

Rationale of Assigning Assignments in Bachelor Degree: Opportunities, Challenges and Implementation Strategies Applied by English Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Although assignments play a crucial role in university education, there is limited knowledge about how university teachers in Nepal oversee the challenges of assigning tasks. This research paper investigates English language teachers' perspectives on assigning tasks in Bachelor's Degree programs at community campuses in Pokhara. This study aims to evaluate teachers' views on assigning tasks and to explore the importance they place on implementing assignments at this level. A mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed. Data were collected using a purposive sampling strategy, with a questionnaire serving as the primary tool for gathering information. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky's concept of constructivist learning theory is employed to analyze the data of this research. Assignments encourage active knowledge construction, which enhances creativity and critical thinking among students. This theoretical framework can help analyze how assignments are perceived by teachers as tools for fostering critical thinking and deeper understanding of the subject matter. Assignments enable teachers to gauge students' learning levels and assess their performance, fostering confidence in oral presentations or written exams. Feedback from teachers allows students to address areas for improvement, and their completed assignments reflect their understanding and areas needing further effort. However, students often fail to take assignments seriously, as pass marks are typically awarded regardless of effort despite the acknowledged role of assignments in promoting critical thinking. Overall, assignments are

valuable for teachers in evaluating students and for students in deepening their understanding of the subject matter.

Keywords: *Assignment, Bachelor degree, constructive learning, critical thinking, English teachers, evaluation and student engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a product of mini research on English language teacher's perception about the significance of assigning assignments to students in Bachelor's Degree. It has included the English language teachers' experiences of opportunities and challenges about the implementation of assignment in Bachelor level in the community campuses in Pokhara. Hyland (2019) said that assignments in higher education are purposeful tasks designed to enhance students' critical thinking, discipline, literacy, and academic skills. Generally, the teachers believe that home assignments boost a learner's self-efficacy, confidence and creativity. Further we believe, assignments are essential academic activities instructed to students with the objectives to improve their understanding through hands on learning activities. It is also the tool for skill development and learning reinforcement which creates opportunities for students to enhance their intellect about designated subject matter. Teachers are the facilitators who design tasks/assignments to promote active learning. Hyland (2019) notes a lack of research on English teachers' perceptions in Nepal's community campuses, where distinct socio-educational challenges persist. Students sometimes assume they will pass without submitting quality work, often resorting to copying from peers or generating through AI tools. Additionally, irregular attendance leads to the gaps in information and submission of the given tasks.

Teachers' views on assignments as tools for critical thinking and self-directed learning reflect constructivist principles. Scholars like Jean Piaget (1970) and Lev Vygotsky' (1978) extend the concept of constructivist learning which aligns with the principles of assigning assignment to encourage students to engage with subject matter as well as develop critical thinking to apply the knowledge creativity. Teacher is the facilitator who designs tasks to promote active learning among students. It is the teacher who provides assignments to his students with the motif of developing critical thinking and self-directed learning which can be viewed from constructivist principles. Maeng & Lee (2015) examine teachers' strategies in

assigning tasks during English language teaching, highlighting perceptions of assignments as motivational tools. Examining teachers' gravity (seriousness) for implementing assignments can connect that how teachers prepare tasks for students to scaffold learning which is also related to constructivist strategy in teaching learning activity. The major objectives of this paper are to explore English teachers' perceptions of assigning assignments in Bachelor's Degree programs at community campuses in Pokhara and to evaluate the extent of teachers' commitment to implementing assignments effectively at the Bachelor's level.

DATA AND METHODS

This study employs a mixed-method approach on the constructivist principles set by the scholars like Jean Piaget (1970) and Lev Vygotsky' (1978) to interpret data gathered from primary sources, specifically responses from eleven in-service lecturers teaching English Language Education and English Literature in Bachelor's Degree programs at various community campuses in Pokhara. Initially twenty English language teachers were approached to receive the data for this research but only few of them showed their interest to provide their responses. The researcher conducted a primary conversation with every respondent to take the legal consent for collecting data and giving the objective of this data collection. After the first phase of conversation over phone call, the participants were randomly selected based on their readiness for giving the responses, expertise in teaching Bachelor Level, availability of time for interview, and prior consent, resulting in a sample of eleven teachers due to the limited number of English instructors available in the valley. Of these, nine were male and two were female. Once the data were collected from eleven teachers, it was realized the similar responses were repeated, which provided a sense of data saturation, and the number of interviewees could be limited for this research. To protect their privacy, respondents were assigned identifiers as R1, R2, to R11 simultaneously, and their responses were analyzed accordingly.

Data collection utilized a purposive sampling strategy due to constraints in the availability of teachers, given the specific subject and academic level. The primary tools included a questionnaire with ten open- and closed-ended questions and semi-structured interviews lasting 30–40 minutes each. Pilot-testing of the questionnaire was conducted among three teachers and major corrections were made before collecting the data from respondents. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, while quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics

There were several challenges the researcher faced while collecting the data like unavailability of the respondents' preference time, little knowledge about assigning assignments, no preference to fill up the questionnaire list as it was time consuming and needed to answer some open-ended questions. Such problems were addressed by allocating enough time by researchers with the best dedication to obtaining the exact data. Follow up interview was conducted through a phone call with few of the teachers to verify the statements provided by them in case it was unclear or double meaning giving phrases.

Assignments are quite frequently provided to the students in university level of education. Universities have set objectives and goals along with the syllabus in every subject in bachelor's degree courses. There are large number subjects in which students are supposed to prepare the assignments for the fulfillment of internal evaluation or external evaluation too. Leal & Crookes (2018) explore English teachers' perceptions of their role in fostering student agency through assignments teacher. It is teachers' duty to prepare the students for final exams as well as support them to make overall development in that subject concerned through assignments and evaluation procedure. For the data collection of this research work, all the eleven teachers were asked to fill up the provided questionnaire which included both the open ended and close ended questions to derive the required data for this research. Except for the few numerical data, a large quantity of the information was collected in qualitative data which are the explanations, teachers' stories and experiences of classroom as well as the opportunities and challenges that they faced while providing assignments and evaluating them. All the eleven teachers provide assignments to their students mostly weekly and some of them provide monthly because of requirement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some teachers have also mentioned that they provide assignments to students both for evaluating their learning and provide practical marks as well as engaging them in free time. The highly preferred objective was to teach the students by self- effort. Boardman et al. (2021) discusses project-based learning (PBL) in English language arts, noting how assignments foster student voice, collaboration, and confidence. The respondents mentioned that the major objective of assigning assignments is to enhance student's learning in the best practical way.

According to R1:

“The assignments are given to motivate the students to learn and work in the field of their interest which would enhance their capacity and develop the presentations skills along with the competence.”

According to R2:

“I assign the assignments in a group work where students develop coordination among the friends, and this activity allows students to use language skills and confidence to express their ideas.”

Garrison (2017) said that Community of Inquiry framework emphasizes collaborative assignments to foster critical thinking and social presence in learning. He highlights group tasks as key to building communication and teamwork skills.

According to R3:

“I give tasks to provide practical scores as a part of the internal evaluation. They also encourage students to engage with the subject matter during their free time, reinforcing their learning.”

From the data received it is found that five teachers provide weekly assignments to students whereas two teachers assign at least some tasks every day to their students whenever the classes are conducted. Two teachers design the project work to be submitted monthly, which data is like the category of the other two teachers who assign assignments to their students sometimes whenever it is really required. No respondents are found who provide yearly assignments. Thus, it shows, every respondent teacher is serious about implementing assignment policy set by the curriculum and objectives. It is also their moral duty to comply with the rules and regulations allocated by the university. Some of the responses provided by the teachers are mentioned here. **R4** aligns assignments with the syllabus and provides it weekly to reinforce key skills like writing and analysis. **R5** responded that he bases frequency of assignments on course objectives and the type of assignment to be provided. Here **R8** and **R11** have asserted respectively as:

“I design most of the assignments for skill development of the learner and for their consistent practice. But the frequency of such assignments can vary since complexity to minimize the overload. I frequently coordinate with other lecturers to avoid overlapping in the deadlines and type of the assignment.”

“I assign the tasks monthly focusing students’ deep engagement with the syllabus. Sometimes I discuss upon the given assignment about its format and methodology to be applied if it requires extra effort and skills. The frequency can differ depending on their performance of the previously assigned tasks.”

R5 responded as he assigned creative writing like stories, essays and notes relating to the prescribed syllabus which allows students to experiment with language and develop argumentation skills. R6 mentioned that group summaries and in person presentations are very useful to make students active and outspoken during assignment discrimination. Harlen (2013) explores how assignments can be used to assess higher-order thinking skills in students. She emphasizes the importance of task variety (e.g., written oral) to cater to diverse learner needs. For language development the teachers frequently assign oral presentations to be given by students.

According to R3:

“Summary writing and argumentative essays are more commonly preferred by the students. They build confidence in the different English language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing.”

According to R9:

“I prefer giving written assignments rather than power point presentations because bachelor level students are not much familiar with power-point, but they can write very good interpretations and critical analysis of the prescribed text.”

According to R2:

“Most of the time I assign group assignments to encourage my students for developing their communication skills and creativity. I provide my students with clear rubrics which would be used to evaluate their tasks once they finalize their work and submit it at my table.

Piaget (1970) supports the claim that assignments encourage active knowledge construction, enhancing creativity and critical thinking. Sometimes, students struggle a lot to prepare assignments when they neglect the deadline and finally come to know it hasn’t been done yet. When they become late for assignments and some students are found doing copy paste and submit only to get the minimum score or pass internal evaluation. It is the challenge for the teacher when many assignments pour down in inbox on the deadline.

Perceived Benefits of Assigning Tasks for Students

There are a few opportunities listed by the respondents regarding the application of assignments in bachelor's degree. Students develop various skills including reading, writing and analysis with critical thinking. They think from open mind about developing the solution to the provided tasks which enhance creativity and professional writing skills. Students develop confidence while coming to the front of the class and give presentations orally in face-to-face setting. Vygotsky & Cole (1978) emphasize the role of assignments in promoting social interaction and knowledge construction on group assignments. In this technological age, students learn to handle the digital tools and use AI tools to sharpen their writing. Working in a group promotes collaboration and learning from diverse peers for a similar goal. According to Foley et al. (2022) assignments tailored to students' cultural backgrounds enhance engagement and learning outcomes. Students become goal oriented and focused to meet the required criteria for the assignment which students need to submit to the concerned teachers for getting internal marks or the practical evaluation score. Research-based tasks can lead the students in self-driven learning and initiative. Flexibility in assignments may encourage the students to design their projects in creative formats with the given limitations. The above-mentioned opportunities align with Jean Piaget (1970) and Lev Vygotsky' (1978) Constructivist Learning Theory which clarifies that the learners construct knowledge actively through experiences, interactions and reflection rather than passively receiving information. Some of the voices expressed by the respondents are mentioned here.

R7 said:

“Assignments develop critical thinking, creativity and self-efficacy, as they motivate students to build knowledge through active exploration when they have freedom to work on the given title or subject matter. Students bring the real-life experiences from the society and in this process, they get connected with society and the culture over there.”

R10 said:

“Assignments create a bond of relationship between the teacher and the students. They do not only become the tutor and the learner, rather they co-create knowledge with mutual help. Students frequently come to teachers for seeking support and the teacher acts as the guide to cater students' needs to fulfill the assigned task.”

The teachers see many advantages in applying assignment system in bachelor's degree to enhance students' overall academic development as it fosters self-effort, depth of understanding and skill development. Hyland (2019) explores how writing assignments in higher education foster disciplinary literacy and critical thinking. He emphasizes that well-designed assignments encourage students to engage deeply with subject-specific discourse, enhancing both academic and professional skills.

Obstacles in Implementing Student Assignments

The respondents presented various views about assigning tasks from the perspective of challenges faced in the teaching learning activities. Telore & Damtew (2023) identify student reliance on teacher-led instruction and lack of responsibility as barriers to effective assignment implementation. To support the above-mentioned idea, we can go through the data as total nine teachers have expressed the worry that students do not take assignments seriously which is the major challenge faced by the teachers. Students' lack of seriousness may stem from low intrinsic motivation or unclear assignment relevance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers can address this by aligning tasks with real-world applications, as suggested by Evans (2013). He explores student perceptions of assessment tasks, noting that clear expectations and relevance to real-world applications increase engagement. She suggests that misalignment between tasks and student interests can lead to disengagement. Here in this research another prevalent problem among some teachers is that they face difficulty in making their students understand what/how to do the assignment.

Benesch (2018) discusses tensions in teacher-student interactions that hinder assignment effectiveness, relevant to student seriousness. Further they have mentioned that providing assignment and evaluating is a time taking task that requires much effort to prepare the rubrics and assign grades based on students' work. According to Biggs & Tang's (2011, p. 97) views, constructive alignments are designed to meet specific learning outcomes. They stress that tasks must align with course objectives to maximize student engagement and learning. The respondents' views regarding challenges are mentioned below:

According to R10:

“Development of rubrics and keeping the records on the basis of the prescribed syllabus is very much time consuming for the teachers and we can't check the authenticity all the time when a large number of students submit the assignments at the same time.”

According to R6:

“Students’ diverse language skills in a classroom makes it really hard for the teachers to design universally appropriate quality. Students may submit unoriginal work which requires the teachers to use detection tools every time.”

Here in this research, out of eleven respondents, one teacher answered as it is quite difficult to keep the records of assignments when assignments are quite frequently assigned in large numbers. The positive aspect is that none of the teachers responded that giving assignment is the extra duty for teachers. They accept it as the prescribed task to be done by the teachers for fulfilling academic purposes. Aull (2020) examines challenges in providing feedback on written assignments in online settings, aligning with the evaluation difficulties.

Approaches to Overcome the Challenges in Assignment Implementation

There are several strategies to minimize the challenges about assignment arrangements for the students in bachelor’s degree. If the students are aware of the importance of completing the given task on time that may create a positive mindset among them to submit it in time. The teachers can provide their students with detailed rubrics for every assignment to guide student submission. Carless (2015) examines how assessment literacy among teachers improves assignment design and student engagement. He suggests that clear rubrics and transparent assessment criteria reduce student resistance and improve task seriousness. The tasks which require multimedia resources can be more entertaining for students, and they prefer to work on it by providing significant efforts. Some of the strategies suggested by the teachers are mentioned here.

R5 said, “*Teachers need to attend workshops on universal design or technology integration to stay updated on best practices of giving assignments and keeping the records.*”

R11 mentioned, “*The teachers have to share assignment goals and rubrics to the students to align with learning objectives and reduce resistance about the task to be done.*”

R7 said, “*The teachers are responsible to teach their students about citation skills and use plagiarism checkers to measure the authenticity of the work prepared by the students.*”

R1 asserted, “*To minimize the challenges, teachers may provide access to students to digital labs or alternative formats like written submissions for multimedia tasks and to*

incorporate technology. We need to train students on proper use of AI tools and citation practices to prevent misuse during completing assignments.”

Thus, the sole responsibility comes to the concerned teachers in implementing assignment provisions allocated by the syllabus. In this same respect, here we can connect Ferris (2016) who focuses on feedback strategies in second language writing assignments, noting that targeted feedback improves student writing proficiency and engagement. She addresses challenges like plagiarism by advocating for explicit instruction in academic integrity. Therefore, teachers are to implement the allocated tasks, and the campus administration provide the required materials.

It is found that six teachers out of eleven provide assignments to their students to teach them by self-efforts. Around four teachers have responded that they assign assignments to evaluate students' learning outcomes and similarly three teachers responded they use assignments for providing practical marks to the students whereas two teachers use assignments to engage students in free time. Approximately five teachers assign tasks weekly, the highest frequency observed, while six teachers use assignments to encourage independent learning. There are several types of assignments in practice among the teachers who decide the appropriate type according to the text prescribed in the syllabus. Here it was found eight teachers out of eleven respondents preferred generating written work as an assignment for students. The second preferred type of assignment is oral presentation which was used by five teachers in their day-to-day teaching learning activities. It is surprising that three teachers assign assignments according to the students' demand based on their choices and possibilities. This looks more practical for the students because they may work more promptly when they get to do the tasks according to their demand. From the responses it is found that none of the teachers assign students to prepare power point and give demonstrations. In this regard they replied there are no overhead projectors in the classrooms and students won't be able to give presentations though they prepare the power point presentations. The higher portion of this study, nine teachers are worried that students are not taking the provided assignments seriously rather they try to skip it or submit it lately just before the due date.

During the interview, most of the respondents mentioned that to ensure effective assignment implementation, tasks must align with the prescribed syllabus and course objectives, varying by subject and requirements. Assignments should be scheduled at regular intervals, and teachers must maintain clear records through consistent regulation and marking. Designing and preparing evaluation rubrics is critical to ensure the linearity and relevance of assignments, supporting their alignment with educational goals. Teachers believe that providing assignments

for students in bachelor's degree can be crucial to encourage students' critical thinking and overall understanding of subject matter. Wilson et al. (2016) addresses teachers' views on assignments to enhance academic speaking and writing skills for English language learners. Group presentations can improve their oral as well as written expertise. Another exciting thing about assignment is that they allow topic flexibility and peer mentoring for struggling students to uplift their proficiency level. Students tend to work on assignments when it can be prepared by using multimedia or various IT tools. When it comes to experimentation or role play as the assignment students readily get energized to participate as that becomes lively and practical.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals assignments in bachelor's degree are crucially important for fostering students' critical thinking, self-directed learning, and skill development, aligning with Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky's constructivist learning principles. The teachers identify the assignments as technical aspects in enhancing students' confidence, creativity and knowledge of subject matter especially through various assignments like written tasks, oral presentations and group activities. The teachers frequently assign the tasks to their students to explore creativity, build practical skills and improve academic learning through real-world applications which can bring holistic academic growth. Teachers have taken the assignment as the effective tool to nourish their students and make them work in collaboration with peers for the common objectives which can enhance their professional etiquette and learn the communication ethics.

There are some challenges for the proper implementation of the assignments due to students' lack of seriousness in completing the given tasks. The teachers are facing problems like checking plagiarism, designing and evaluating the assignments is another hurdle for teachers when they are supposed to deal with many students in a short period of time.

Teachers are the major body who can solve the problems of assigning assignments through various measures like including clear rubrics, integrating the technology in classroom for dissemination, by enhancing students' accountability through motivation, teaching the citation skills, offering practical pathways to design the project works and submission format. Students require timely feedback for deep learning and strategic planning to set up learning mindset. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to utilize the assignment provisions in the university level education by the concerned subject teachers, and the campuses are suggested to make the availability of the required resources for implementing assignment activities in the best practical way.

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