

# EXPLORING ASSESSMENT REFORM IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

SHANUSI BIN AHMAD

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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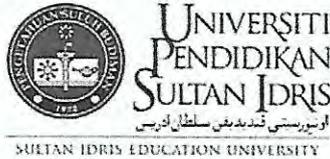
## EXPLORING ASSESSMENT REFORM IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

SHANUSI BIN AHMAD

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the implementation of assessment reform initiatives known as the National Education Assessment System (NEAS) from the perspectives of school administrators and teachers and in two primary schools. The objectives of the study were: (a) to explore the approaches developed by schools in response to NEAS, (b) to explore the factors which affect the implementation of NEAS, and (c) to identify the factors in schools which impact upon the implementation of NEAS. The main model used in this study was Concern-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). This model explained about the teachers' concern within a context of assessment reform. This study used a qualitative case study which involved 8 informants from two primary schools. Semi-structure interview protocol and document analysis were the instruments used to collect qualitative data. Qualitative data analysis using thematic analysis was also utilised in this study. The supportive result shows that the relationship among the teachers, management team, students, parents and community are crucial to facilitate the implementation of the NEAS. In addition, teachers' beliefs, leadership quality, and school culture were also critical elements. However, the suppressive factors for NEAS implementation such as low teachers' morale and negative students' attitude were the emerging themes from the study. In other words, there is a need to improve not only the system but also the delivery of the NEAS. In conclusion, the study found that the critical factors such as school leadership's support, teachers' beliefs and training are pertinent to facilitate the implementation of NEAS. In implication, the framework developed by this study can be used by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate, school administrators, and teachers to revamp or redesign the current NEAS implementation.



## PENEROKAAN REFORMASI PENTAKSIRAN DI SEKOLAH RENDAH MALAYSIA

### ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian kes ini adalah untuk meneroka pelaksanaan inisiatif reformasi pentaksiran yang dikenali sebagai Sistem Pentaksiran Pendidikan Kebangsaan (SPPK) dari perspektif pentadbir dan guru sekolah dan di dua buah sekolah rendah. Objektif kajian adalah: (a) untuk meneroka pendekatan yang dikembangkan oleh sekolah sebagai tindak balas kepada SPPK (b) untuk meneroka faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan SPPK, dan (c) untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor di sekolah yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan SPPK. Model utama yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah Model Adopsi Berasaskan Keprihatinan (*Concern-Based Adoption Model-CBAM*). Model ini menjelaskan keprihatinan guru dalam konteks pembaharuan pentaksiran. Kajian ini menggunakan kajian kes kualitatif yang melibatkan 8 orang informan dari dua sekolah rendah. Protokol temu bual separa struktur dan analisis dokumen adalah dokumen yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data kualitatif. Analisis data kualitatif menggunakan analisis tematik digunakan dalam kajian ini. Hasil sokongan menunjukkan bahawa hubungan antara guru, pasukan pengurusan, pelajar, ibu bapa dan komuniti sangat penting untuk memudahkan pelaksanaan SPPK, ini termasuk kepercayaan guru, kualiti kepimpinan dan budaya sekolah. Walau bagaimanapun, faktor penekanan untuk pelaksanaan SPPK seperti moral guru yang rendah dan sikap pelajar yang negatif adalah tema yang muncul dari kajian ini. Dengan ini, terdapat keperluan untuk memperbaiki sistem tetapi juga kaedah penyampaian SPPK. Sebagai kesimpulan, kajian ini mendapati bahawa faktor-faktor kritikal seperti sokongan kepimpinan sekolah, kepercayaan dan latihan guru adalah berkaitan untuk memudahkan pelaksanaan SPPK. Secara implikasinya, kerangka kerja yang dikembangkan dalam kajian ini dapat digunakan oleh Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, pentadbir sekolah, dan guru untuk merombak atau merancang semula pelaksanaan SPPK saat ini.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBAM	Concerned base adoption model
LPM	Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia
MCE	Malaysian Certificate of Examination
MES	Malaysian Examination Syndicate
MEC	Malaysian Education Council
MONE	Ministry of National Education
NEAS	National Education Assessment System
PAGE	Parent Action Group for Education
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
QCA	Qualifications and Curricular Authority
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
STAM	Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia
UCLES	University of Cambridge Local Exam Syndicate



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study



This study entitled ‘Exploring Assessment reform in Malaysian Primary Schools’ is set out based on the current backdrop and developments taking place in Malaysia’s education landscape. This chapter establishes the parameters of the study in terms of the background of the study namely the implementation of educational change in Malaysia; the rationale and justification for the study and the purpose of the study based on the research questions.





## 1.2 Assessment Change: The Challenges and the Implications

One of the challenges of educational change faced by the educational policy makers in Malaysia is to bring in new approaches in educational assessment. Currently, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has a significant task to make sure that the education change and standard in Malaysia is at par with the international standard. As such, new policies are being gradually formulated and the transformation of education is implemented to improve the education system, which includes assessment and evaluation. The focus on public examination results is intensified in Malaysia as well as other countries especially those countries with centralised educational system. Similar to those countries, Malaysia utilises results from final examination to determine students' progress (Chiam, 1984). Ong (2010) also agreed that the centralised public examinations in the Malaysian education system has dominated assessment to the extent of marginalising or undermining the significance of other potential forms of assessment presently used in the classroom or school levels via teacher and peer assessment. The central public examinations such as PMR, SPM and STAM in Malaysia are all administered by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES/LPM). On the other hand, STPM is operated by Malaysian Examination Council (MPM). This centralised assessment mechanism is seen as valid and reliable. Hence, it is generally accepted by the public and is deeply embedded in the social and educational system in Malaysia that national centralised examination system as a fair and acceptable way of measuring standards or achievements and as a form of accountability.





However, there are several shortcomings or pitfalls of the national centralised assessment which are discussed and elaborated in this thesis. Hence, assessment reform is needed to uphold the quality of our educational outcomes. Cultural factor may be involved in order to bring about the assessment reform. Changing a significant educational dimension such as assessment is a major challenge because it is a profound cultural change for many teachers (Chapman, 2010). Fullan (2011) who is a leading educational change expert states that change is a complex process and cannot be understood only by superficial measures. Thus, the essence of change is never superficial and almost always not uni-dimensional. The manifestation of change occurs in multi-dimensional perspectives which requires deep analysis and interpretations. Literature review shows a paucity of qualitative corpus on Malaysian educational assessment studies and reforms.



Several previous educational reforms and policy changes in Malaysia were aimed at school improvement and effectiveness such as in terms of new teaching and learning approaches or curriculum change (Ong, 2010). However, there were few studies that particularly focused on Malaysian education policy reforms on student assessment (Chin et al, 2019). In other words, the in-depth studies on the systemic change to the assessment system were rarely carried out by Malaysian researchers. Hence, this study was designed to explore the reform initiatives regarding the educational assessment practices in Malaysia.

Educational dimensions including assessment in Malaysia must be based on the National Education Philosophy (NEP). In essence, NEP established in 1988 (MoE, 2001) puts an emphasis on the importance to produce a well-balanced individual. A





well-balanced individual is an individual who goes through a holistic educational and personal development. NEP states that “Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort to further develop 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.” The NEP puts emphasis on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains with regard to human development (Ghazali, 2016; Chin et al., 2019).

In terms of educational evaluation, holistic assessment is deemed necessary based on the NEP. In 2011, National Education Assessment System (NEAS) was introduced (LPM, 2012). It was a part and parcel of a new educational transformation in Malaysia. Moving away from the examination-oriented outlook of the old education system, NEAS (SPPK) was designed to provide more holistic indicators of students’ achievement. The core component of NEAS is school-based assessment (PBS). School-based assessment was adopted in order to assess the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of the students in line with the Malaysian national philosophy of education and the new primary school curriculum standard (KSSR).

With the implementation of National Education Assessment System (NEAS) (LPM, 2012) in 2011, constructive changes were taking place in particular, the shift from a centralised examination into a combination of centralised examination and school-based assessment (LPM, 2012). This move was intended to change the whole culture of knowledge acquisition and assessment, thus making learning more authentic and less exam oriented.





Initially, 500 out of 7776 selected primary schools comprising of urban, sub-urban and rural schools were involved in the implementation of NEAS as a pilot project. Malaysian education system is hoped to be a better system when NEAS is fully implemented (LPM, 2012). The new system assigned a more important role for teachers in terms of being a part in assessing students' learning output in the new system, which is a combination of central examination system (which may take different forms) and school-based assessment system.

Research studies have demonstrated that students' achievement can be influenced by classroom assessment (Stiggins, 2002) which serves a clear purpose in terms of goal setting (Andrade & Brookhart, 2016). Alkharusi et al. (2014) have asserted the power of classroom assessment in supporting and enhancing students' learning and motivation. This notion of assessment for a more meaningful and holistic purpose rather than just gauging academic performance for grades also reverberates and become the backdrop in many studies on the educational change phenomenon in the education systems in many countries. It has also often been shown that the history of breakthroughs in the study of change is not only in form of the creation of isolated and brilliant ideas, but also in the intersection of independently discovered elements spontaneously or otherwise coming together at opportune period of development (Fullan, 2011). This understanding strongly relates to the way in which this study was approached and conducted whereby all micro aspects related to assessment practices were scrutinized to form a comprehensive understanding of the educational change process and the actual practices and impacts which were entailed.





Apart from this case study, more thorough studies may need to be conducted on the implementation of the NEAS as the new assessment elements introduced may bring about aspects of interpretations, acceptance and rejection or impacts. The introduction of the NEAS is seen as a significant catalyst essential to the inevitable changes required by the stagnant education system.

The contemporary curriculum reform in Malaysia is the implementation of the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) in stages starting with Year One pupils in 2011. The major change in this curriculum is that its assessment is expected to be more holistic and less examination oriented for the pupils. Consequently, the School-Based Assessment (SBA) was officially introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Education to evaluate pupils' progress in line with the new KSSR curriculum. The



rationales behind the implementation of school based assessment include the

following: (1) to achieve the aspiration of the National Philosophy of Education toward developing pupils' physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual abilities; (2) to reduce examination-oriented learning among pupils; (3) to evaluate pupils' learning progress; and (4) to enhance teachers' integrity in assessing, recording, and reporting of pupils' learning. Under this new assessment approach, teachers are given greater responsibility to design quality assessments that align with their pupils' learning outcomes. However, since its implementation in schools is on-going – various complaints, setback, issues, and challenges have been heard among the KSSR teachers (Lim & Chew, 2019). Therefore, it is critical to elaborate on the implementation of educational change in Malaysia.





### 1.3 The Implementation of Educational Change in Malaysia

At present, educational assessment practices in Malaysia have a major impact on the education system (Lim & Chew, 2019). The assessment reform in Malaysia follows the typical international trend of transforming assessment practices from being dominant, centrally regulated and regimented into a more dynamic, holistic and integrative system. I have observed the policies that embody such changes in the United States via their National Assessment and Progress Education (2001) and in the United Kingdom through their Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2007). In relation to this, Malaysian educational policy makers claim that the introduction of school-based assessment will create more balance in the approach of assessment in the system (Malaysian Education Council, 2012). The Malaysian Ministry of Education, like other government educational departments in other countries, has been concerned with the way in which the changes and reforms on educational assessment have been carried out to determine the quality of teaching and learning processes in schools. According to the former Minister of Education, Musa Mohamed (The Straits Times, Feb 2003), “We need a fresh and new philosophy in our approach to exams and we want to make the education system less exam-oriented, and we are looking at increasing school-based assessment as it would be a better gauge of students’ abilities”.

Similar to other elements in education, assessment requires changes and transformation towards producing a quality education system. Any change in the education system invariably affects the key components of the system which are the school and the teachers. The study of change process may be analyzed at two levels –





individual and organizational (Zaltman, Duncan & Holbek, 1973). According to Hall and Hord (2006), the significance of the individual level is as follows:

“Although everyone wants to talk about such broad concepts as policy, systems, and organizational factors, successful change starts and ends at the individual level. An entire organization does not change until each member has changed... Even when the change is introduced to every member of the organization at the same time, the rate of making the change and of developing skill and competence in using it will vary individually... leader of organizational change processes needs to devise ways to anticipate and facilitate change at the individual level” (p. 7)



However, organizations can rarely afford to develop strategies based on changes

of any one individual. As such, several researchers have put forth a more synergetic and collaborative model for any intended organizational change process to be better introduced, internalized and well embraced from the top down to the individual level. The Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) of Malaysia chairperson, Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim has put forward her view:

“Teachers can easily exercise favouritism and leak questions to their students — we need independent and standardised national assessments. The Malaysian Examination Syndicate also mentioned this form of assessment will produce more complex report cards; I personally feel that this will not be useful to parents if it is hard to make sense of how their



children are progressing in school. Plus, the resulting paperwork will just be another burden to teachers” (The Star, Mar 2010).

Hence, the change is seen as an added burden to the teachers, not attributes and not favourable to some parents. In addition, according to Abdul Rahman Arshad, the former Education Director-General, the success of any programme at the school level depends to a large extent on the quality of leadership there (The Star, Mar 2010). Therefore, there is reason to assess how the context in these case study schools that implement the NEAS, particularly ‘the successful’ and the ‘in progress’ categories, may facilitate the successful implementation of the new policy. It is particularly important at this juncture when several scholars are talking about educational change and formative assessment, and how the role and responsibility of the teachers need to be improvised. All these are crucial in order to identify the successful factors in implementing the new policy and they are certainly worth considering via further studies.

Based on this realisation or such context and realities, this study is undertaken to explore all possible aspects which come into play in the ways the actual practitioners namely the schools and the teachers that actually embrace the change and how they mitigate the new emerging demands via their practices. The following section highlights how my background in education and my job designation and my work tasks at various bureaucratic strata in the education ministry enabled me to have an objective view and rich insights into the local assessment change phenomenon.



#### 1.4 Researcher's Involvement and Roles in the NEAS

I have served for almost 21 years as an education officer starting with schools and colleges. My work is currently involved to the headquarters of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. During the planning for an assessment change in the education system, I was able to directly observe the processes and development up to the level of the introduction of the NEAS in 2011. As a practitioner of education via my previous roles as a schoolteacher and a college tutor, assessment is an area which is my cup of tea as it was part of my job routines. It is still my passion despite my administrative job tasks which I presently dispense as an education officer. I am able to observe the big picture of education in Malaysia and the recurring issues which are brought to my attention from time to time. All these experience and vocation in education have motivated me to undertake this study as I feel that I have both an insider and a practitioner's point of view and actual sense of implementation that reflects actual reality.

With my insights into the intricacies of the workings of a ministry, I am well positioned to assume the role of an objective observer cum researcher for this doctoral study. As a full-time doctoral student, I am relieved of my full responsibility relating to any ministry level educational administration tasks which include all matters pertaining to the NEAS. At the final planning and rolling out of the NEAS in Malaysia, I was witnessed to the exciting developments in this assessment policy change which became my basis for the proposal for this doctoral study. As such, by assuming this new role as a researcher, I have formally and officially distanced myself from the educational agenda and job designation at the Ministry of Education.





Though there are concerns that my role as a researcher is still shadowed by my position, I took great care to carefully present myself as a neutral and objective doctoral student and researcher, via all my self-introduction, written and email communications and even the way I carried myself to meet the case study respondents at schools.

### 1.5 The Problem Statement

Most educational changes are grounded in the assumption that these reforms have significant influence on any attempt to implement major changes successfully at schools. The change in the assessment system as introduced by KSSR provides a paradigm shift in education. According to the Assessment Reform Group (2008), a change in the assessment system has to start with an innovation which might be different from the one being practised by teachers nowadays. Teachers are required bring changes in assessment practices as to improve students' learning. The changes include changes in classroom culture, whereby teachers need to shift from focusing on public examination to focusing more on using several types of alternative assessment (Webb & Jones, 2009). Excellence in public examinations such as UPSR, PMR and SPM does not give a real picture of the ability and ability of students to further reinforce public opinion about the weakness of the exam-centered education system (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2011a).





Although reform activities have increased the workload for teachers and have presented some of the most challenging tasks to the teachers, no such evidence is available regarding the success of these reform activities in improving classrooms. Hence, literature regarding educational change is not sufficient (Cuban, 1998; Spillane, Spring 1999). However, the issue here is not that change does not happen. It is that the aspirations of the central policy that are not met (Supovitz, 2008). Poor, inadequate, and inefficient implementation that fall short of the intended aims of an educational policy change have been reported in literatures on study in many countries as among the primary reasons for shifts in educational policies for certain specific purposes to be deemed as unsuccessful or even derailed from the proposed blueprint or strategic plan. However, there is a gap in research on the specific causative factors that brought about the elements of inefficiency, inadequacy and shortcoming in the execution of certain policy change. This warrants more thorough and comprehensive studies on several possible perspectives, and this is part of my intention in undertaking this research. As such, my study focuses on the changes within a system of education to highlight some of the key issues that may facilitate or hinder educational change processes.

To date, studies on the approaches developed by schools, factors affecting the implementation of the NEAS and the impact of the NEAS implementation in the Malaysian education context are not many. This study intends to investigate the approaches and factors that facilitate the successful implementation of the NEAS which took place at two schools in the state of Johor. Besides determining the approaches which have been developed by these schools in response to the NEAS, this study also identified the factors that affect the implementation of the NEAS in





these schools and the impact of these factors in schools upon the implementation of this policy.

## 1.6 The Conceptual basis of the study

The conceptual framework for this study follows a model called the concern-based adoption model (CBAM). CBAM offers a conceptual framework which is better suited to the needs of this study. I have chosen CBAM in my research as I feel that it is the most appropriate model for my study as I am going to explore teachers' concern within a context of change. The elements in CBAM model are related to assessment through the three diagnostic dimensions such as innovation Configurations which provides a clear picture of what constitutes high-quality implementation, Stages of Concern which includes a questionnaire, interview, and open-ended statements, enables leaders to identify staff members' attitudes and beliefs toward a new program or initiative and Levels of Use that helps determine how well staff, both individually and collectively, are using a program. And, with various elements and dimensions in CBAM, it is an advantage for my study. As this thesis is focused on schools in Malaysia, the conceptualization of educational change is described and, in more depth in chapter two.

The reason for studying concepts of change and educational change are grounded in the assumption that these concepts have significant influence on any attempts to implement major changes successfully at schools, in particular in teachers' pedagogical practices. What is change? I would look at the general meaning of change





and its relation to teachers' pedagogical changes as it would first give a brief overview of my research focus. The father of organizational development, Kurt Lewin (1951) presented the idea of change as a process with three distinctive sub processes namely unfreezing, moving and refreezing. When a set of unconscious behaviours and thoughts melt they are regarded as a state of unfreezing. These behaviours and thoughts are the reasons for the decreasing of productivity among employees, thus creating conflicts and social problems. Once melted, thoughts and behaviours are then channelled to refreeze so that congruent and functional patterns are formed. Unless these new patterns are challenged by certain new perception, they will not be changed. Although the change formula presented by Lewin is fascinating, practically it is not possible. Moreover, such explanations tend to overlook the fact that change is constant, and it is visible in the educational format and in modern day life. According to Levin (Dec 2008), the educational field has witnessed a massive introduction of innovation in the past twenty-five years. Due to this, the teachers now feel professionally marginalised, disempowered, and afflicted by an increase in bureaucracy and paperwork (Ball 2008, Goodson 2003, Helsby 1999, Hursh 2007, Levin 2008). A decade after his earlier observation, Levin (2008) in his analysis of the recent 21st century educational reforms in many contexts still highlight the prevalence of almost identical impacts on the part of the teachers as the main implementers at the base of educational policy change.

Next, is to look at changes within systems of education. I would look at findings from changes within systems of education and its relation to teachers' pedagogical changes. In the today's world, educational institutes are under extreme pressure to carry out a change program (Desimone, 2009; Fullan, May 2011).





Nowadays, bringing a change is added to the responsibilities of individual teachers as well as having to discharge administrative duties. Undoubtedly, pedagogical changes face major hindrances, especially when people responsible for a change are not included in the policy making. The current literature shows us that if a change needs to be implemented in an educational system, then active participation from teachers is important (Fullan 2015, May 2011).

To make a workplace more efficient, processes need to be influenced and motivated by clear and attainable goals thus, laying emphasis on the necessity of maintaining organizational stability while still tending to the newly introduced reforms (Grimm, & Pianta, 2010; Aypay & Kalayci, 2008). Hence, the traditional structure of the educational sector and new educational reforms can exist parallel to each other.

As such, the reforms initiative should be more varied and exhaustive. This may include efforts such as the initiation of student-oriented methods, the widening professional base, and the introduction of different methods of teaching.

Several factors must be kept in mind when bringing changes in an existing system including (a) integrating training of teachers within their different levels of professional development (Fullan, 2015), (b) developing an advanced school leadership by training the principals (Fullan, May 2011; Mariage & Garmon, July 2003), (c) developing the professional experience of teachers (Fullan, 2015), and (d) focusing on the perception, work, and views regarding the world of teachers. Some researchers like Miles (June 2015) have opined those changes in the educational setup can be managed if training is provided for it. While Hammersley (2008) is of the view that if the researchers work together with the teachers in making changes based on a





research, then the changes can be implemented more effectively by the teachers. These studies do not emphasise the significance of examining the reforms' implementation about the attitudes of teachers. Hence, it would suggest the need for further studies that could analyse the impact of professional development of teachers that influences their attitudes towards pedagogical changes. This also influences how they differentiate among different teaching strategies, which are determined by the educational orientation of the teacher itself, the teaching content, and the students. These types of studies also aim to explain how the ability of different schools that are trying to implement different reforms is often influenced by such differences.

### 1.7 Purpose of the Study



The purpose of this study is to explore the assessment changes in the Malaysian educational context and to also to identify what are the factors that facilitate the changes. Specifically, this study has focused on investigating the approaches and factors that facilitate the successful implementation of the NEAS which took place at two schools in the state of Johor. Besides determining the approaches which have been developed by these schools in response to the NEAS, this study also identified the factors that affect the implementation of the NEAS in these schools and the impact of these factors in schools upon the implementation of this policy.





## 1.8 The Future of Malaysian Education

To ensure Malaysia's attainment internationally as the status of an industrialized and developed nation, the government sees that it is imperative that the country provide high quality education to its young generation. The Ministry of Education is mobilized towards the preparation to achieve the advanced-nation status by producing human capital with proper knowledge, skills and a "First Class Mentality". In order to be a developed nation, the government has identified strategies to match the following challenges highlighted in Vision 2020 (Government of Malaysia, 2000).

The latest Education Development Plan for Malaysia (2013-2025), also referred to as the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, was launched by the former Prime Minister, Najib Razak in 2013. It is placing a strong focus on developing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in students so that they can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom (Zamri, 2016). The education transformation is to take place over 13 years, with Wave 1 (2012-2015) focusing on efforts to turn around the system by supporting teachers and focusing on core skills, Wave 2 (2016-2020) on accelerating system improvement and Wave 3 (2021-2025) on moving towards excellence with increased operational flexibility. The five outcomes which the Blueprint aspires for the Malaysian education system cover the areas of access, quality, equity, unity and efficiency. It seeks to develop students who possess six key attributes that would enable them to be globally competitive, namely knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics, and spirituality, as well as national identity.





## 1.9 Malaysian Examination System

The Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) is responsible for developing tests for all national examinations including the Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR), Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) and Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). The dominant form of assessment in the Malaysian education system is the centralised public examinations (Ong, Feb 2010). Public Examination for primary and secondary school level like UPSR, PMR, SPM, STAM are administered by the MES and the pre-university level public examination like the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia or Malaysian High School Certificate is conducted by Malaysian Education Council. These centrally controlled and administered public examinations are valid and reliable forms of education assessment mechanisms which are an administratively manageable means of grading and selecting students for various educational and social purposes.

All public examinations have been prepared, administered, scored, and reported by MES and MEC. However, according to Ong, (Feb 2010), score reports usually take months to generate and usually contain only summary test scores in the form of grades. The issue is on the conversion of examination scores to grades which has not been disclosed to the public. Nevertheless, brief description of the grade system for each examination is provided. The MES has confirmed that the main purposes of public examinations are for selection of candidates for educational opportunities, employment and certification of achievement (Lembaga Peperiksaan, 2007). One of the important criteria for selection of staff into the government services is the results of public examinations such as SPM and STPM. For instance, the SPM examination results have been used for the awards of federal government scholarships





(Ong, Feb 2010). Private institutions have also given scholarships and monetary assistance to students based on this government public examination grades although there are also international based criteria of evaluation and assessment which are practised in Malaysia.

The UPSR, PMR, SPM, STAM and STPM are all external examinations. The UPSR is based on the newer integrated school curriculum which was introduced in 1988 to replace the 'Primary School Assessment' which had been in place since 1967. PMR is a combination of centralised and school-based assessments (course work) where candidates must sit for examination of eight mandatory core subjects: Malay Language, English Language, Islamic Education for Muslim students and Moral Education for non-Muslim students, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography and Integrated Living Skills for diagnostic evaluation of students' learning. All secondary schools prepare students for SPM whether academic, technical, religious, or special education schools. In 1988, SPM was revised to be an open certificate examination. Six core subjects (i.e., Malay, English, Mathematics, Science, History and Islamic Studies or Moral Education) are to be taken by all candidates with two or more elective subjects. Students are not forced into the traditional arts and science streams after the lower secondary level. They now receive a broad-based education that gives them more flexibility to learn according to their individual capacity. SPM serves as the basis for selection of candidates into Form 6 and as a gateway examination for entry into various private institutions of higher learning.





Aside from the public examinations, there are also school-based assessments. There are three main types of test being used in schools. The first is a diagnostic test that is done at the beginning of the year to gather a baseline for students' level skills in certain areas (Gurnam et al., 2007). The information gathered is used for academic programme review purposes. Secondly, formative assessment is conducted continually throughout the year and is used to monitor students' understanding. It gives immediate feedback and guides the teacher in modifying instruction to meet the needs of the students. Thirdly, summative assessment takes place at the end of the unit or lesson and evaluates if the student has mastered the learning objectives or outcomes. The types of summative assessment include standardised test and teacher made test. Next, I would touch on the purpose of public examination in Malaysia.



### **1.10 The Purpose of Examination in Malaysia**

Public examinations are conducted for selection and certification purposes (Marlin Abd. Karim & Shahril Mohd. Karib, 2003). To enter secondary level, the students use The Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) or Primary School Achievement Test. For placement in upper secondary level, The Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) or the Lower Secondary Assessment results are used. For higher level, like entering institutions of higher learning, the students must have good grades in The Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results. Next is the sixth form level. In addition, the public examinations result such as SPM results or Form 6 results also used by the students to apply for study scholarships. However, some students would use the results to find a job.





### 1.11 The National Education Assessment System (NEAS)

The call for reformation in educational assessment system in Malaysia aims to see the introduction of a reliable and appropriate school-based assessment system. The NEAS concentrates on school-based assessment, and examinations would remain in the system but at a lower stake at primary and secondary education. It has put less emphasis on evaluating learners based on their ability to pass an examination. It was created to achieve the National Philosophy of Education target towards developing learners' physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual abilities. It also aims to reduce exam-oriented learning among learners by evaluating learners' learning progress and enhancing teachers' integrity in assessing, recording, and reporting of learners' learning.



NEAS focuses on a holistic assessment practice. Figure 1.1 shows the holistic process of developing the right potential in each individual in NEAS. This includes experiential and exploratory learning that is intended to enrich students' knowledge and stimulates their creative minds. The creativity and innovation of workforce, which is seen as a prerequisite for a high-income economy, can only be enhanced if creative and innovative learning becomes a major component of education.





*Figure 1.1.* The Holistic Assessment for National Education Assessment System

### 1.12 Why the NEAS?

There are five components in NEAS which are school assessment, central assessment, central examinations, psychometric tests and physical activity assessment. All of those are intended to improve assessment in school children. For school assessment, subject teachers are responsible to plan and develop the assessments following the syllabus. Then, they conduct, examine, and make a report on it. The second form of assessment is central assessment. This is not the same as central examination as it is fully conducted by the subject teachers, but the data analyses and guidelines are still provided by MES. The central examination would be fully conducted by the MES. The NEAS has three sets of core principles, known as PADI, 5 SERANGKAI and PASSak. These are outlined as follows:



### 1. PADI.

Assesses aspects such as learners' profiles, achievements, developments and involvement as based on the national curriculum.

### 2. 5 SERANGKAI.

Uses various methods to gather data about students' development (growth), performance and achievement such as the 5 SERANGKAI.

### 3. PASSak.

Schools, teachers, stake holders, interested individual, relevant agencies or organizations would be involved in the assessment process.

#### 1.12.1 What to assess? (PADI)



The acronym PADI is detailed as follows.

#### Profile (P)

In the NEAS context, profile information would focus on psychological characteristics of students as impacted by the continued process of absorption of learning namely aptitude, personality, and passion. The profile information can describe a student by reflecting on his or her willingness to learn as well as the tendency and potential for the student to succeed. Determining psychological characteristics can help the process of learning to become more efficient and meaningful.





### Achievement (A)

In the NEAS, achievement is viewed as the acquisition, success, and excellence in the aspects of knowledge or capabilities that are developed in students. The level of achievement is referred to as the attainment of life skills. Achievements are earned through ability or skills, training effort and determination. Indicators of the level of achievement would be referred to either through the certification process, the selection or the learning process and various decision-making processes that relate to learning and education. Achievements assessed in NEAS include academic, non-academic, and vocational skills which include all kinds of achievements. By introducing the assessment of achievement in curriculum and co-curricular activities, pupils' achievements other than academic aspects would be evaluated.



### Development (D)

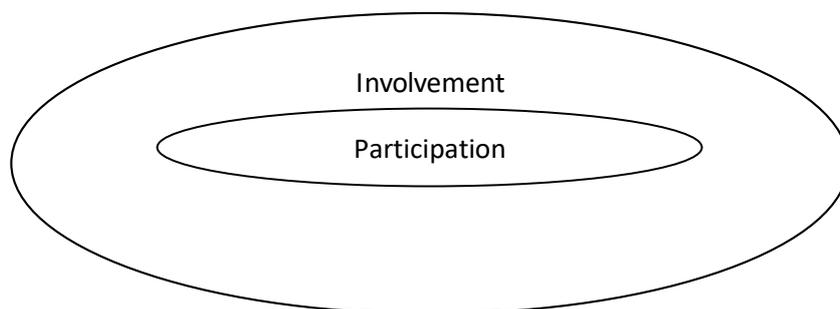


One of the major changes in NEAS is in the role of assessment. In NEAS, assessment is not merely for making a judgment but for monitoring and promoting student development. Student development here encompasses various aspects such as physical, cognitive, psychomotor, socio-emotional, spiritual and language proficiency. Planning for these respective aspects to continuously develop and instilling the desire to have all these gradually move towards the intended targets is the goal. This is one of the changes that would enhance the student at a continuous rate and be of use at the end of an academic programme. Therefore, the continuous and holistic development would serve as aspects that need to be assessed. Continuous monitoring on the overall progress of students would ensure that the aims of the NEAS are fulfilled.



### Involvement (I)

In this context, participation has a meaning which encompasses engagement. The level of participation can be seen as a habit that should be identified and addressed to develop an active individual. Given education is an ongoing effort, then the lack of participation or the failure to do so would affect the effectiveness of education in creating individuals with the desired traits and character. Figure 1.2 illustrates the concept of participation which refers to the presence of students in an activity, situation or learning environment. Attendance does not only mean physical presence alone as nowadays students can still participate in an activity at school despite being in a different location. Presently, students who cannot attend school are still able to join a class discussion or give opinions via on-line or by phone. Participation indicates a contribution in the form of knowledge, opinions, skills, time or energy, sharing of interests and expressing emotions towards an activity.



*Figure 1.2.* The participation in involvement

In the NEAS, students' involvement and participation are critical in learning process. Students' learning contribution can be seen in terms of the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and efforts along with the sharing of the interest and emotion



towards activities that they are involved in. When students actively participate, they cannot see and listen without taking part as this would not be sufficient for development of positive traits or character in a person. Active students' participations in activities conducted at school, at home, with the local community and at the international level are also considered, recorded, and given recognition. These aspects are part of the new assessment because when the students participate, involve, and actively engage in an activity; they are considered to be actively learning. In contrast to the conventional assessment primarily via examination, the performance, participation, and involvement which are presently assessed via NEAS are not necessarily evidenced by the receipt of a trophy or award by the students but rather, the assessment aspect would encourage students' participation in contributing towards a variety of healthy activities conducted in school or outside of school and all these engagements would be recognised and acknowledged. This process could motivate students to remain in the activity; could enhance students' participation; and could create fun learning.

In school-based assessment, teaching methods and learning activities can be tailored to suit students' learning styles. This would attract students to join and participate actively in learning activities which could enhance their personal development and growth. Furthermore, effective learning could lead to the students' achievement. As students' learning shows improvement, positive impacts on students' self-confidence could be seen. Students who believe that they have hope and can be more successful would continue to further develop their potential via active involvement. Thus, the students' learning process is basically based on their active participation and involvement.



### 1.12.2 How to Assess? (5 Serangkai)

The five serangkai or the five types of assessment model comprised school assessment, central assessment, central examination, psychometric test and physical activity assessment. All the components complement each other. They are supposed to be designed for everyone following the individual potential. Figure 1.3 showed the 5 Serangkai (Five Methods of Assessments) model adopted by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE, 2010).

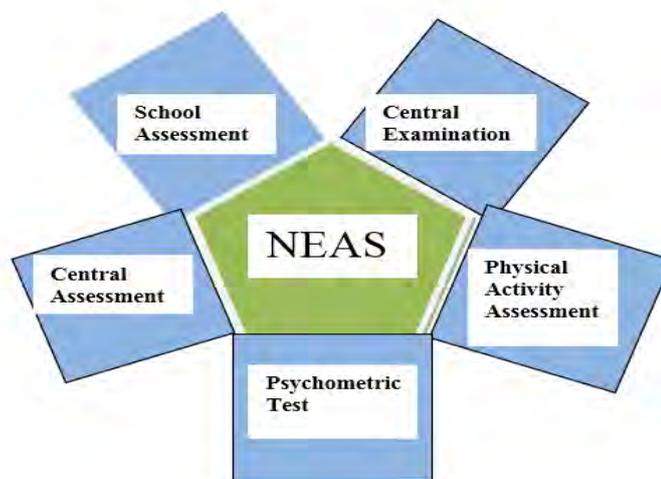


Figure 1.3. Five methods of assessemnt

#### School Assessment

The classroom assessment is also known as formative school assessment (MOE, 2017). This assessment is planned, developed, conducted, examined and reported systematically according to the procedures fixed by the MES (Mudin, 2019) which include involvement of students, parents and outside organisations. According to Adamson (2014), the school assessment could be used to determine where pupils are in their learning development and to identify any learning challenges they may have.



Furthermore, assessment can be formative throughout the teaching-learning process or summative which is carried out at the end of school year. The process of teaching, learning and assessment occur reciprocally and are integrated with aspects beyond academic curriculum. Teachers are expected to formally and continuously assess students in a more holistic teaching process as they are aware of students' progress in learning. Feedback would be given accordingly to students after each learning task or assessment process. The process of moderation would also be carried out by the school as to ensure that the assessment is genuine, valid and reliable.

#### Central Assessment

The central assessment involves standards, instruments, data analysis and guidelines which are provided by the Examination Syndicate. On the other hand, the administration, marking and reporting are conducted by the schools. Assessment is implemented in a summative form according to the schedule fixed by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES). Marks awarded by the schools are sent to MES to be analyzed and moderated before they are to be reported to the schools.

#### Central Examination

The Central examination is fully conducted by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES). The areas measured in the Central Examination are related to and covers the national curriculum. Students' performances in the central examinations are reported in the form of certificates awarded by the MES after considering both the students' performance in their school assessment and central assessment. The new central examination would be flexible and less stressful. It would be reported in the form of a cumulative certificate and acknowledged by external agencies. The school system





would be administered in the form of a semester system and the number of subjects assessed in the central examination would also be less according to the time frame.

### Psychometric Test

Psychometric tests would be used to measure students' innate abilities. These involve their general knowledge abilities, aptitudes, personalities, strength, skills, interests, and attitudes. In addition, the psychometric tests are also used to identify students' abilities and behaviours which are non-academic but are to be expanded within the learning activities at school. Psychometric tests for Malaysian schools would be developed by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES), and their administration would either be school-based or administered by the District Education Offices.



### Physical Activity Assessment



Physical Activity Assessment would be used to evaluate and measure students' performance, involvement and participation in various co-curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Assessment instruments would be jointly developed by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) and relevant professional organization and agencies in their related field of expertise. Students' involvement and achievements in the schools' clubs or societies, sports and games, community works, or any other activities or competitions would be recorded and recognized accordingly where students would be awarded for their achievements.





### 1.12.3 What and How to Report (PASSaK)

The reporting and certification systems currently do not provide sufficient information to comprehensively describe the real capabilities and qualities of students. Existing systems only report academic achievement and making it the only indicator that can be used by various parties to assess and consider the students' achievement for a variety of purposes such as entry selection into boarding school and controlled schools, award of scholarships, placement into university or employment. PASSaK is a concept reflecting educational purpose or purposes of learning (learning goals or outcomes). PASSaK is related to information that can be reported to all so that the effectiveness and quality of the education system can be evaluated. PASSaK is an acronym in the Malay language which can summarily described by the following.



#### *Potential-skilled*

Emphasis is given to report students' potential in terms of their ability, strength, wouldingness, and ability to thrive. These attributes are categorized as 'competency'. As such, when the term competency is used it reflects the state where a student has the capacity, strength, and ability to thrive.

#### *Academic - Knowledgeable*

Academic is considered as high level of knowledge. Efforts to ensure that capable individuals are created through a joint knowledge-based education. This academic achievement would be recorded because of the new assessment system and is aimed at continuously measuring students' achievement in academics. However, not only academic performance is measured but the aspects of knowledge construction process





would be considered. This covers not only achievements at the end of a program but the whole teaching and process from the beginning to the end.

### *Social - Harmony as: Family, community, country*

Unity is one of the aims that is important for the country. As a country with people of different religions, races and ethnic groups, a strong and lasting unity is viewed as essential as it would enable all to contribute and strive to achieve Malaysia's dreams of becoming a developed country by the year 2020. Unity requires harmony at the micro level of the family, the community and up to the macro level of the country. Community or social group in this context is seen from the perspective of the relationship between individuals or groups in forming a harmonious entity. The harmony of this group is specifically directed to the family, the community and the country that consists of citizens from a variety of races, religions, and ethnicities.

Moral Character-honourable and responsible, balanced and harmonious (Physical, emotion, spiritual and intellectual), and believe in and worship of sovereign God. The element of religion is including as a requirement that leads to good character and personal behaviour. It is often related to as the personality traits of a behaviour or attitude that reflect the individual as a human.

There are also people who term this as character. In this case the focus areas are:

- Believe in and Obey God
- Morality or nobleness
- Responsibility
- Balanced and harmonious in terms of physical, emotion, spiritual and intellectual.



## Culture - Prosperity family, community, and country

The students' culture is a whole way of life (which includes how to act, behave, and think) as well as the results of activities and the creation of a material or spiritual element for a society, civilization and progress (common sense). In this context, the way of life focuses on the family, society, and the state. Prosperity cannot just simply happen as it has to be intentionally built. An organization could only be claimed as prosperous if its members have a culture of prosperity.

### 1.13 School-Based Assessment as the Main Element of the NEAS

School-Based Assessment (SBA) becomes the main element for the NEAS. SBA is an effort to develop human capital holistically by emphasizing knowledge mastery, intellectual capital, the cultivation of progressive attitudes, and the deployment of high values, ethics, and morals as stated in the Master Plan of Educational Development, the National Integrity Plan, and the National Mission (Gengatharan & Rahmat, 2019). It features essential concepts such as assessment for and of learning, standard-referenced assessment that is integrated, balanced and robust. Chin et al. (2019) identified that the SBA component is divided into two subcomponents which refer to Academic component such as School Assessment (using Performance Standards) and Centralised Assessment and the second sub component is Non-Academic such as Physical Activities, Sports and Co-curricular Assessment (Physical Activity Assessment - PAJSK) and Psychometric Assessment.



### School Assessment

School assessment would emphasise on the collection of first-hand information on students' learning, based on curriculum standards. Teachers are accorded more significant roles in planning the assessment, preparing the instrument, and administering the assessment during teaching and learning process as well as marking students' responses and reporting their progress.

### Central Assessment

Central assessment would be conducted and administered by teachers at schools using instruments, rubrics, guidelines, timeline and procedures prepared by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate. The monitoring and moderation would be conducted by the School Based Assessment Committee at School, District Education Office, State Education Department, and the Malaysian Examination Syndicate.

### Physical Activities, Sports and Co-curricular Assessment – (PAJSK)

The teachers would record students' physical endurance, body mass index, participation, involvement and contributions in sports, curriculum, and extra-curricular activities. Students' participation in sports and outdoor activities would be acknowledged and recognised as part of the learning process and would be an important addition to the assessment process.

### Psychometric Assessment

A psychometric assessment is a profiling assessment which emphasises on students' learning inclination, attitudes, interest, and personality. It enables teachers to help





students in their learning in accordance with their profile and identifies the areas of their interest according to their innate ability.

### **1.14 Research Objectives**

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore the approaches developed by schools in response to NEAS.
2. To explore the factors which affect the implementation of NEAS.
3. To identify the factors in schools which impact upon the implementation of NEAS.



### **1.15 Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the approaches developed by schools in response to NEAS?
2. What are the factors which affect the implementation of NEAS?
3. How do these factors in schools' impact upon the implementation of NEAS?

All the research questions above formed the essence of this research inquiry whereby the elicited data and findings yielded would help formulate understandings on the phenomenon being explored which is reflected in the aims of this doctoral study.





## 1.16 Importance of Research

Assessment in Malaysia is heavily test-oriented (Murad M. Noor, Sept 2005). In general, students' performance in national assessment is an important indicator for the education achievement in Malaysia. Although the Malaysian Examination Syndicate acknowledges the important uses of assessment, such as for diagnosis, evaluation, and guidance as beneficial characteristics of educational assessment. However, the way assessments are carried out often ignores these functions (Ong, 2010). The poor use of assessment in Malaysia is a critical situation and is a significant challenge to the nation.

The former Prime Minister, Najib Razak suggested the idea on skilled and knowledgeable workforce in the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan in the statement below:

“In this regard, the Government will implement holistic measures to strengthen education and training systems, starting from early childhood to tertiary education”

(The Star, April 2010).

This study is expected to provide useful information on the educational reform and assessment change process to the Education Ministry, educational bodies, schools including to the teachers themselves. Secondly, the study contributes to a theoretical development of the study of educational change. Most research on educational change has been carried out in other countries. A study of educational change can shed light on theories and models of educational change based on experiences in NEAS, complementing and possibly leading to the refinement of existing theories and models





and in-depth understanding of change process within the assessment context. It could be observed, that via such efforts, genuine attempts at innovation in terms of developing new approaches to educational change would also emerge and come the researcher's way. This is certainly new in Malaysia, and it would present an invaluable opportunity to enrich the educational research landscape of the country. Finally, beyond exploring empirical findings, the study raises an important question about the successful implementation of NEAS in Malaysia and provides recommendation on have developed whether the current NEAS policy needs to be redesigned to suit the objectives of the national education philosophy which ultimately aims for a holistic and well-balanced development of individuals who would be well positioned to operate as a nation. As such, it is hoped that this study would contribute to the body of knowledge on educational change phenomenon and



benefit the following people:

(a) Researchers and Academicians

This research could further contribute to researchers of education in Malaysia as well as give a more in-depth understanding in theory building, contexts of educational change particularly where NEAS is concerned. Currently, there is not much work that has been done in Malaysia in the study of educational change particularly focusing on educational assessment change. As such, this study could help initiate other similar studies in the field of educational change and assessment, which would further contribute to the resource base and be of benefit to many people who may be interested in doing research on this topic. It would propose a conceptual model that identifies the major factors involved in change processes as well as provide empirical evidence to support the implementation of the NEAS.





## (b) Schools and Ministry of Education

It is hoped that this study would highlight the factors that impact on schools' implementation of this policy. In addition, the results of the study would in some way be used as a basic communication channel for decision-making among MES officials, school administrators, and teachers. It could also be applied as the path by the Ministry of Education to decide whether to revamp or redesign the current NEAS policy.

### 1.17 Limitations of the Study

Every research has certain limitations, and it's completely normal. In my case, Sample Size. It is the limitation because I cannot generalize the results based on my limited case studies in my research.

### 1.18 Operational Definitions

An operational definition articulates how to capture (identify, create, measure, assess etc.) the value. In this study, the operational definition for the selected cases is based on the schools that have been approved by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate and these schools consist of two categories namely schools that have successfully implemented NEAS and schools that are still in progress of implementing National Education Assessment System (NEAS).





National Education Assessment System (NEAS) was designed to provide more holistic indicators of students' achievement. The core component of NEAS is school-based assessment (PBS). School-based assessment was adopted in order to assess the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of the students in line with the Malaysian national philosophy of education and the new primary school curriculum standard (KSSR).

### 1.19 Summary

The major content of this chapter is made up of: (1) a background of assessment reform, (2) a new understanding of assessment, and (3) the changing assessment practices in schools. This chapter has introduced the context for this study which is primarily concerned with the issue of educational change as a major challenge in implementing the new policy in schools in Malaysia. The study focuses on the Malaysian context and in particular the approaches and factors that facilitate the successful implementation of the NEAS. It also explains the scope of the study context that focuses on the Malaysian education system specifically on how the government aims to improve the quality of education via policy reform in the critical aspects of assessment. The chapter also discusses about the conceptual context of the study which employed CBAM provides more information on the NEAS as one of the attempts to promote new assessment system and all the implementation mechanisms and concept that come with it.

