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A CASE STUDY OF ESL TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND
ABILITY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT (SBA)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to investigate the English as Second Language teachers' knowledge and ability in implementing School-Based Assessment (SBA). It is also to identify the challenges and their recommendations to improve its implementation. A qualitative research design was chosen to answer three research questions. Three sets of instruments were utilized to measure teachers' knowledge and ability. Seven ESL teachers were selected as purposive sampling in the study from two secondary schools which were selected from one of the districts in Selangor. This case study participants were employed to be in the interview to gain a better insightful explanation on the challenges and suggestions of the implementation of SBA. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations and document analyses. The findings of the study indicated that the teachers had insufficient knowledge and ability to implement School-Based Assessment effectively in schools. Some of the challenges that they encountered were time constraint, students' negative attitudes, unclear guidelines and heavy workloads. Several suggestions were put forward to ensure the success and the smooth running of its implementation. The implication of this study suggests that the teachers' sufficient knowledge and ability will increase the effectiveness of the SBA implementation. However, a more comprehensive quantitative study should be carried out in other schools from different districts to seek its effective implementation.



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KAJIAN KES TERHADAP PENGETAHUAN DAN KEUPAYAAN GURU BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DALAM PELAKSANAAN PENTAKSIRAN BERASASKAN SEKOLAH

ABSTRAK

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti tahap pengetahuan dan keupayaan pihak guru Bahasa Inggeris di dua buah sekolah menengah berkaitan tentang Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah (PBS). Kajian ini juga adalah untuk mengenal pasti masalah yang dihadapi dan cadangan penambahbaikan dalam pengendaliannya. Reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif kajian kes dipilih untuk menjawab tiga persoalan kajian dengan tiga set instrumen yang telah digunakan untuk mengukur tahap pengetahuan dan keupayaan guru Bahasa Inggeris. Seramai tujuh orang guru telah dipilih menjadi responden kajian kes ini. Pemilihan sampel dibuat berdasarkan teknik *pensampelan bertujuan*. Pengumpulan data dibuat secara temu bual separa berstruktur, pemerhatian dan analisis dokumen. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa guru Bahasa Inggeris tidak mempunyai pengetahuan yang cukup dan kurang berupaya untuk melaksanakan pentaksiran kepada para pelajar dalam mengendalikan PBS di sekolah. Masalah yang dihadapi antaranya ialah kekangan masa, sikap negatif para pelajar, ketidakjelasan panduan pengendalian dan bebanan kerja yang berat. Beberapa cadangan telah dikemukakan untuk memastikan kejayaan dan kelicinan pengendalian PBS ini. Implikasi kajian menunjukkan bahawa pengetahuan dan keupayaan guru yang cukup dijangka dapat meningkatkan keberkesanan pelaksanaan PBS ini. Kajian yang lebih komprehensif secara kuantitatif perlu dilaksanakan di sekolah-sekolah daerah lain untuk melihat keberkesanan pengendalian PBS.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DSP	Document of Performance Standard
EPRD	Education Planning Research Department
ESL	English as a Second Language
PMR	<i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i> (Lower Secondary Assessment)
PPD	<i>Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah</i> (District Education Department)
SBA	School-Based Assessment



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION








1.1 Background of the Study

Education has gradually become one of the premier public policy issues in Malaysia and has been seriously debated in parliament. Cunningham (1998) states that education can solve the nation's social problems, which stem from the long held faith. In Malaysia, the government has continuously improved the education policies to accommodate the needs of producing better and responsible generations with 'strong moral and ethical values' (Fahainis, 2012).

As education is an on-going process, changes in the education system are geared toward improvement, particularly to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. In relation to the Government Transformation Program (GTP), Malaysian



government needs a reform in education system. The transformation of the education system is necessary to produce world class human capital (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012b). Hence, school children must be equipped with necessary skills to face the challenges of globalization and fulfill future employment demands (Tunku Mohani, 2010). It is mentioned by Gill (2004) too who asserts that to increase productivity, the education system of a country needs an educational model which can produce graduates who can help achieve the development of the nation.

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In the Malaysian education system, the assessment system is seen as very examination-oriented (Chan, Sidhu & Md Rizal, 2006). Malaysian school children are required to sit for three major public examinations throughout their eleven years of education. In the Malaysian education system, the students have to take the standardized tests at the end of their primary six namely the *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR) or Primary School Assessment, evaluation secondary in form three, the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) or Lower Secondary Assessment and they have to sit for another test in their fifth year of secondary school called the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) or the Malaysian Certificate of Education. These three major examinations are set by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate. Besides that, students have to sit for monthly tests or trial exams that are set by their class teachers or district level. Thus, there is no doubt that teachers consequently place a great emphasis on examination, and putting less emphasis on the holistic values of all-rounded students as stated in the National Philosophy of Education.

Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious based on firm belief in, and a devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well being as well as able to contribute to the betterment of the society and the nation at large.

(Malaysian Examination Syndicate, 2012b, p. 2)

In line with education, assessment is an essential part of the teaching and learning process in the system. According to Marzano (2006), at a basic level, classroom assessment is a form of feedback to students regarding their progress which later will enhance learning. At the same time, it aids both teachers and parents in monitoring the achievement of a student.

According to Moss and Brookhart (2009), the focus of the school education system is mainly on assessment of learning taking place at the end of the learning process which is largely summative in nature. There is not so much effort given on formative assessment. Summative assessment is based on students' achievement at a particular point in time, generally at the end of the course. On the other hand, formative assessment is to encourage ongoing process of learning throughout the course.

According to Tunku Mohani (2010), the results of a single form of assessment do not indicate the multiple intelligences that students have and they do not reveal the

students' real abilities. Again, Tunku Mohani asserts that this formative assessment allows teachers to monitor students' progress and students themselves are able to chart their own performance. Thus, it shows that formative assessment provides more advantages than summative assessment.

Recently, assessment policies in most countries such as the United States of America, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Australia have undergone several significant changes from summative to formative based assessments. Thus, the Minister of Education in 2009, Datuk Seri Hishammudin Tun Hussein stated that our education system should not be too exam-oriented and he then suggested that The Malaysian Examination Syndicate to look into reducing examination and introducing the school-based assessment (Utusan Malaysia, 20 April 2009).

For the past decades, due to the summative assessment, the Malaysian education system has become more exam-oriented. The focus has not been effective because according to Normah and Leela (2007), it forces many students to rote learning and memorizing just to score in their examinations. As a result, the school-based assessment is developed where it transforms the current assessment due to these reasons. Firstly, the aim of National Philosophy of Education that is to 'produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious' has not been successfully achieved because the students are only concerned about achieving high grades or passing the examinations administered by the internal and centralized syndicate (Ministry of Education, 2012a). According to Ratnawati and Jaya Pushani (n.d), instead of these 'paper-and-pencil' tests teachers

should use varieties of measuring tools to gather more data about their students' innate abilities, strengths, weaknesses, talents, attitudes, interest and personalities.

In addition, it is reported by the Ministry of Education that parents expect too much from teachers and insist to attain merely excellent results without evaluating the students' true abilities. Gradually, the focus on developing balanced human capital is consigned to oblivion when too much emphasis and concentration are given on academic performance without taking into consideration of their co-curricular activities.

Furthermore, another reason why summative assessment is not that effective is that the severe pressure is burdened on teachers, students and parents. Samihah (2006) states that when centralized examination results are announced nation-wide, more media coverage is given to celebrate percentages rises or falls in tested subjects to celebrate students' successes. Hence, it indirectly shows that these percentages have serious impacts on teachers, students and parents. Besides that, she also illustrates that these examinations only measure a limited cognitive level, but other skills are abandoned. This is also supported by Popham (2008) when he points out that today's teachers find themselves on the receiving end of the relentless pressures to raise the test scores.

1.2 Characteristics of Formative and Summative Assessment

According to Moss and Brookhart (2009), formative assessment is the assessment *for* learning to improve students' learning and achievement. It is carried out while learning in progress, day to day, minute by minute, which focuses on the learning process and the learning progress. It is viewed as an integral part of the teaching-learning process. As it is a collaborative process form of learning, teachers and students know where they are heading, understand the learning needs, and use assessment information as feedback to guide and adapt what they do to meet those needs. This is an ongoing process influenced by students' needs and teachers' feedback. The teachers adopt the role of intentional learners and they use the evidence they gather to make adjustments for continuous improvement.

On the other hand, as for summative learning, it is the assessment *of* learning which is to measure or audit attainment of the students. It is carried out from time to time to create snapshots of what has happened and it focuses on the products of learning. It is viewed as something separate or an activity performed after the teaching-learning cycle. This is a teacher directed form of learning where teachers assign what the students must do and then evaluate how well they complete the assignment. It seems an unchanging measure of what the students achieved. Teachers adopt the role as auditors and students assume the role of the audited. Teachers use the results to make final "success or failure" decisions about the relatively fixed set of instructional activities.

After analyzing the positive qualities and advantages of formative assessment, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has taken a positive move towards that direction by conducting the school-based assessment in the classrooms. It is envisaged and hoped that this new policy could be well-implemented by the teachers in schools in order to produce better performance in students' learning and achievements.

1.3 School-Based Assessment in Malaysia

Subsequently, the school-based assessment (SBA) has been first introduced in 2002 as the School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA) to overcome those problems mentioned. The Ministry of Education (n.d) defines this School-Based Assessment (SBA) as a holistic form of assessment that assesses cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects in line with National Philosophy of Education and School Standard Curriculum. It is a newly refurbished and introduced assessment system to calibrate the students' competence by taking into account both academic and extra-curricular achievements (Ministry of Education, 2012b). Besides that, it is developed in order to produce a more rounded sort of education achievements among students.

Initially, the school-based oral assessment was first introduced in 2002 for Bahasa Melayu and English (School-Based Oral English Assessment) which focused only on students' speaking and communicative skills. This oral assessment is integrated in the teaching and learning process in everyday's lessons. Later, on December 17, 2010, the cabinet approved the improvement of UPSR and PMR. As a result, this holistic School-Based Assessment started to take place in our education system.

This newly introduced SBA is part of wide reforms outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Currently, Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who is also the Education Minister said that SBA is a new system and it is one of the areas in the blueprint where teachers are directly involved (New Straits Times, 4 November 2012).

The School-Based Assessment (SBA) for Year One in primary schools started to be implemented in 2011 and the UPSR will continue until 2016 before it is abolished. As for secondary schools, the School-Based Assessment for Form One in all subjects has been introduced since April 2012. With some modifications of existing SBOEA, the PMR will be entirely school-based using the SBA in 2014.

1.4 Background of the Problem

Student assessment should be an ongoing process to evaluate their holistic performance, not be based only on the results on a piece of paper (Samihah, 2006). It provides opportunities to students to improve their performance, while teachers can monitor them constantly. Students' achievement from time to time can be clearly observed. Both teachers and students are able to interact to enhance teaching and learning. Thus, the right assessment should be seriously put into consideration. Skehan (1998) states that the method of assessment is the main problem in testing because the elicited language and engaged performance are the crucial matters. These elements are the basis for any generalization on language ability to be made.

Apparently, it shows that the right procedures of assessment can lead to any generalization on language ability.

Dealing with new innovations, individuals are concerned and overwhelmed with mixed feelings (Rogers, 2003). Teachers might be curious about what they are dealing with and how prepared they are in terms of knowledge and ability in implementing the current policy. Again, Rogers (2003) states that to get a new idea adopted, even it has obvious advantages, is difficult. Thus, it is quite hard for many teachers to speed up the rate of diffusion of the SBA.

According to Shanusi (2007), there is a need to change because the scenario is changing fast and this assessment can serve as a catalyst to bring about the changes in the education system. Therefore, teachers play a vital role in assessing their duties towards this assessment system when they are responsible to teach, prepare, grade, mark, monitor and evaluate their students in the classrooms. According to Weir (1993), this can lead to a descriptive profile of a learner's record of achievement. These multi tasking jobs perhaps worry the teachers in managing their time.

Teachers are the main source of the success in SBA implementation (Faizah, 2011). Thus, the teachers' knowledge and ability are the main elements to be investigated as these qualities are important in ensuring the success of SBA implementation. The formative assessment, when used effectively, can significantly improve students' achievement and raise teachers' qualities (Moss & Brookhart,

2009). Guskey (2009) also points out that we need teachers to be equipped with the established knowledge base of effective practice in any new implementation.

As for the students who are involved in the formative assessment process, they understand and use learning targets, set their own goals, select effective learning strategies and assess their own learning progress (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). Hence, it shows that this formative assessment provides some positive impacts on the students too.

Again, according to Moss and Brookhart (2009), the formative assessment is an intentional learning process that the teacher and students gather evidence of learning continuously and systematically. The main goal of it is to improve students' achievement. Therefore, it is the assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Teachers are the best assessors of students' true ability in performing their tasks in the classrooms to make better educational decision about their students (Popham, 2008). They are the most important figures who should conduct the implementations of this innovation. When students are assessed using a new system, the teachers' knowledge and ability need to be taken into consideration seriously.

This research was prompted out of curiosity when the researcher conducted a preliminary study in early November 2012 on teachers' categories of concern employing the survey conducted by Aidarwati and Abdul Ghani (2013). The results presented in Table 1.1 showed the highest categories of concern is 'Knowledge and Ability' category with the mean score 4.03.

Table 1.1
Preliminary Study Results

Categories Of Concern	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self Awareness	2.12	0.57
Knowledge and Ability	4.03	0.62
Management	3.95	0.88
Collaboration	3.95	0.75
Impact on Students	4.01	0.95

Based on this study, it showed that the teachers were really concerned about their knowledge and ability in implementing SBA in schools as it was at the beginning stage of its implementation.

Besides that, a study conducted by Chan, Sidhu and Md Rizal (2006) indicated that teachers possessed low levels of knowledge and skills in implementing SBA. Hence, it is definitely reasonable to investigate teachers' knowledge and ability.

Minimal focus has been given by the ministry on teachers' knowledge and ability to implement this new assessment as they were not well-equipped to carry this

out (Chan et al., 2006). Therefore, there is a need to find their extent of knowledge, ability and the challenges they encounter in implementing the SBA. To ensure that this school-based assessment a success, a research should be conducted. Inspired by this reason, it prompted the researcher to explore the knowledge and ability of the ESL teachers with regards to the implementation of SBA in Malaysian schools. This leads to the exploration of their challenges and recommendations to be taken to improve the situation and overcome these predicaments.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the ESL teachers' knowledge and ability in implementing SBA with reference to the amended Stages of Concerns by Hall, George and Rutherford (1977).

This study was employed to identify how the ESL teachers carried out SBA in the classroom and to investigate their compliance with the procedures imposed by the ministry. Besides that, how teachers utilized their knowledge and ability to adhere with the guidelines given were also scrutinized.

While conducting the procedures of SBA, teachers might encounter several challenges that might hinder them from complying its guidelines. These aspects were

also identified, in which it had led to their opinions and suggestions on how to enhance its implementation.

The findings of the study may shed light and help enhance the implementation of SBA. More importantly, it benefits the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the Examination Syndicate in improving this program for the betterment of its implementation. Marzano (2006) states that “national and state standards documents simply were not designed to allow easy application to classroom application” (p. 30). Therefore, some recommendations should be put into practice to enhance its implementation.

1.7 Objectives of the Research

The study focused on achieving the following aims:

1. To investigate the ESL teachers' extent of knowledge and ability in implementing the SBA.
2. To identify the challenges encountered by the ESL teachers in implementing the SBA.
3. To identify the ESL teachers' recommendations to further enhance the SBA implementation.