Strategies to Track and Assess the Students Participation and Performance during Formative Assessment Cycles in Telangana - Vinayadhar Raju Prathikantam

Abstract: In Telangana state there are four formative cycles every year at the secondary level which are assigned 20 percent weight in the overall grade. It includes four components: Read and Reflect, Written Works, Projects and Slip Test with 5% weight each. Most of the teachers are struggling to track and assess students' performance and participation during formative cycles due to various reasons such as lack of time, lack of understanding of formative tools and lack of formative assessment concepts. Even administrators are also concentrating much on quantitative data obtained through paper-pencil tests instead of qualitative data to assess students' performance during the course of study. Teachers are spending much time recording their marks and grades in different formats which are not at all useful and in no-way connected to students' performance on language use or helpful to support students' language development. But some teachers are doing well by practising innovative strategies of assessment and are getting good results by maintaining students' portfolios and use of rubrics to assess their students' performance. This research aims to conduct surveys, personal interviews and opinion polls of different stakeholders such as policy makers and practitioners and collate their perceptions as a first step towards finding appropriate ways forward.

This research study therefore attempts to understand present practices of teachers during their formative assessment cycles and also elicits the best practices of effective teachers to address the problems of teachers and students during formative assessment. This paper thus documents effective practices so that policy makers, administrators and teachers will understand how to track and assess students' performance and participation.

During our research we address the following exploration questions:

What are the present practices of teachers during their formative assessment cycles?

- 1. What are the challenges of teachers while assessing students' progress and participation?
- 2. How to address the problems of teachers and students during formative assessment cycles?
- 3. What are some of the best practices of teachers during formative assessment cycles?
- 4.How to incorporate best assessment practices like self-assessment, peer assessment, use of rubrics, maintaining portfolios and constructive feedback techniques in formative assessment cycles?

I Introduction and Background of study:

I am employed in a government secondary school in Telangana, where the majority of institutions are situated in rural India. The students attending these schools are typically first-generation learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In most of these schools, the medium of instruction is in the regional language, Telugu. However, there has been a recent government decision to establish English medium schools. As a consequence, teachers initially appointed for Telugu medium instruction are now compelled to teach in English medium sections as well.

In the past decade, the Telangana government introduced Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). This initiative included the implementation of formative assessments to gauge the students' learning progress. Unfortunately, many teachers struggled to comprehend the concept of formative assessment and its role in enhancing student learning. This lack of understanding has resulted in confusion among educators.

My research aims to address the gaps that teachers encounter during the four formative assessment cycles, Though it is mainly focused on language assessment but most of my findings are applicable to non language subjects also. Additionally, it seeks to identify and share best practices employed by teachers to benefit the broader community.

II. Literature Review:

Formative assessment plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape, providing educators with insights into students' progress and areas of improvement. In Telangana, the implementation of four formative assessment cycles each year at the secondary level reflects a commitment to holistic evaluation. This literature review explores existing knowledge on formative assessment practices, challenges faced by teachers, and effective strategies employed globally.

1. Formative Assessment Practices:

Formative assessment is an integral part of the education system, facilitating continuous monitoring of students' learning. Scholars like Black and Wiliam (1998) argue that well-designed formative assessments can significantly enhance student achievement. In the context of Telangana, it is imperative to understand the current practices employed by teachers during formative assessment cycles. Research by Sadler (1989) emphasises the importance of ongoing assessment for both teachers and learners, promoting a dynamic and responsive teaching environment.

2. Challenges Faced by Teachers:

Teachers in Telangana encounter various challenges while assessing student progress and participation during formative cycles. Lack of time, inadequate understanding of formative tools, and conceptual gaps in formative assessment hinder effective implementation. Studies by Heritage (2010) and Hattie and Timperley (2007) highlight the significance of addressing these challenges to ensure meaningful assessment practices. Additionally, the emphasis on quantitative data through traditional tests may not capture the qualitative aspects of student performance.

3. Addressing Problems of Teachers and Students:

To address the identified challenges, it is crucial to explore strategies that support both teachers and students during formative assessment cycles. The work of Brookhart (2013) emphasises the need for professional development to enhance teachers' formative assessment practices. Moreover, involving stakeholders such as policy makers and practitioners in the decision-making process can lead to more effective solutions.

4. Best Practices of Teachers:

Effective teachers often employ innovative strategies to navigate the complexities of formative assessment. Incorporating self-assessment, peer assessment, rubrics, maintaining portfolios, and constructive feedback techniques align with contemporary educational research (Andrade, 2010; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). These practices not only offer a holistic view of students' abilities but also promote a student-centric approach to learning.

5. Integrating Best Assessment Practices:

The integration of best assessment practices requires a comprehensive understanding of their applicability within the local context. Studies by Black and Harrison (2018) emphasise the importance of aligning assessment practices with learning objectives. In Telangana, this may involve tailored training programs for teachers and the development of supportive resources.

In conclusion, this literature review establishes the groundwork for understanding formative assessment practices, challenges, and effective strategies. The research in Telangana should consider this existing knowledge to frame appropriate interventions that address the unique context of the region, ultimately fostering a more effective and student-centred formative assessment system.

III. Research Methodology: This study will involve the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data through straightforward online surveys and informal discussions with stakeholders such as teachers, students, and administrators. The questionnaires utilized will seek insights into stakeholders' expectations regarding formative assessment, current practices, and recommendations for improvement.

IV. Data collection and Analysis:

A.Teachers' Responses Analysis:

1.Difference between Unit Test and Formative Assessment

Aspect	Unit Test	Formative Assessment
Purpose	Measures what students have learned at the end of a unit	Ongoing evaluation during the Teaching-Learning Process (TLP)
Feedback	Feedback is often absent	Continuous feedback is provided, aiding in understanding strengths and weaknesses
Focus	Emphasis on completing syllabus and conducting tests	Focus on student learning and understanding
Teachers' Role	Predominantly active role of the teacher	Teacher acts as a facilitator, creating a conducive learning environment
Opportunities for Improvement	Limited emphasis on improvement	Provides opportunities for teachers to modify instruction based on performance evidence
Evidence Collection	Performance evidence collected at the end of a unit	Ongoing collection of evidence during the TLP
Students Involvement in Feedback	Limited engagement with teacher comments	Students actively discuss and learn from teachers' comments
Comments Approach	Often judgmental comments on performance	Constructive comments aimed at improvement
Collaborative Learning	Limited collaborative learning opportunities	Encourages students to discuss and enhance understanding through feedback discussions

2. Components of Formative Assessment Tools and their Effectiveness

The teachers find various components of Formative Assessment to be highly beneficial in improving students' language performance. "Read and Reflect" is praised for its ability to help children express themselves effectively. "Written Works" is acknowledged for its role in enhancing writing skills, despite the presence of mistakes, as it provides valuable learning experiences. "Project Works" is seen as a valuable tool for facilitating learning, and "Group Presentation" is recognized for fostering leadership qualities among students.

The utilisation of online resources, such as Googling, is viewed as an effective means for students to explore new aspects of language independently. Formative tools are commended for creating a space for children to actively discuss language items, involving them fully in the learning process. Importantly, these tools are seen as allowing children to make mistakes and learn from them, fostering a positive learning environment.

The **Slip Test is** acknowledged for its role in helping students express what they have learned during formative cycles. Overall, the formative assessment tools are considered instrumental in improving students' language competency, both orally and in written form. They are viewed as not only providing valuable learning experiences but also promoting autonomy among learners by offering opportunities to explore language elements on their own.

3. Teachers Innovations during formative cycles

Yes, during formative cycles, teachers have experimented with various innovative approaches to enrich the learning experience for students. One novel practice teachers introduced was incorporating a review of news articles or newspapers as part of the formative assessment. This allowed students to engage with real-world language usage and current events, enhancing their comprehension and analytical skills.

Furthermore, teachers introduced the use of video stories with subtitles during the "Read and Reflect" component. This multimedia approach not only made the learning process more dynamic but also catered to different learning styles, promoting better understanding and expression.

In addition, teachers incorporated crossword puzzles and anagrams to make the formative assessment more interactive and engaging. This approach not only tested language comprehension but also added an element of fun to the learning process.

To enhance authenticity in language learning, teachers integrated the use of authentic materials, such as articles, advertisements, or excerpts from literature. This approach exposed students to genuine language usage, contributing to a deeper understanding and application of language skills in real-life contexts.

Lastly, teachers experimented with situational teaching during formative cycles. By presenting language in context-specific situations, students were better able to apply their language skills in practical scenarios, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

Overall, these innovative practices were aimed at making formative assessment cycles more dynamic, engaging, and effective in enhancing students' language performance.

4. Challenges of Formative cycles

- 1. Paying Individual Attention: Teachers find it challenging to provide individual attention to each student, given the varied needs and learning styles within the classroom.
- 2. Receiving Responses from Everyone: Ensuring active participation and obtaining responses from all students poses a difficulty, potentially impacting the effectiveness of formative assessment.
- 3. Absenteeism: Teachers struggle with absenteeism, as it hinders the collection of comprehensive data and disrupts the continuity of formative assessment.
- 4. Overemphasis on Evidence: Some teachers express concern about a tendency to prioritise collecting evidence over fulfilling the actual purposes of formative assessment, leading to deviation from the intended focus.
- 5. Task Burden: The simultaneous assignment of tasks by all subject teachers creates a burden on students, making it challenging for them to manage and complete the given assignments.
- 6. Dependence on Written Work: The predominant collection of evidence in the form of written work is seen as a limitation, as it may not capture the full spectrum of students' abilities and understanding.
- 7. Variable Student Engagement: While active students benefit from the formative cycles, there is a challenge posed by some students who simply copy from others, compromising the authenticity of their work.
- 8. Irregularity:Inconsistent attendance and irregularity among students hinder the effectiveness of formative assessment, impacting the quality of data collected.
- 9. Project Work Challenges: Teachers note that some students struggle to independently gather information for project works, indicating a potential gap in research and information-seeking skills.
- 10. Lack of Resources: Challenges such as a lack of library facilities and difficulties in providing required materials impede the seamless implementation of formative cycles.
- 11. Copying: Students who are active in the classroom will copy from their friends notebooks.

These challenges highlight the complex nature of formative assessment and emphasise the need for addressing various factors to ensure its effectiveness in supporting students' learning and development.

B.Students' Responses Analysis:

1. Challenges to Students:

Students find different aspects of formative assessment cycles challenging, and their responses indicate the following difficulties:

- 1. Read and Reflect and Slip Test: The most difficult part for students seems to be the Read and Reflect and Slip Test components, although the specific challenges or questions are not provided. It implies that these activities may pose difficulties in comprehension, expression, or test-taking.
- 2. Project Work:Translation and sentence constructions in projects emerge as challenging aspects. This suggests that students may struggle with language-related tasks, possibly due to language barriers or complexities in expressing ideas.
- 3. Written Work: A significant challenge is noted in the realm of written work, where only a small fraction of students (5 out of 30) are writing independently, while the majority resort to copying. This indicates issues with originality and may reflect a need for support in generating individual content.
- 4. Task Burden: Students express concern about the burden created by teachers assigning tasks during the last week of formative cycles. This overload may hinder students' ability to manage and complete assignments effectively.

To manage these challenges, students may need additional guidance, resources, or support tailored to their specific difficulties. Addressing language barriers, providing clearer instructions, and fostering an environment that encourages independent work could contribute to a more effective and fair formative assessment process.

C. Administrators and SCERT People:

1.Administrators or SCERT expectations-Shift from Unit Test to Formative Assessment

SCERT individuals in Telangana have articulated their expectations regarding the transformation of unit tests into formative assessments:

- 1.Integration into Learning:Expectations include assessment becoming an integral part of the learning process, occurring during the Teaching-Learning Process (TLP) and being continuous. The goal is for students to learn during assessments.
- 2. Avoiding Memorization:Formative assessment is seen as a departure from the one-day match scenario of unit tests, which tends to promote memorization. The belief is that formative cycles, with the use of assessment tools, provide a more comprehensive evaluation of students' performance.
- 3. Stress-Free Learning: The aim is to alleviate the stress associated with examinations, creating an assessment system that supports further learning rather than inducing anxiety.
- 4. Real-World Application: Formative assessment is expected to address the application of language in real-life situations, encouraging a holistic approach to language teaching.

- 5. Tailored Teaching: Teachers are expected to tailor their classroom transactions based on formative assessment insights. This includes understanding students' strengths and weaknesses and implementing a more personalised and effective teaching approach.
- 6. Performance and Fearlessness:The hope is that students will perform well and approach assessments fearlessly, fostering a positive learning environment.
- 7. Feedback and Re-teaching:Formative assessment is anticipated to provide valuable feedback for teachers, allowing for re-teaching and adjustments in instruction based on the identified strengths and weaknesses of students.
- 8. Lack of Tracking System: There is a recognition of the need for a tracking system to monitor and evaluate the work of teachers, indicating a desire for accountability and improvement in the education system.

In summary, the expectations of SCERT individuals in Telangana emphasise the shift towards a more student-centric, continuous, and holistic formative assessment approach, aiming to enhance the learning experience and outcomes in the state's educational system.

2. Administrators' or SCERT people Observations and Suggestions to Improve:

- 1. Adoption Varies: Some teachers have embraced formative assessment methods effectively, understanding their benefits. However, a portion of educators still adheres to traditional approaches, indicating a variation in adoption levels among teaching professionals.
- 2. Positive Impact:Formative assessment is acknowledged for its significant contribution to both learners and teachers. It is seen as a helpful tool in enhancing the learning experience for students and providing valuable insights for teachers to tailor their instructional strategies.
- 3. Change, but Not as Expected: While there has been a noticeable change in teaching practices, it falls short of the expected transformation. This suggests that the implementation of formative assessment has brought about some improvements but has not fully realised the anticipated level of change.
- 4. Persistence of Rote Learning: Despite the introduction of formative assessment, a considerable number of teachers still rely on rote learning and memorization techniques. This indicates a challenge in shifting away from traditional methods of teaching and evaluation.
- 5. Deviation from TLP Process:The Teaching-Learning Process (TLP) is not consistently adhered to as suggested. Some teachers may not be fully aligning their teaching practices with the intended TLP process, highlighting potential gaps in implementation.
- 6. Need for Mentoring:The observations underscore the necessity for a mentoring-type monitoring system. This implies that a more supportive and guiding approach may be beneficial to ensure that teachers effectively integrate formative assessment practices into their classrooms.

5. Suggestions to change teachers attitude and belief system

- 1. Openness to Change: Teachers are encouraged to be more open and receptive to new ideas, fostering an environment where they can embrace innovative approaches.
- 2. Experimentation in Classrooms: Teachers should conduct more experiments in their classrooms, exploring diverse teaching methods and assessing their effectiveness in enhancing student learning through formative assessment.
- 3. Self-Assessment: Teachers are advised to assess themselves, reflecting on their teaching practices and identifying areas for improvement in the implementation of formative assessment.
- 4. Comparison with the Old System:It is suggested that teachers compare the new system of formative assessment with the old system, facilitating a better understanding of the benefits and areas that need improvement.
- 5. Enhanced Awareness:Recognizing a lack of awareness among teachers, there is a suggestion for educators to enhance their knowledge by reading teachers' modules and staying informed about the latest educational practices.
- 6. Readiness for Change: While formative assessment is perceived as easier than traditional methods, teachers are encouraged to be ready to embrace this change in their teaching methodologies.
- 7. Shift in Focus for Students and Parents: Students and parents are urged to shift their focus from merely chasing marks to applying what has been learned in the classroom, emphasising the practical application of knowledge.
- 8. Focus on process rather than a product: Teachers, parents and administrators should shift their focus from product to process of learning.
- 9. Engaging Instructions: Teachers instructions must be clear to focus on learning steps/process instead general instructions like do the project.

V. Overall Observations and Suggestions to Improve Formative Assessment Tools

Components	Observations	Suggestions
Read and Reflect	make learners independent and autonomous readers Reflections can be oral or written to enhance reading,	presentation per formative cycle if time is limited Teachers need to provide diverse reading material suited to students' levels Promote interactive teaching by scaffolding Encourage students to explore various resources and be courageous

	reading includes unseen passages to assess understanding Reflections can take various forms such as posters or newspaper articles Current practice is more of a one-time activity, not integrated with classroom teaching Oral presentations are limited due to time constraints Theoretically sound but faces challenges in practical implementation Task completion sometimes becomes more mechanical, lacking real comprehension.	
Written works	- Students should go beyond the text, developing discourses like letter writing and conversations Emphasis on continuous, process-oriented writing aligned with classroom teaching Shift from product-oriented to process-oriented writing Errors are considered stepping stones for learning; students compare with the teacher's version and rectify mistakes Peer correction is encouraged, and written works should reflect efforts and progress Some teachers still focus on error-free notebooks, and copying is observed.	- Teachers should provide more freedom and space for students to express themselves Emphasise that expression and efforts are more important than the end product Recognize that the process of reaching a goal is more important than the goal itself Highlight the importance of originality over copied work Shift focus from classwork to fair notes.
Projects	- Projects aim to encourage exploring skills, finding information, and presenting Teachers have the freedom to choose projects Social interaction with people around is encouraged Observations note instances of copy-pasting, taking pictures and pasting Some	- Encourage teachers to choose projects beyond the prescribed text Emphasise easy, accessible, and doable projects Focus on the "what, why, and how" of projects Administrators should mentor and support teachers in project implementation.

	teachers excel while others focus more on syllabus than learning outcomes The process is sometimes missing in project implementation.	
Slip Test	- Similar to a pen-and-paper test to showcase what students have learned Acts as a miniature summative test Observations highlight that slip tests are conducted non-anonymously Initial suggestions for 20-mark tests at different intervals are not consistently implemented Teachers perform relatively well in comparison to other components Time constraint is a significant challenge.	- Emphasise the use of slip tests to understand students' ability to use language, not just test rote memory Advocate for anonymous slip tests Consider implementing 20-mark tests at different intervals
Evidences	Evidence is in written and oral forms, but reliance on written forms is predominant Oral presentations have specific indicators for assessment Evidences serve to showcase efforts to stakeholders but sometimes are used merely to display results Administrators often focus on products rather than the process Teachers may not collect recorded evidence, and administrators may not demand it Ultimately, the emphasis tends to be on marks and grades Oral discourses are neglected in assessments.	Encourage a balance between written and oral forms of evidence Highlight the importance of oral presentations with specific assessment indicators Shift the focus from showcasing to understanding the learning process Encourage administrators to value the process over the end product Promote the use of recorded evidence Emphasise the importance of assessing oral discourses and bridging the gap between teacher and administrator expectations.

VI. Future Plans and Recommendations:

Read and Reflection:

Teachers employ various innovative practices to enhance the Read and Reflection component of formative assessment. Students are exposed to a diverse range of materials, including stories, picture stories, and animated stories with subtitles. To further enrich their comprehension, teachers incorporate newspaper reflections and explore higher or class lessons from other subjects. The use of authentic materials is emphasised, providing real-world context for lower classes. Graphic organisers, such as preparing comparison charts of characters in a story, and the implementation of tools like the Question Meter contribute to a more engaging and insightful learning experience.

Written Works:

In the domain of Written Works, teachers focus on extracting discourses from textbook lessons, fostering an understanding that goes beyond rote memorization. Authentic materials, such as newspapers, are integrated to provide a real-world context for students. Teachers encourage the development of student portfolios, including journals or magazines, reflecting a personalised and continuous learning journey. Reflective diaries, whether online or offline, further promote self-expression and metacognition through avenues like kids' blogs.

Project Work:

Teachers engage students in meaningful Project Work that transcends conventional boundaries. This involves activities such as interviewing local celebrities or leaders, conducting surveys on the effectiveness of homework linked with textual lessons, and contextualised grammar teaching. Peer teaching and connecting classrooms contribute to collaborative learning experiences. Projects addressing environmental issues, such as creating a kitchen garden, or focusing on problem-solving skills, like organising a school backpack, bring real-world relevance to the curriculum. Students may also engage in documentary preparation, exploring topics like the evolution of hairstyles and dressing styles. Additionally, projects like crafting e-commerce mobile descriptions and involvement in the preparation of question papers enhance students' critical thinking and creativity.

Slip Test:

In the Slip Test component, teachers introduce innovative approaches to assess students' understanding. This includes open-book tests, immediate input tests, and time-lapsed tests, each providing a unique perspective on students' knowledge retention and application. Framing questions instead of writing answers allows for a more dynamic assessment. Furthermore, the end products and outcomes are diversified through the use of e-portfolios, recordings of student presentations, reflective journals, blog posts, infographics, posters, role plays, and skits.

Assessment:

To ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded assessment, teachers incorporate various evaluation methods. Students actively participate in the assessment process through self-assessment, where they reflect on their own progress and learning. Peer assessment encourages collaborative learning and provides students with valuable insights from their peers. Teacher assessment, guided by well-defined rubrics, ensures a thorough evaluation of students' performance. The integration of assessment tools, such as checklists, enhances

students' understanding of the evaluation criteria and fosters a sense of responsibility for their own learning journey.

VII. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the implementation of effective formative assessment practices in the educational landscape plays a pivotal role in fostering a dynamic and enriching learning environment. Through the exploration of best practices in each component—Read and Reflection, Written Works, Project Work, Slip Test, and Assessment—teachers demonstrate a commitment to innovative and student-centred pedagogies.

In the realm of Read and Reflection, teachers employ diverse strategies, incorporating engaging materials and tools such as stories, animated content, and authentic materials. This not only enhances students' comprehension skills but also encourages independent and autonomous learning. The Written Works component is enriched through the extraction of discourses from textbooks, the integration of authentic materials, and the development of student portfolios, reflecting a shift towards process-oriented writing and a deeper understanding of content.

Project Work emerges as a transformative element, connecting students with real-world scenarios and promoting skills such as interviewing, surveying, and contextualised grammar teaching. The Slip Test component witnesses innovation through various testing approaches, ensuring a more dynamic and comprehensive evaluation of students' knowledge.

The assessment practices, encompassing self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment, demonstrate a holistic and inclusive approach to evaluating student performance. The use of diverse tools, from checklists to e-portfolios and recorded presentations, reflects a commitment to capturing the multifaceted nature of student learning.

In publishing this paper, the aim is to share these best practices with the wider educational community. By embracing these innovative approaches to formative assessment, educators can contribute to a more meaningful and student-centric educational experience. This paper serves as a testament to the dedication of teachers in evolving their instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of learners, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of education in our schools.

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Presenter Details:

Vinayadhar Raju Prathikantam

S.A (English)

ZPHS Mudimanikyam

Chigurumamidi

Karimnagar,

Telangana-505001

Mobile number:9347847048

E-Mail Id: vinayadharraju@gmail.com

Appendix:

Teachers' Interview questions and the their responses:

- 1. What is formative assessment and How would you differentiate it with age old unit tests?
- 2. What are the different components of Formative Assessment? What do you think about them? Are they useful to improve your students Language performance? If so How? If not, why?
- 3. Have you ever tried anything new during Formative cycles? If so, describe briefly? If not, why?
- 4. What are the challenges you face during formative cycles?
- 5. How would you take up a project in your classroom? Give one example
- 6. How do you take up Read and Reflection activity in your classroom? Give one example

- 7. How do you take up Projects in your class? (Project process)
- 8. What are the things you will do under the written works?
- 9. How would you conduct a slip test? What are its components?
- 10. How would you connect your classroom practices with formative assessment components? Give one or two concrete examples.
- 11. Anything you want to share from your experience.
- 12. How would you collect evidence of learning?

Students' Questionnaires:

- 1. What is the most difficult part of Formative assessment cycles? Why? How do you manage?
- 2. What kind of projects do you like? Why? If possible give one example
- 3. What are the activities you have done under the read and reflect component? How did you feel? What benefit do you get from it?
- 4. Have you ever written an open book test? If so How do you differentiate it with regular slip text?
- 5. What are the things you will do under written works? Is there any connection with your regular classroom activities? If so, how?

Administers' Questionnaires or SCERT People

- 1. What are your expectations after changing the unit test into a formative test?
- 2. What do you really expect from teachers after shifting from unit tests to formative assessment? What is your observation? Any suggestions for improvement.
- 3. What is the purpose of introducing each component in Formative cycles?
 - a. Read and Reflect
 - b. Written works
 - c. Projects
 - d. Slip-Test
- 4. Any future plans to make it successful
- 5. Any plans to Linking with classroom teaching.
- 6. Do you suggest any changes in the School Time-table?
- 7. Rate Success of formative assessment on scale of 1 to 10.