

Spotlight — Raj Bhandari

You presented at the 2022 TESL Ontario Conference (*Integrating web-based formative assessment in test preparation courses*). What is web-based formative assessment and why and how did it grab your attention originally?

I believe that assessing learners' language abilities is an essential part of language learning and teaching. In order to ensure success in language education, language educators must recognize the gap between what students are capable of and what they need to know to complete a task successfully. Observing and comparing a student's performance helps teachers identify this gap and tailor future lessons accordingly. How can we do that? The answer is formative assessment. Formative assessment is used to identify learning gaps and assess learners' ongoing progress throughout a class or course. A web-based formative assessment tool is an online platform that allows teachers to create engaging assignments in web media. Some popular web-based formative assessment platforms are Classkick, Formative, Nearpod, and Socrative. My exploration of the benefits of web-based formative assessment was prompted by the transition from face-to-face to remote teaching following COVID-19.

You are a first-year PhD student in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies at Carleton University. In your view, what's the relationship between these two disciplines and what do you hope to focus on in your PhD career?

Put simply, languages in society are the focus of both Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies as separate disciplines. Why separate them? The graduate program in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies is a unique approach to bringing the two disciplines together. In my cohort, I have colleagues from both a pure Applied Linguistics background, like me, and also colleagues from a Discourse Studies background. To me, this combination provides rich learning experiences and broadens the scope of research avenues. Talking about my doctoral research, I am interested in exploring learner beliefs about technology integration in language teaching and learning. In particular, I plan to investigate learners' beliefs about web-based formative assessments.



Raj Bhandari is a first-year PhD student in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies at Carleton University. He has a master's degree in Applied Linguistics and has been teaching English since 2010, both in-person and online. His research interests include technology-mediated language learning and teaching, second language assessment, and corrective feedback.

There are many technological tools available to educators. Maybe even so much to the point of it being overwhelming to know what to use. What's your advice for navigating technology tools, what to use, how to use them, etc. in the classroom for novice and experienced teachers?

I read an article titled *Not more technology, but more effective technology* during my MA program. This title emphasizes the key aspect of technology integration in language education: effectiveness. In my opinion, language educators should analyze both the affordances and limitations of any EdTech tool they plan to incorporate into their teaching. When considering using any EdTech tool, I always ask myself: Why do I need this tool? Does it fit my teaching context? How will it help me and my students? Will students like it? Do they have to pay for a subscription? Whenever I integrate a new tool into my classroom, I find it useful to analyze learners' perceptions about that tool before continuing to use it. It is also very important to find

out what the tool developer's data privacy policy is so that learners' privacy is protected. Also be sure to pay attention to how intuitive the tool is; to me, it should be user-friendly and easy to use.

As co-founder and instructor at Komon, what distinguishes Komon from other services and businesses?

I would not call Komon a business; it is just a platform acting as a bridge between a learner and an instructor. We—three colleagues of mine and I—founded Komon in April 2020 shortly after the first lockdown was implemented primarily to provide online test preparation services to learners in Canada and Nepal. Since we were teaching online, our service wasn't/isn't geographically restricted; we get learners from different countries. A unique aspect of Komon is that its instructors are real test takers who have first-hand experience of taking the tests they teach. So, they know what skills are required to ace the test and how to build, develop, and master those skills.

There is a stress attributed to many, if not all, formal assessments that candidates experience. Whether it be the IELTS, CELPIP, the SAT, what advice do you have for test preparation instructors to help them assist their students in navigating the uncertainty and anxiety they feel when preparing for a test? Is there another way of looking at test preparation?

I recommend avoiding 'teaching to the test' as much as possible. The reason I said 'as much as possible' is that I know it can be a challenging task in some circumstances. To me, test preparation courses should focus on teaching students the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) necessary to perform well on tests and achieve desired results. Instructors should therefore identify activities that will equip students with the needed KSAs. To minimize the anxiety they feel when preparing for a test, it is crucial for learners to set a goal first and then understand the test requirements, content, format, and weighting of the sections of the test. It is crucial that instructors familiarize students with the test's structure and content. Our main goal as instructors should be to focus on the language skills the test measures and plan/design our lesson/course accordingly.

What are your future goals when it comes to language, assessment, and your career overall?

At this point, I am focused on completing my PhD coursework and progressing with my research. In my role

as an applied linguist and a language educator, I strive to constantly improve classroom instruction and assessment and explore ways to incorporate technology into the classroom. It will always be my priority to keep up with the latest developments in teaching techniques. Working towards my PhD, I aim to continue to lead research projects to inform classroom curricula and share my findings with the academic and professional communities.

If you would like to know more about Raj Bhandari, please visit his [LinkedIn](#) page and [Komon](#). To get in contact, Raj can be reached at rajbhandari@email.carleton.ca.

Thank you once again, Raj!

