



TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT USING THE STANDARD DOCUMENT FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT (DSKP): AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is an essential part of the teaching and learning process in the education system. The newly introduced School-Based Assessment (SBA) in Malaysian schools is a positive move towards formative assessment. This paper examined whether the ESL primary school teachers could understand and accurately assess students formatively by using the Document of Standards Performance and Assessment (DSKP). This study used a qualitative approach to elicit information on the respondents' understanding of carrying out SBA using DSKP. A survey involving 40 ESL teachers from primary schools participated in this study. The study reveals that 83 % of those who participated in this study consider themselves to have moderate understanding of using the DSKP to carry out SBA, while the other 16% consider their understanding of the matter as below average. However, there were a few of the respondents who had the wrong idea of DSKP in relation to SBA.

KEYWORDS: SBA, DSKP, assessment, ability, accuracy

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INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 2010, the Ministry of Education (MOE) implemented the School-Based Assessment (SBA) as part of the Educational Programme Transformation. SBA is an assessment of a holistic evaluation of the cognitive aspects (intellectual), affective (emotional and spiritual) and psychomotor (physical) that are in line with the National Education Philosophy, Curriculum Standard Primary School (KSSR) and High School Curriculum Standard (KSSM) of Malaysian public schools.

Formative assessment is a part of school-based assessment. Formative assessment or *assessment for learning* is an important aspect of teaching and learning in the classroom and good

pedagogy always includes this. Formative assessment is carried out by teachers to gain feedback on their pupils' learning and provide them with the necessary information regarding their pupils' learning so that they can make changes to their teaching by perhaps, changing their approaches or methods of teaching in order to further enhance pupils' learning in the classroom. Thus, formative assessment is carried out during classroom teaching and learning. In order to help teachers implement effective school-based assessment, the assessment element has been incorporated into the DSKP together with the content and learning standards.

Teachers should refer to the Performance Standard to help them ascertain the level of their pupils' acquisition of the various learning standards. The levels have been designed to help teachers gauge the level of their pupils' understanding and acquisition of the skills taught. With this knowledge, teachers may change their approach or methodology to help their pupils master the intended learning standard. Teachers should refer to this document to plan their lessons and assess their pupils. Assessment should be carried out during the teaching and learning process and pupils achievement levels are recorded and reported every quarterly. Various methods of assessment such as checklists, observations, oral presentations, quizzes, question and answer, task sheets or written assignments can be used to document the attainment of the learning standards. Through this process, teachers will be able to build a profile of their pupils' language development through an on-going assessment. As cited in Swaran and Samad (2013), portfolio is viewed as one of the leading alternative assessment approach (Tabatataei, 2012). Portfolios demonstrate students' progress, achievement and self-reflection in one or more areas (Paulson & Paulson, 1991). Portfolio assessment is an on-going process which involves a procedure which teachers use to plan, collect and analyse a collection of student's work. The main aims of portfolio assessment are to encourage learners to be more autonomous, be independent learners by taking charge of their own learning, able to make decisions, participate in the self-assessment process of their own work, and become active learners (Tabatataei, 2012). Besides student's active participation during the portfolio assessment process, teachers role as a facilitator is considered crucial as they are the key to successful use of such a strategy (Neiman, 1999).

The Performance Standard details six levels of performance with descriptors for each level based on clusters of learning standards. These levels serve as a guide to teachers in assessing their pupils' development and growth in the acquisition of the learning standards that are taught. The Performance Levels are arranged in an ascending hierarchical

manner to differentiate the different levels of pupils' achievement as shown below:

Performance Level	Descriptor
1	Very Limited
2	Limited
3	Satisfactory
4	Good
5	Very Good
6	Excellent

SBA is also exercised in all subjects in primary and secondary schools and is aimed at strengthening the quality of the assessment and evaluation of the existing education. Among the goals of SBA is to get an overview of the performance of a student in learning, assessing the activities carried out during the teaching and learning processes, continuous information about teaching and learning as well as planning and repairing of teaching and learning (Ojo & Gbinigie, 2009; Yin & Adamson, 2015). This study aimed to examine the primary English school teachers' understanding on how to carry out School-Based Assessment based on DSKP. Hence the research objectives for this research are as follow:

1. To investigate whether the ESL primary school teachers understand how to carry out SBA based on the DSKP.
2. To explore ESL primary school teachers' issues regarding SBA and DSKP.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Malaysian education system, the examination system is seen to be very examination-oriented. Malaysian school children are required to sit for three major public examinations throughout their eleven years of education. The students have to take the standardized examination at the end of their primary six namely UPSR (*Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* or Primary School Assessment Examination), evaluation secondary in form three, PMR (*Penilaian Menengah Rendah* or Lower Secondary Assessment), and they have to sit for another test at the end of their fifth year of secondary schooling which is SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or Malaysian Certificate of Education). Students are required to sit for these three major examinations which set by the Malaysian

Examination Syndicate to ensure the objectivity and validity of the examination in this country.

The public examinations in Malaysia have long been the only tool to measure students' achievement. Since independence, teachers have actually been assessing their students formatively through homework, projects and internal tests as they chart their students' progress whereas the Malaysian Examination Syndicate conduct those external tests "summatively" at the end of the year for the whole country. Consequently, there is no doubt that educators place a serious emphasis on examinations. Unfortunately, learners tend to memorize the answers to the examination questions that are "likely" to be tested. According to the former Director of Education, Tan Sri Murad Mohammad Noor, "The attitude of too obsessed to too many standardized examinations in the national education system is the factor to not being able to achieve maximum level of creativity and innovation. There are too many examinations at primary, secondary and university levels cause students to not having time to develop their talents, ability and potentials in an area of interest"

To solve these challenges, a school-based assessment has been suggested and planned to avoid students to depend totally on those high-stake examinations alone which created a lot of stress and anxiety among them. Thus, a new evaluation method has been introduced to gauge the students' competence by taking into account both academic and extra-curricular achievements so that a more rounded approach to assessment can be carried out.

This newly introduced SBA is part of the reforms outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The SBA is to believe that it is a holistic form of assessment which assesses cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects in line with National Philosophy of Education and School Standard Curriculum. The use of portfolios in self-assessment, for example, has been found to be greatly beneficial in SBA in Malaysian schools because it allowed both teachers and students to collaborate in the teaching, learning, and assessments process (Swaran Singh, 2013: 104). For Year One in primary schools, SBA started to be implemented in 2011. It is stated by Norazilawati,

Noorzeliiana, Hamzah, & Saniah (2015) that while teachers carry out the assessment, they will ensure that the assessment is carried out according to the mastery of their learners' learning progress. Also, the teachers are going to create the instruments based on what the learners are going to be assessed. However, to what extent do the teachers understand how to carry out the assessment based on the performance levels? Perhaps this question can only answer by them, the educators who carry out the assessments.

METHODS

Research design

The research was a descriptive study design carried out within a sample in which 40 ESL primary school teachers were randomly selected from Malaysian primary schools. Questionnaires with open-ended questions were used to collect the qualitative data. Three school teachers were interviewed using semi-structured questions to get an in-depth understanding of the research concerns.

Participants

Of the 40 English primary school teachers, 24 were female participants and 6 were male participants. Their range of age was between 24 to 50 years old. The participants were randomly selected among the Malaysian primary and secondary school teachers from *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK) and *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan* (SJK) in Selangor, Putrajaya and Negeri Sembilan. The English teachers were selected as the participants since they needed to refer to the same performance levels and DSKP while carrying out the School-Based Assessment.

Instrumentation

The pilot test was carried out with 10 teachers who were randomly chosen for the test. It aimed to test the validity and the reliability of the research methods in which the questionnaire was distributed to be answered by the teachers. From the pilot test, the questions had been simplified so that the participants could understand them better. The questionnaire about the participants' understanding of DSKP and implementation of DSKP in carrying out the School-Based Assessment was distributed to the teachers to be completed. The

questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended questions as in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Questions on the Questionnaire on Teachers' Ability to Assess School-Based Assessment Using DSKP

1. In your understanding, what is DSKP?
2. Do you understand each of the performance level when assessing SBA?
3. In your opinion, does DSKP play an important role in assessing your students?
4. Do you understand how to plan lessons according to DSKP?
5. How much do you use authentic materials while conducting lessons?
6. How much do you implement higher order thinking skills in the lessons?
7. What is your difficulty, if any to carry out SBA?
8. Have you been to workshop regarding SBA?
9. Suggest ways to improve teachers' ability in assessing SBA accurately using DSKP.
10. From 1-10, which number shows your level of DSKP understanding?

Design and Procedure

In this study, a questionnaire consisted ten open-ended questions was used to generate data for this investigation. It was semi-structured in nature so that it allowed the respondents to answer in the best way possible. The questionnaires were distributed for a convenience sample of forty ESL teachers who were teaching in public primary schools. The questionnaire which consisted of questions about the participants' understanding of DSKP and the implementation of DSKP in carrying out the School-Based Assessment was distributed to the teachers to be completed. Three teachers were randomly selected to participate in an interview session which was done separately. This was done to get an in depth understanding of the research concerns.

Data analysis methods

The qualitative data which consisted of the responses to the open-ended questions were analysed through coding data in order to make sense of the qualitative data. Coding was used to organize the large amounts of text and to discover patterns that would be difficult to detect by reading alone (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The answers for the open-ended questions were analysed to identify the teachers' understanding of DSKP and

implementation of DSKP in carrying out the School-Based Assessment.

Findings

The respondents for the study were English language teachers who have been teaching between 1 to 20 years, and all are currently teaching in urban area schools. 83 % of those who participated in this study consider themselves to have moderate understanding of using the DSKP to carry out SBA, while the other 16% consider their understanding of the matter as below average. However, there were a few of the respondents who had the wrong idea of DSKP in relation to SBA.

Level of teachers' knowledge on DSKP

Table 2 shows the finding for teachers' level of knowledge on DSKP. It shown that the more knowledgeable teachers are, they know how to conduct SBA and how to assess students' performance. They also implement SBA in every lesson. Teachers need knowledge on SBA to conduct teaching and learning activities in order to improve students' achievements continuously.

Table 2: Teachers' level of knowledge on DSKP

Questions	Answering Yes (%)	Answering No (%)
Do you understand what is DSKP?	65	35
Do you understand each of the performance level when assessing SBA?	70	30
In your opinion, does DSKP play an important role in assessing your students?	70	30

Level of teachers' knowledge in applying DSKP in the classroom

Table 3 shows the finding for teachers' level of knowledge in applying DSKP. Table 2 shows that the more knowledgeable teachers will use variety of teaching method and materials to draw students' attention and use the SBA in their classroom. The knowledge in assessment is also different between teachers who understand the DSKP and teachers who do not. These questions assess teachers' knowledge about the use of DSKP to facilitate learning activity in the classroom.

Table 3: Teachers' level of knowledge in applying DSKP

Questions	Answering Yes (%)	Answering No (%)
Do you understand how to plan lessons according to DSKP?	95	5
Have you been to workshop regarding SBA?	57.5	42.5

Teachers' suggestion on ways to improve teachers' ability in assessing SBA accurately using DSKP

Base from the finding in Table 4, it is clearly shown that most of the teachers do agree to have workshop or training to the teachers in school in order to improve teachers' ability in assessing SBA. It is also a good alternative in providing In-house training at the school to the teachers in order to let the educators have better understanding in assessing SBA accurately using DSKP.

Table 4: shows the finding for teachers' suggestions

Suggestion	Number of teacher(s)
Professional Learning Community - PLC	5
Searching for information from other sources (Google/Research/Books)	7
Workshop/Training to teachers in school	10
Provide materials/Modules	4
Training in Teachers' Training Institute	4
In-house training at school	10

Level of teachers' DSKP understanding.

Table 4 shows the finding for teachers' level of understanding on DSKP from 1-10. This phenomena clearly proven that teachers have moderate knowledge and understanding of assessing SBA accurately using DSKP.

Table 4: Teachers' level of understanding on DSKP from 1-10

Level of understanding	Number of teacher(s)
1	0
2	3
3	10
4	1
5	14
6	3

7	15
8	2
9	0
10	1

Discussion

The findings in this study indicated that teachers are aware that SBA is a form of assessment that is currently being implemented in the Malaysian education system. Their knowledge of SBA also extends to how it is supposed to be conducted, the Bands system, and how it is to be reported. This study also found that teachers are aware of the importance of SBA and agree that it is beneficial not only for the learners, but also for the teachers (Noraini, Adlina & Nurhidayah, 2013). However, the study also revealed that a number of teachers do not fully understand the use and importance of DSKP in implementing effective SBA. The DSKP does not only help teachers to plan their lessons, but it is also a crucial document to refer to when assessing pupils.

The study also revealed that teachers face difficulties in conducting SBA due to factors such as lack of training or workshop, concerns of fairness, difficulties in differentiating the performance levels, and constructing assessments. Nevertheless, the study also revealed that teachers do not know how to construct assessment according to the learning standards in the DSKP, resulting in 'cut and paste' and taking exercises form reference books directly. In terms of putting bands, some teachers may not be so sure in determining bands stipulated in DSKP to students.

In the *Level of Teachers' Knowledge on DSKP*, the findings in this study shown majority of teachers are knowledgeable in terms of level of understanding and assessing using SBA. Knowledge in assessment is important for all teachers so that they can give a proper guidance in order to prepare our students to the transformation in assessment in Malaysia's education system. SBA is a good way to measure students' achievements but the success of this SBA is totally depending on teacher's knowledge and understanding. This is because teachers play an important role to face all the challenge to implement this SBA. Teachers' evaluation can be one of the most reliable sources to evaluate the students. The findings also suggested that teachers

are ready to use SBA in teaching. This can be seen on the data where more than half of the teachers understand and knowledgeable on DSKP and SBA. This kind of readiness provides opportunities for the teacher to build lessons to suit students' need. For example, teacher can focus on helping students who have a low level of achievement to achieve a higher band. This is because teachers will know students' weaknesses and teachers can focus on that in upgrading students language skills. However, if teachers are not ready to assess students using SBA, the implementation of it will face a drawback. Although teachers are knowledgeable, they need to master the technique of assessments too. Teachers' assess might be neither fair nor valid. Therefore, knowledgeable teachers need to learn the techniques to come out with good assessments.

In applying DSKP in the classroom, teacher must be ready and use variety of approaches in delivering their lessons. Students are our customers and it is our job to catch their attention to focus on our subject matter. Other than that, it is important for the teachers to select the authentic materials and implement higher order thinking in their lesson. Teachers also need to provide a conducive learning environment and ready to be creative in the ESL classroom. Teachers might be knowledgeable but the most important part is to apply the knowledge in real situation. Most of the knowledgeable teachers are those who have attend seminars, courses and briefings on SBA. During the courses, they will provide documents, guidelines and explanations to the teachers. This is important for the teacher to covers the wide are of SBA during the course. Teachers must grab as much knowledge as they can during the course so that they can implement it when they are back to school. Learning and assessments need to be parallel to each other to produce excellent students.

Recommendations

For a better implementation of SBA in the education system in Malaysia, teachers require to undergo an on-going professional development in the form of training so that their competencies with regards to SBA knowledge and implementation could be elevated and promoted same as the SBA is an on-going assessment (Talib, Kamsah, Abu Naim &

Abdul Latif, 2014). All respondents agreed that in general teachers do not have proper knowledge about this system and how it should be efficiently implemented. The lack of the know-how knowledge is evidently mentioned by all respondents. The officials should play an active role to explain about this system and offer hands-on classes for all teachers. They should not just come 'to monitor and evaluate teachers.'" This direct approach in delivering the information will definitely reduce information dilution which normally happens when information is delivered based on 'top-down' approach.

The respondents also stressed on the importance of teachers to not being carried away with the new assessment system at the expense of the noble task of teaching and educating students. According to them, the strong emphasis given on SBA by the Ministry of Education and the Education Department has reduced the importance of teaching and learning as the priority of the education system. Compounding the issue is the fact that teachers are too engrossed with trying to cope with the new assessment procedure that they unavoidably put aside their main core business that is teaching and educating our new generation in this country.

This research hopes that the issues raised and the suggestions offered will not fall on deaf ears but instead help to improve the management of the SBA and enhance teachers' readiness and knowledge in this matter.

Conclusion

The new assessment system is an on-going assessment was formulated based on a noble intention which is to provide a more holistic assessment of individual learning abilities, to reduce 'exam oriented' syndrome and improve teachers' teaching strategies. In order to help teachers implement effective school based assessment, the assessment element has been incorporated into DSKP together with the content and learning standards. Teachers should always refer to the Performance Standard as their guideline to help them ascertain the level of their pupils' acquisition of the various learning standards. The levels have been designed to help teachers gauge the level of their pupils' understanding and acquisition of the

skills taught. With this knowledge, teachers may change their approach or methodology to help their pupils master the intended learning standard from time to time.

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