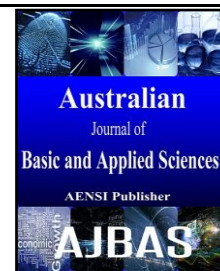




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### Teachers' Readiness and Issues in the Implementation of School-Based Assessment

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#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Malaysian Ministry of Education introduced School-Based Assessment (SBA) to enhance the development of human capital, as well as monitor and assess students in a more conducive teaching and learning environment. **Objective:** This study intends to explore the level of teachers' readiness towards the implementation of School-Based Assessment (SBA). The study was conducted in 10 primary schools in a selected district which is situated in Kedah, Malaysia. A total of 20 teachers were purposively selected from these 10 schools. Two teachers were selected from each school. The criteria for selection included those who were teaching in Grade 4, and had three years' experience in teaching under the SBA system. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data on teachers' views on the implementation of SBA. **Results:** Most teachers had a positive view on SBA and were willing to implement it. Nevertheless, there were several issues raised regarding the implementation of SBA. The issues included internet access, excessive paperwork, constructing items for tests, scales of evaluation which were open to several interpretations, and the need for more information, clarity and guidance to implement SBA effectively. **Conclusions:** The implication here is that teachers feel that they are in agreement that SBA should be implemented, but the necessary preparatory steps need to be given close attention so that its implementation would be more effective.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The objective of the School-Based Assessment (SBA) is to help transform the national education system so that the goal of the Integrated Primary School Curriculum (in children) and Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (ICSS), the National Education Philosophy (FPK), Education Development Master Plan (PIPP) and Malaysian Education Development Plan (MECC) 2013-2025 can be realized. In the context of the Malaysian Education System, the implementation of School-Based Assessment (SBA) is to enhance the development of human capital, monitor and assess students in a more conducive teaching and learning environment. This system intends to reduce the emphasis on public examinations and shift the focus to continuous assessment, improve students' learning, introduce a more holistic form of assessment and make improvements to the exam at the school level and at the federal level (Examination Board, 2011).

Thus, the SBA is an initiative towards human development with a focus on mastering knowledge, and developing intellectual capital. Central to the SBA is the emphasis on a progressive attitude, moral

elements, values and ethics (Examination Board, 2011). The Examination Board (2012) recognized the implementation of the SBA at the school level and central level. This new system is a more meaningful and authentic form of assessment in the sense that scores on assessments given by teachers for students' work at school is coordinated. The feedback received as a result of the coordination of assessments by teachers in schools should be taken into consideration to overcome any weaknesses in the assessments. Therefore, the rationale to introduce SBA can be realized in the form of a better and more effective form of assessment. Additionally, the SBA should be realized in the form of a holistic and integrated form of assessment that is driven by inbuilt mechanisms for quality assurance. Consequently, these forms of assessment will produce students who are critical, creative, innovative, competitive and progressive as envisaged at the national level (Examination Board, 2012).

The underlying rationale of the SBA is its potential to provide comprehensive assessment on overall student achievement. In addition, the SBA implemented is particularly relevant for subjects that emphasize skills and requires continuous

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training, such as mathematics (Mathematics Performance Standards Documents, Year 4, February 2013). This assessment allows for students to learn from their mistakes because the post analysis on their performance helps to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Based on a statement by the Examination Board (Utusan Malaysia, 2012 Oktober, 22), it can be stated that teachers do not have a complete understanding of the implementation of SBA nor the processes of teaching and learning. This problem could arise as teachers find it difficult to construct instruments related to assessment in its various forms because they are more familiar with examinations that test student achievement.

According to a study by BadrulHisham (1998), teachers are less prepared in the teaching and learning of subjects through the SBA. He also found that most teachers do not receive adequate exposure to the SBA through courses organized on the implementation of the teaching and learning process through the SBA. This study showed that the teachers have not reached the expected level of readiness towards developing a scientific and progressive society because of a lack of knowledge and skills. Many teachers felt they were under pressure because of the need to test the level of student achievement in a holistic manner within a stipulated time. The duty of teachers not only covers teaching and assessment of student performance. Teachers are also required to perform routine tasks from time to time but need to adhere strictly to time schedules (Tribus in Halpern & Diane, 1994).

A study by Abd. Rahim (2000) found that teachers were still bound by the exam-oriented assessment system. Knowledge of strategies and methods of teaching and learning through the SBA is still limited. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge and skills to assess performance compared with assessment based on the examination-oriented system. Teacher sensitivity towards the need to improve their knowledge and skills from time to time in accordance with changes should arise from within as an educator. A study by Pajares (1992) showed that teacher knowledge and skills about SBA affects the implementation of SBA. A lack of knowledge about SBA results in negative outcomes. Teachers fail to monitor student progress in terms of testing, evaluation, and maintaining the appropriate records on student learning.

A study by Norani and Saifulazri (2010) found that some teachers were not prepared to undertake SBA. They also found that the unwillingness of teachers to engage with SBA was because of a lack of training which affected their confidence to conduct it. Stiggins (2005) in his study found that teachers lack a willingness to undertake SBA in assessing classroom learning because they lacked the opportunities to learn the techniques and assessment practices. In this new assessment system in the

classroom, there are opportunities for teachers to learn and practice proper assessment. There are many things that the teachers need to do such as to document evidence of teaching and learning, implement assessment based on the guidelines provided in the curriculum, assess student involvement and keep systematic records. Thus, not all teachers are prepared for the new practices involved in the SBA (Gallagher, 1998). This study explores the level of teacher readiness and related issues in the implementation of the SBA.

#### ***Literature Review:***

##### ***Teacher's readiness towards SBA:***

Teachers need to be ready to manage any agenda that is spelt out in the education system, especially at the school level, so that teaching and learning effectively at the micro level in the classroom can be realized in accordance with the SBA. Studies by Nixon (1974) and Fraser (1982) (in Saharudin, 1996) showed that successful assessment in the teaching and learning process is highly dependent on teacher readiness and ability of teachers to explain the contents of the lessons so that students can master it.

Studies by Thimmappa and Tushita (2003) found that teacher readiness was very important for the SBA and there was also a need for a variety of assessment skills. These assessment skills need to be given priority and dealt with in appropriate ways. Teachers should also give their full commitment to implement this alternative assessment and their support will be helpful in the long run to meet the needs of the teaching process as well.

A study by ShokMee (1991) (in Azlyana, 2013) found that with regard to teaching and learning in the classroom, teachers must be ready to conduct assessments as well as continuous and comprehensive evaluation to determine whether the objectives of teaching and learning has been achieved. John (2002) found that the SBA provided the unique possibility for teachers to be involved in the evaluation process till the final grade is determined for the students for the whole learning session.

A study by SitiFatimah (2009) showed that teachers are very willing to implement the SBA system as outlined by the Malaysian Examinations Board. She also found that this assessment opened the possibility for teachers to assess student performance in greater depth when they fulfilled the requirements in the system. This is because the assessment includes all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain and the questions that are tested are within the scope of the teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, a study by Norani and Saifulazri (2010) found that there were teachers who were not ready to conduct the SBA. As a result of a lack of training, some teachers did not have the confidence to conduct the SBA.

Alaba's (2012) study showed that teachers in Nigeria were not willing to conduct the SBA for teaching and learning. He also found that more than 50% of the teachers in Nigeria had a negative perception of the impact of the implementation of SBA in the practice of teaching and learning for students. He suggested that effective monitoring should be carried out within the educational policy and in-service training be provided for all teachers. Badrul Hisham (1998) found that teachers were still not ready as envisaged by the ministry because of a lack of skills to implement the current assessment system at the school level.

The findings in Tribus' (1994) (in Halpern & Diane, 1994) showed that many teachers lacked preparation and were under pressure to mark papers and perform several types of evaluation within a short time period. Besides teaching, teachers had to perform routine tasks from time to time and these had to be completed within a certain period of time. Mariam (2008) (in Suriana, 2013) found that teachers in Bangladesh did not have adequate skills and were less ready to conduct the SBA, which in turn had adverse effects on student assessment.

Studies by Kamaruddin and Leong (2011) showed that teachers in Brunei require more time and preparation to implement SBA because it is more challenging. The interviews revealed some important teacher concerns. The teachers felt that courses that fulfilled the needs to meet the SBA requirements were important. There was also a need for other types of support such as computers and internet access. Studies by Neal Green, Joseph Giacquinta and Marilyn Bernstein (1971) (in Rosli, 2008) had shown that there were many challenges that teachers had to face when they had to implement changes in the education system. One challenge was the lack of explanation on the changes to those who implement these changes. For that to happen, the latest information and changes must be disseminated to teachers from time to time. Staffs also lack the ability to perform their new roles. A combination of courses, workshops and seminars on the SBA can help to reduce this problem. Deterioration of teacher motivation in implementing the changes could lead to problems. Any failure to resolve the issues related to SBA will bring about a decline in work performance.

Studies by Abd. Rahim (2000) found that teachers were still bound by an exam-oriented assessment system. Knowledge of strategies and methods of teaching and learning through the SBA was still very limited. In addition, the knowledge and skills to test and evaluate performance standards with the band system under the SBA was somewhat less compared with examination-oriented evaluation. Teachers' sensitivity to enhance their knowledge and skills from time to time in accordance with changes that took place should arise within the individual as an educator. Tan (2010) in his study found that

teachers are less willing to implement the SBA. The implication here is that teacher unwillingness to engage in all the practices associated with the SBA will result in assessment scores that are unfair and invalid. According to him, this situation affects the validity and reliability in assessment.

#### **Methodology:**

##### **Participants in the study:**

The study involved 10 primary day schools in one district in Kedah. 10 schools were involved in the study. The total population of the teachers using the SBA was 181. A total of 20 teachers were selected for the study. Two teachers were selected from each school. The criteria for selection included those who were teaching in Grade 4, and had three years' experience in teaching under the SBA system. The qualitative method was used to collect data on various issues related to the SBA and its implementation. Interviews were conducted to provide a space for teachers to express their opinions. The use of semi structured questions allowed the researchers to explore, investigate and study in-depth the issues that are of concern to teachers or need to be addressed (Bryman, 2008).

##### **Instrument:**

The questions for the interviews were adapted or modified based on FAQs (frequently asked questions) from the Examination Board, Ministry of Education Malaysia (2011). There were ten core questions. All the 20 teachers who were selected were interviewed face-to-face for between 45 minutes to one hour. The interview session was designed to collect information on the two broad themes in this study, that is, teacher knowledge and teacher readiness to implement SBA.

##### **Findings:**

##### **General teacher readiness to implement the SBA:**

Below are some excerpts of responses of teachers regarding their readiness to implement the SBA. Four excerpts of interviews are given below:

*"Well, when we engage with SBA, we have to be prepared, be ready. We cannot walk in unprepared. But, I don't think I am totally ready yet; just so so. Need to really know what is SBA. I am just average. (T1)*

*"I just go about it, doing it, according to all the guides, documents that have been prepared for us. But still things I do not know. Maybe, this will take some time. I won't say I don't know anything, but there are things that are maybe hard to understand. Need to prepare according to what is required and this is not always easy in the process of teaching and learning." (T5)*

*"Teachers must be prepared for SBA, as we can see and they are implementing it. We cannot stick on to the old system or old ways, but have to move on. But, I am not really sure what to do at times, so I*

would place myself as average. Still don't know what I can refer to or look at models for what to do. But the documents provided help and we can make use. So, can manage, but still learning."(T11)

"We just need to do it. But my own perception of myself is that I am just somewhere in the middle and I think there is a lot to learn. Need more time as we have been so exam based. Now this is something good, but still new and I need some time."(T13)

#### **The level of readiness to implement the SBA:**

Below are some excerpts of typical responses of teachers regarding their level of readiness to implement the SBA:

"I can say that I am ready to implement SBA when involved in teaching and learning. It's like this. I try to start by drawing students' attention to the lesson. The induction set is based on what I intend to achieve and what I can do in the classroom. Once I got their attention, I lead them and develop the lesson. It is the use of things like visual aids and a variety of materials without forgetting the lesson objectives. This will make sure the students are paying attention. I try my best to do it. The next process is the imaginative and development phase in which I use many kinds of visual aids to make sure that my students master the skills that have been specified." (T9)

"It has been stated in the SBA that we need to be ready and carry out lessons, the teaching and learning part, by introducing different types of innovations and new things so that the students are able to master the skills that I wish to impart"(T16)

"Needs a lot of work and preparation. I think it tests the teacher because the teacher needs to be creative. You cannot use the same thing again and again. So, needs more time." (T15)

"I am ready to carry it out, be imaginative and organize activities in the process of teaching and learning in the SBA evaluation system. But it will be tough" (T12)

#### **The level of readiness in terms of information regarding the SBA:**

Below are some excerpts of typical responses of teachers regarding their level of readiness in terms of information regarding the SBA:

".... I need to master the information especially the contents which are found in the documents provided. Well, those who do not master the subject matter, there will be problems when a skill cannot be properly taught to a student. You need to know the contents."(T3)

"... so we have to share our information from time to time so that the implementation of the system is smooth when it is done at the school level. Informal discussions with my friends, I do it quite regularly. Sometimes ask about the contents in DSKP which I do not understand. After my friends have given explanations about the parts that I do not

understand, I am clearer about the contents of the lesson which I need to teach." (T18)

"...teachers need more information regarding the implementation of SBA in schools. I try what I can. Sometimes I just surf the net and this helps me get some extra information or information I need. I can use it for SBA." (T1)

"For me, SBA is a good form of assessment because it is not focused merely on examinations. As I meant just now, it is holistic. Just that the planning and the implementation might not be in alignment. I heard some comments about SBA. From what I hear, teachers do not have enough time to implement it comprehensively. Many of us complain that there are too many things to do such as gather evidence, completing the data online, and among other things to update data on student achievement continuously. Even for me, it is the same. But now, improvements are being made, when the data on student achievement is kept by the teacher, it doesn't have to be entered online." (T9)

#### **The level of readiness for feedback on the SBA:**

Below are some excerpts of typical responses of teachers regarding their level of readiness for feedback on the SBA:

"...normally a lot of the initial feedback is negative but when we change and diversify our activities to improve the teaching and learning, the students become more and more positive to the extent that some students ask for the same activity to be done again or again and again during teaching in class." (T14)

"the feedback that I receive from students is that normally, they do not understand what I explain and so they do not master the skill. So, I try to find a different approach or activity which is able to increase their understanding about what is being taught and delivered to them." (T1)

"... normally the feedback we receive is either positive or negative. If it is positive, it is OK, but if it is negative, we have to improve our teaching so that what needs to be mastered by the student is achieved by the students during the teaching."(T11)

#### **The level of readiness for conducting assessment based on the SBA**

Below are some excerpts of typical responses of teachers regarding their level of readiness for conducting assessment based on the SBA:

"I am ready to evaluate the level of development and mastery of the students after any skill is taught based on the requirements and needs of the documents given." (T1)

"I am ready to perform student evaluation and assign them the appropriate band based on their level of achievement."(T17)

"I think I am ready to carry out assessment based on the bands which are found in the SBA documents. I will do this once the students have been

*taught some skill or the contents of some lesson that they have been taught. I will just refer to the assessment documents.”(T14)*

***The level of readiness for teaching and learning under the SBA system:***

Below are some excerpts of typical responses of teachers regarding their level of readiness for teaching and learning under the SBA system:

*“I think under any system there is preparation. Doesn't matter old or new. When I am involved in classroom teaching and learning, I need to prepare for the lesson and as stated in the documents regarding preparation. I need to prepare earlier for the lesson plans, weekly, daily; all the strategies, techniques, methods, approaches, and all those things that help the students to learn in class and do what they are able... to do. Then they improve with all the classroom activities that I do.”(T9)*

*“I think this whole thing is ongoing. You keep on finding ways to improve teaching and learning. I need to be ready and make sure that they learn whatever they are supposed to learn in each lesson. I need to keep finding ways, better ways, each time I teach the students in class. I keep finding different approaches, better approaches to teach.”(T15)*

*“When I teach in class, I need to be prepared for the teaching and learning that goes on in class. This is very important as the strategy, approaches that we use will have the effect on whether the students are able to understand and follow the lessons. So, I think of the strategy and techniques before I teach the class. We need to be prepared for this. If we are ready with the right strategy, students will learn better, will improve, master the lesson and able to understand what has been taught.”(T20)*

The above responses represent the typical views of teachers. Teachers expressed their views regarding important aspects of the SBA. The section below will discuss the findings.

***Discussion And Implication:***

Generally, the findings suggest that teachers have a positive view towards SBA in the selected district in which this study was conducted in Kedah. Although the views are generally positive, and teachers talk about how they will implement the SBA, there are some areas that need to be addressed as some teachers have expressed their reservations. These findings concur with studies done by Abd. Rahim (2000) and Tan (2010) which found that there were still issues that needed to be addressed in the implementation of the SBA. Generally, there were no major differences in opinions regarding the implementation of the SBA. Overall, most teachers felt that their level of readiness was at the average level towards the implementation of the SBA. However, they faced challenges such as the need to prepare and put in effort. Readiness to implement the SBA would be important as shown in studies by

Nixon (1974) and Fraser (1982) (in Saharudin, 1996) that successful assessment depends greatly on teacher readiness.

Generally, the level of readiness in terms of information for the SBA was quite similar for the teachers. Teachers were willing to master the contents of the subject matter and share information about the SBA. However, there were teachers who expressed the need for more information as this would be helpful in conducting the SBA. On the whole, most teachers were ready to conduct the SBA in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Readiness is important as studies have shown the adverse impact on classroom assessment because of a lack of readiness to implement the SBA (Kamaruddin & Leong, 2011; Abd. Rahim, 2000; Tan, 2010). Under the SBA system, teachers are directly involved in the teaching and assessment of students. This is a major paradigm shift in which teachers need time to be familiar with the new practices and assessment systems. These findings are similar to findings in previous studies (Badrul Hisham, 1998; Abd. Rahim, 2000; Norani and Saifulazri, 2010) which have shown that challenges need to be addressed in the implementation of SBA. Teachers need to be ready and prepared to teach in line with the practices which conform to the SBA.

Generally, teachers were ready to receive feedback on the implementation of SBA so that they could improve their quality of teaching and learning. On the whole, the level of readiness for conducting assessment based on the SBA among the teachers showed that teachers were ready to focus on skill acquisition and assessment of students' progress in their learning activities. Finally, the findings on the level of teacher readiness for teaching and learning under the SBA showed that teachers were ready to diversify their approaches, strategies, and techniques to teach. They were also ready to monitor their students' progress in their studies and help students achieve the best possible bands through SBA. Some of these positive aspects of readiness can be seen in a previous study by Norani and Saifulazri (2010).

***Implications:***

The findings generally suggest that teachers see the positive side of SBA and are ready to engage with it. The teachers interviewed generally feel that they are trying to prepare for the SBA and make the necessary preparations before the lessons. Nevertheless, in spite of the positive aspects of the SBA, there are still issues that need to be addressed under the SBA. For example, teachers mention that there are documents that serve as guides but they need more resources so that they are able to implement the SBA effectively. Teachers also have expressed the need for more information. This could be related to the previous system in which it was very examination-oriented and evaluation was done in a more centralized manner. Under the current

system, the Ministry of Education focuses on assessment for learning whereby teachers are involved in the teaching and assessment of students. This is a departure from previous practices as new practices in assessment systems among teachers as well as the school management have been introduced. These outcomes have shown that challenges need to be addressed in the implementation of the SBA among primary school teachers. Teachers need to be ready to teach in line with the SBA so that they can conduct the new forms of assessment for learning.

### Conclusion:

The study above suggests that teachers need to acquire pedagogical knowledge, the content in the subject and be aware of the students learning needs. Classrooms are diverse and students have different learning styles and abilities. Teachers need to prepare lessons and use the appropriate approaches so that students are able to benefit from classroom lessons. Additionally, teachers must take into account the previous lesson that was taught. Each lesson cannot be treated like a separate unit as lessons are connected and current lessons build upon previous lessons. So, teachers will be better prepared if they are aware of students' prior knowledge. Consequently, teaching and assessments are continuous processes in which teachers play an active role to help achieve positive learning outcomes. The teachers play a vital role in assessments and the final grades that the students achieve.

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