Continuous Assessment System: Analysis of Policy Practice Gap

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Background
Student evaluation/assessment is an integral part of teaching learning activity and it is linked with teaching learning practices. There are different types of evaluation techniques, out of them formative and summative are the main types. They can be used on the basis of need and context of learning environment. The Continuous Assessment System (CAS) is an approach which is related with the formative evaluation system. It is a practice in which teachers manage their classes adopting the techniques of student centered teaching learning process and assess individual student all the time using judgment based interaction with a wide range of formal and informal techniques in teaching learning process regularly and remedial treatment is provided continuously to improve their learning achievement. CAS is a mechanisms whereby grading of the learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain of learning systematically takes account of all their performances during a given period of schooling (Falayalo, 1986). According to him it is a mechanism that enhances the learners' holistic development not only cognitive one. CAS as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods, teachers use to gather, interpret and synthesize information about learners (Airasian, 1991). Learners are evaluated gathering maximum information as far as possible which are related to them. CAS is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of assessment instruments, assessing various components of learning, not only the thinking processes but including behaviors, personality traits and manual dexterity.

Characteristics
- It is carried out frequently along with teaching-learning activities.
- It is formative evaluation system.
- Regular feedback is applied in teaching learning activity.
- It is informal evaluation system.
- Weak students are assisted to improve their learning outcomes and talents are encouraged to learn more.

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**Objectives of CAS**

To increase attendance rate of students.
To reduce drop out rate of students.
To maximize cycle completion rate of students.
To minimize the stress of examination.
To maximize the learning achievement level of students.
To reduce repetition rate of students.

**CAS practice in other countries**

**Malawi**
Integration of the continuous assessment in all primary school curricula and teacher training materials. Policy makers are now considering integrating the continuous assessment model into all of Malawi's primary schools' curriculum and the teacher training colleges.

**Honduras**
In the process of developing integrated curriculum materials educators established continuous assessment process to enhance the quality of the non-formal education experience and to learn what students were and were not mastering in the curriculum.

**South Africa**
Teachers share assessment results with parents, teachers, community members and the learners themselves. Students are supported by teachers and parents in their studies during the school years continuously. Regular reports from the teachers based on continuous assessment allow the parents to know about their children's progress.

**CAS practice in Nepal**
BPEP-11(1999-2004) mentioned some key features and one of them is to introduce CAS and LPP (Liberal Promotion Policy) for the improvement of quality primary education. We have started CAS linking with liberal promotion policy at primary level since 2000. It was piloted in all schools of five districts (Illam, Chitwan, Syangja, Surkhet and Kanchanpur) where compulsory primary education (CPE) was launched. At present it is being applied in grade four in fifty schools of ten districts, five schools in each district where textbooks of primary level are being piloted. The piloting districts are Taplejung, Dhankuta, Bhaktapur, Rasuwa, Dhanusha, Baglung, Jumla, Doti, Kapilbastu and Kailali. From the academic year 2064 it is declared to implement in all schools up to grade two and in grade three by the academic year 2065. Liberal Promotion Policy (LPP) and continuous assessment system are being used together with the concept that the CAS can be the base of LPP. It is true to some extent and it could be the foundation of LPP but the essence of CAS is beyond LPP and it is not only to support the
LPP program but to improve learning achievement of the students with a view to maximize internal and external efficiency of the school education system.

**Policy about CAS and LPP**

a. CAS is one of the components of improving learning achievement to provide quality primary education (BPEP-11)

b. CAS and liberal promotion policy should be applied from grade one to seven (NCF of School Education & SSR)

c. CAS should be launched up to grade five on the basis of pilot experience. (Tenth National Plan)

d. School examination system should be improved through the introduction of formative assessment system instead of annual examination. (EFA Action Plan 2001-2015)

e. Liberal promotion policy is brought in practice on the basis of continuous assessment up to grade three (Primary Education Curriculum, 2062)

**Policy practice gap**

Policy is seen very lovely to implement CAS in all schools but practice is being week in the real context. It is hardly found to be implemented in almost schools. Child centered teaching learning is catchy slogan but practice is different and has not been applied yet. It can successfully be applied where teacher student ratio is suitable but reality is different and has to do in crowded class. Its vision is to improve achievement level of students whereas practice has to pass and fail the students paper pencil test. The policy is not supported by program and program is not being assisted by practice. There is vast gap between policy and practice. "Policy making is like an imagination whereas implementation is struggle with reality" has been relevant in the implementation of CAS and LPP.

**Findings & comments regarding CAS**

CAS could not be helpful to improve students' achievement level. Teachers think that CAS is only for upgrading purpose not for formative purpose. Students of CAS piloted schools scored low marks than non CAS students in achievement tests (study Report-2003). Lack of teachers to conduct the program. It is comparatively expensive program, lack of commitment and honesty of concerned authorities to run the program, time consuming and difficult to manage, lack of support and guidance from the stakeholders. (Participants' views - curriculum dissemination of grade two, 2064)

**CAS related issues**

1. How can be CAS successfully implemented?

   It has been serious issue because CAS could not be implemented
successfully and efficiently. The concerned authorities must think either to implement it or to revise the program.

2. How to change the examination oriented attitude of all stakeholders?
Another issue is related with the attitude of the concerned stakeholders regarding the traditional evaluation system. They are seen as change resistant and hardly believe to CAS. So their attitude has been another barrier to implement CAS smoothly.

3. What could be the effective and supportive strategies and programs to implement CAS successfully?
It is another issue to find out and develop effective strategies and programs regarding CAS. Till now, it is not implemented to the extent of desired degree in our country. It has been just nominal program without real implementation.

4. How to create responsibility to run the program from local level to central level?
By creating responsibility in each level they can be made responsible for its implementation. Otherwise no one would be responsible for this Herculean job and they tend to blame for its failure to each other instead of practicing and taking own responsibility about it.

Challenges of implementation

Appropriate size of classes
The classes are not in appropriate size. A teacher has to teach in crowded class where a number of students are studying in a class. As a result the teacher can not manage their record effectively.

Commitment and enthusiasm
School staffs are seen reluctant towards this program. They are not so enthusiastic and devoted to implement it in the schools. They think that it is monotonous task to maintain records of individual student regularly.

Degree of concern of the policy level
Implementation is more difficult job than the policy designing. The designed policy remains incomplete until it is not successfully implemented. But the policy making level have to rethink about the implementation mechanism. Otherwise the good policies remain only in documents without implementation.

Work load of teachers
Teachers have to teach daily more than six periods in different classes. They hardly have leisure time and are very tired by teaching. They don’t have extra time to maintain portfolios of the individual student.
So they think that it is extra burden for them.

**Skill and knowledge of maintaining records**

Most of the teachers are unaware of record keeping system of CAS. They have not got enough training regarding the record keeping process. So they are unable to apply it as the intended level or degree.

**Availability of resources**

The financial position of most of the schools is not satisfactory. Schools are unable to purchase individual record files (Portfolios) for each student. Central authority is not providing materials regularly in enough quantity to each school.

**Status of support programs**

It is very difficult to find out the support programs for the enhancement of CAS. CDC (Curriculum Development Center) should be well equipped technically and financially to move ahead this program but it has not been as prioritized as curriculum development activities to support and drive it towards the successful implementation. Sufficient budget should be allocated to CDC to run the program.

**Recommendations for the improvement**

1. Teachers' preparation and understanding of CAS is a crucial factor. As they are the key persons of implementation they have to be ready to apply it with sound understanding.

2. Teachers' knowledge and skills for the test construction and administration should be strengthened. For this they should be provided skill based and demand based training.

3. It is necessary to create positive attitude towards the program. Knowledge, skill and attitude are the multiplied factors. If the attitude is zero with sound skill and knowledge the result would be zero. That is why creation of a positive attitude is a must for it.

4. Right sizing of teacher student ratio should be maintained. If the teacher student ratio is very high, it is difficult to bring it in practice. A teacher cannot evaluate many students at a time. So number of teachers should be increased as the number of students increase for maintaining teacher student ratio.

5. Regular monitoring and supervision system should be done to support teachers. They should be technically assisted according to their need. All school supervising and RPs should be well trained.

6. Enough budgets should be allocated to run the program. Due to lack of enough budgets it is difficult to manage instructional materials. So the schools should
be well equipped with enough resources.

7. Coordination should be maintained with line agencies to run the program efficiently and effectively. Single effort may not be effective and enough. So there should be good linkage among various agencies.

8. ECD classes should be run where CAS is implemented. It helps to maintain appropriate teacher student ratio in primary level.

**Conclusion**

CAS is a formative evaluation system though it is a bit difficult to manage and implement. The focus of CAS should be on the improvement of learning achievement along with LPP. It is not so easy to apply as it is said and mentioned in the program and policy papers. So it could be futile effort to implement CAS without managing basic infrastructures. As aforementioned challenges and issues regarding CAS, they should be addressed as far as possible to make it alive by the concerned authorities. If it is not possible to apply and is not so practical in our context, it is necessary to adopt alternative approach so that it can be implemented efficiently as an evaluation process. Similarly there should be appropriate balance between policy designing and implementation framework about CAS. All policies should be based on the context of implementation. It would be better to pay attention in different recommendations provided by study report and the views expressed in workshops as the valuable suggestions regarding to take remedial steps for the further improvement.

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