not provide a supportive and positive learning environment to encourage student participation, address their varying levels of expertise, and differentiate the instruction. However, he did not adequately preserve the portfolios of individual pupils of his class. This is in harmony with Joshi (2019). His study showed that learners have varying requirements, interests, and rates of learning. These variations may be accommodated by creating an environment that supports learning and assigning assignments based on the learners' varying rates of learning.

Less Administrative Support and Poor Government Policy

For effective implementation of formative assessment, teachers have to get adequate support from the administration. However, there is also a lack of mutual support among the staff, a shortage of supplies, a lack of suitable training for instructors, oversight and advice from the relevant authorities and school administration. Regarding this, Prem contended, "I do not get proper support and guidance from the concerned authorities and school administration for the effective implementation of formative assessment such as training and technology support." This confirms that the school administration and authorities did not provide adequate assistance for the successful implementation of FA. For effective implementation of FA procedures, teachers need to get training, continuous assistance and resources to develop the skills and knowledge needed to utilize it successfully. Every institution does not have access to the technology required to do digital formative evaluations. Regarding this, Arun shared, "I usually do not get opportunities of training and workshop to implement formative assessment in real classrooms." He reported that he seldom gets the opportunity to receive training and workshops on how to apply FA in real classrooms. His experience is in harmony with Cisse et al. (2021). They asserted inadequate training and professional development result in inconsistent and poor implementation of FA procedures in the classroom.

In this line, Sanju shared her experience thus, "I do not get proper guidance from the concerned authorities and school administration for effective implementation of formative assessment." She does not receive adequate direction from the relevant authorities and school management for the successful implementation of formative assessments. The challenges faced by the participants were similar to Ghaicha and Oufela (2021). They found time restraints, insufficient training and materials, and student-related issues including big class numbers and a range of learning requirements as the challenges in implementing FA.

Discussion

This study found that formative assessment not only reveals students' learning issues but also assists teachers in improving their teaching techniques to improve the learning outcomes. FA is essential for encouraging a pleasant learning environment, supporting student development, and directing instructional strategies. It helps teachers teach and learn more effectively as it keeps them more accountable for their obligations, and pupils have been proven to be more motivated to study since it stimulates clever students to learn better, while also supporting poor and unmotivated students. According to Good (2011), formative assessment is used to gather data on relevant learning materials, context, and learning techniques, as well as to bridge the gap between learners' existing proficiency and the planned learning target. FA assists educators in discovering any gaps between their planned purpose and their present understanding, or competence and then monitors them through the tasks needed to attain the objective (Viktorovna & Arkadyevna, 2015). FA supports them to adjust their pedagogical approaches according to the individual academic progress and needs of each student. With the use of FA, instructors may quickly step in and assist students overcome obstacles before they become major hindrances to their ability to learn.

Understanding FA is critical for instructors to make good follow-up decisions. To enhance the teaching and learning process, homework, class assignments, terminal tests, and presentations are often utilized as formative assessments. Teachers were seen using the FA to solve difficulties for themselves and their pupils. FA is equally useful for reducing class repeat rates while enhancing student regularity and everyday attendance rates. Pupils have a more profound understanding of their areas of proficiency and weakness in learning. It was revealed that FA helps minimize the stress level of the students due to exams. It also promotes experimenting and taking

risks by establishing a safe, encouraging atmosphere for learning. FA also brings about desirable improvements and success over time and increases students' academic performance and final exam grades.

It indicates that there isn't a clear link between student success and the FA system. The correlation between the assessment and learning achievements is not strong as the teachers encounter many problems such as limited time, rigid curriculum, lack of materials, lack of proper training, the difficulty of personalized instruction and lack of appropriate observation and regulation from the concerned authorities for effective implementation of FA.

Conclusion and Implications

This study attempted to explore teachers' experience on the contributions of formative assessment in students' learning and the problems that they face in implementing it. The study examines the favourable, positive and beneficial contributions of FA on student academic success by addressing their weaknesses, modifying current behaviours, and bringing about desired improvements over time. FA promotes student achievement by inspiring them to learn assessing their improvement and boosting their efficacy. It improves teachers' teaching abilities and gives them ideas of what they can do to support their pupils' development in their learning. Furthermore, it gives teachers and students constructive feedback they need to improve and enhance classroom activities. It is a useful tool for improving students' performance by delivering suitable feedback on their learning challenges offering appropriate solutions to them in time and preparing them for self-directed learning. Teachers include FA in their lesson plans, set out time for peer feedback and adjust their teaching strategies based on learner performance. FA techniques and tools include group work, class work, home assignments, presentations, project work, and terminal tests which improve students' academic performance and final test results. Although keeping a portfolio is one of the tools of FA, the participants were not aware of maintaining portfolios of students in the implementation of FA. However, the overloaded curriculum, time restrictions, difficulty in providing personalized instruction and a lack of administrative support make it challenging to use FA to make learning and teaching successful. FA needs to be adopted in a genuine sense with several improvements in the system, including the supply of teacher training, teacher-student ratio, teacher workload, and teacher accountability. This study can contribute to the betterment of current

assessment practices for learners to improve their learning by offering continuous feedback and instructors to adapt their teaching to the requirements of their pupils and can enhance the entire teaching and learning atmosphere. As a small-scale study in the Rupandehi district with four teacher participants, the findings may not apply to all instructors across the country. As a result, future researchers may undertake a study using a mixed- method of observing their real classes.

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