

Narratives of English Language Teachers on the Implementation of School-Based Assessment (SBA) in Sarawak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has followed other countries such as Australia, Finland, and the United Kingdom in adopting school-based assessment (SBA). SBA was introduced to the Malaysian education system in 2011 with the rationale of reducing examination-oriented learning among students; effectively evaluate students' learning; and provide a systematic way of assessing, recording and reporting students' learning. Numerous studies have highlighted various complaints, issues, and challenges in the implementation of SBA among English language teachers in West Malaysia but only a few studies have been conducted in East Malaysia. This paper thus seeks to shed light on and provide a comparative qualitative study of, perspectives, implementation, issues, and problems faced by English language

teachers in East Malaysia. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve English teachers (N = 12) teaching in the lower secondary forms of public national schools in the Kuching and Samarahan area of Sarawak. Interview questions were designed based on Stake's Countenance Model of Evaluation (1967) and encompassed three key criteria of evaluation, which were antecedents prior to implementation, transactions during, and outcomes of the program. All interviews were coded and clustered according to

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themes. The findings suggest that a lack of training and clear policy direction hampered the initial implementation of SBA. However, most teachers reported that since its implementation, the policy had gained greater clarity with greater support now provided by the Ministry of Education through the provision of further training opportunities.

Keywords: Malaysia, policy implementation, school-based assessment, semi-structured interviews, teacher narratives

INTRODUCTION

Education systems around the world are going through reforms, with school-based assessments (SBA) being a key part of those reforms (Bennet, 2011). Fullan (2011) noted that there was a real focus now at raising student performance and closing the gap between higher and lower-performing groups. The change has also shifted the way students are assessed from high stakes standardized testing to SBA systems.

Recognizing that nationwide high stakes testing through various exams such as the Primary School Evaluation Test or *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah* (UPSR), Lower Secondary School Assessment or *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) and Malaysian Certificate of Education Test or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) potentially created passive teachers and students who concentrated on rote learning, the Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced the SBA system in 2011 as part of the changes to

the education system as highlighted in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2012). Also, part of the changes to the education system, the PMR, was abolished in 2013 and replaced with the Form Three Assessment or *Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga* otherwise known as PT3 beginning 2014 (“Do you know”, 2016).

The SBA comprises five components which are a centralized assessment, school assessment, physical assessment and co-curricular activities; and psychometric assessment (Yusof, 2013). In the English language classroom, SBA is carried out by teachers throughout the teaching and learning process. It is conducted both formally as a summative exam as well as a series of formative assessments. Teachers conduct a number of formative assessments biannually, e.g. a portfolio to demonstrate their learning or a class presentation. These tasks would be graded by the teacher and students will receive a school assessment subject score at the end of their Form 3 studies. A summative exam will also be conducted at the end of their Form 3 and a centralized assessment score will be awarded based on the students’ performance in that exam. The reports of the centralized assessment and school assessment are combined at the end of the school year (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2012). The SBA is planned, administered, scored and reported based on the procedures as prescribed by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2011).

Research Problem and Aims

This paper thus seeks to report the perceptions of English teachers towards SBA in secondary schools through semi-structured in-depth interviews with English teachers in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia. As it has now been over 7 years since its implementation, it would be apt to better understand the implementation of the program through the lens of the English teachers. Specifically, this paper seeks to document the perspective of English teachers as to whether the shift to SBA in the English classroom has allowed students to communicate confidently, proficiently, competently and provided a fair and accurate assessment of students' language proficiency as intended in the Secondary School Standards-Based Curriculum or *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah* (KSSM).

To summarize, the objectives of the study are to identify 1) the overall views of English language teachers on the implementation of SBA in their school; 2) the practices of SBA by English teachers in the classroom; 3) the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing SBA.

Research Significance

While there has been a number of research on the evaluation of the SBA from various aspects (Lim & Chew, 2019; Majid, 2011; Malakolunthu & Sim, 2010; Salmiah, 2013; Sidek & Salleh, 2010), one commonality is that the research focus has been on the implementation of the SBA system in West Malaysia but few have looked

into its implementation in East Malaysia. To highlight this disparity, an extensive literature review search showed that over the last decade, only one unpublished master's thesis (Nik Fauzi, 2016) has been written on the implementation of SBA in the English language classroom in Sarawak. Furthermore, teachers have questioned whether they can cope with the implementation, 'PT3 system a nightmare to teachers, students' ("PT3 a nightmare", 2014). Other concerns such as motivation of students to learn after implementation, effective implementation of the system, adequate training of teachers in regards to having SBA been frequently mentioned in newspaper articles ("PBS utamakan guru, pelajar" [PBS prioritized teacher, student], 2014). Additionally, the perception of teachers is important as teachers are not only the primary implementers of policy but are also the primary feedback providers on how to improve policy (Yavuz Konokman et al., 2017).

Table 1 shows the total number of schools and students in Sarawak. Given a large number of government schools ($n = 184$), almost 10% of the total number of secondary schools in Malaysia (MoE, 2018), students and teachers in the state of Sarawak, yet research has been lacking on the implementation of SBA, this paper thus becomes an insight and a starting point to further research in the state. Findings between this research study and those in peninsular Malaysia could also differ as Sarawak had only agreed to change the medium of instruction of subjects from

Table 1

Sarawak school statistics (2010)

Schools	Number of students
Government & Government-aided Primary schools	1,265
Government and Government-aided Secondary schools	184
Students in Government & Government-aided Primary schools	289,315
Students in Government & Government-aided Secondary schools	No data recorded
Teachers in Government and Government-aided Primary schools	24,960
Teachers in Government and Government-aided Secondary schools	15,536

English to Bahasa Malaysia for government schools in 1973, 10 years after Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia (Ting, 2003).

Literature Review

The assessment of students' achievement has always been an important aspect of education. In recent years, there has been increased attention and focus on the various methods a teacher can employ to assess students. In a world that demands new knowledge, skills and behaviours that are not clearly defined, traditional methods of assessments may not cater to the needs of a proper evaluation (Segers et al., 2003). Questions of whether traditional summative based assessments accurately assess students' learning are often heard (William, 2011). Van Lier (2004) went even further to suggest standardized tests as dehumanizing and oppressive pseudo-assessments as he too argued that such tests could dominate the curriculum, taking control over the

content and pacing of instruction away from the teacher and encouraging teaching to become more test-like. Thus, Birenbaum (2003) argued that the shift in need meant that a new assessment culture that embeds assessment in the teaching and learning process became necessary. Sadler (1989) argued that various assessments in the classroom should be employed as a strategy to assist students to identify gaps between their present achievements and desired goals.

SBA is seen as a medium to acquire generic competencies, encourage learning and maintain standards (Joughin & Macdonald, 2003). With SBA, teachers can assess various areas of students' performance which could not be assessed in a typical public examination (Davison, 2007). The introduction of SBA may also reduce the pressure faced by students in high stakes testing (Esther, 2012). With SBA, assessments can be in the form of both summative and formative assessments which can, therefore, encompass all

three types of assessments which are an assessment of learning, assessment as learning and assessment for learning. Earl (2003) defined the assessment of learning as assessments that were used to certify learning for reporting to students, parents, schools and the government. It takes place usually at the end of the unit, program or year of study. Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning (Black et al., 2004). Lastly, assessment as learning is a term used to describe the role of students in monitoring and directing their own learning (Hayward, 2015). Thus, students monitor their learning and use feedback from this monitoring to make changes to what they understand.

In the UK, Black and William (1998a) argued that school teachers needed to have a deep understanding of formative assessment. Black and William's (1998b, 1999) further research and more recently Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2005) showed that the use of formative assessment in the classroom could lead to substantial gains in students' achievement. In fact, OECD (2005) argued that achievement gained through formative assessment in the classroom had been characterized as among the largest ever reported for educational interventions. It was also found that formative assessments were very effective in developing students' "learning to learn" skills.

However, many countries and educational systems have suffered from

implementation issues. It was only after large investments into teacher education by Finland and Sweden, that these countries have begun to see the successful implementation of SBA in the English class (Reyneke, 2016) whereas Hong Kong is still confronted by serious implementation challenges (Qian, 2014).

As English allows mobility in multilingual and multicultural contexts for learners, it is important that the focus of teaching and assessing high level linguistic and critical thinking skills is emphasized when teaching English. Brindley (1998) identified three common types of issues and problems that were faced in school-based assessments namely political issues, to do with the purposes and intended use of the assessment; technical issues, to do with validity and reliability; and practical issues, to do with the means by which the assessment was put into practice.

One of the major challenges highlighted by Reyneke (2016) was to link assessments to the curriculum and integrate assessment into the instructional process to promote high level cognitive and affective learner developments within the English classroom. She argued that SBA was supposed to drive learning, provide knowledge and proficiency to students and assess students. If there is a strict alignment of the curriculum with the preparation for end-of-year examinations or summative tests, then the SBA implementation may not be as effective as it was intended.

In June 2010, then Education Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

stated that the current learning system in Malaysia was seen as too exam-oriented and failed to provide holistic education to its students (“PMR may be abolished”, 2010a). SBA was thus introduced to the public after roundtable discussions with various stakeholders (“PMR ready”, 2010b). This shift is important to promote assessment as integral to the teaching and learning process and establish a classroom discourse on the assessment that facilitates teaching and learning and at the same time promotes self-assessment. Some have also attributed the testing culture to a lack of English proficiency among the students. Koo (2008) blamed the high stakes testing culture in the education system for the lack of proficiency among the Malaysian students. She argued that the discourse of ‘privileging examination’ was dominant across Malaysian education system whereby it had been reported that teachers tended to concentrate on the teaching of grammar at the expense of communicative aspects of language learning instead. Certain language skills are also prioritized over others depending on whether they are tested in examinations. Furthermore, English is seen as a subject, in which teachers often focus on the mechanics of the language without making connections to how it is used in real-life communication events. As an example, reading and writing skills together with grammar are often emphasized as these are items that are tested in school examinations as well as nationwide high stakes testing (Abdul Rahman, 2005).

To ensure that SBA is conducted fairly

and effectively, the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) implemented a framework that includes four aspects, i.e. moderation, mentoring, monitoring and tracking (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2012). Without proper quality assurance processes, teachers may feel non-committed and lackadaisical in conducting the proper evaluation and assessment methods as required by the MoE (Tan, 2010). The objectives of moderation within the SBA context is to standardize understanding towards assignment expectations and scoring criteria, standardize school assessment scores given by teachers based on the performance standard statements, descriptors and evidence as provided in the performance standard document (PSD), standardize centralized assessment scores given by teachers based on the scoring criteria prescribed for the assignment, standardize tools, materials and situations according to prescribed scores in order to produce standard scores, ensure validity and reliability of scores in SBA implementation by school teachers, ensure that awarded scores match the students’ ability and performance and ensure that scores awarded are fair to all students (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2012).

Yusof (2013) stated that through a series of monitoring activities at various levels, questionnaires, dialogues and small studies conducted by the MES, they found various issues with the implementation of the SBA system in schools. Firstly, they found that school administrators and teachers were still having difficulty accepting the changes

made in the policy. They also found that teachers lacked adequate skills especially in developing various assessment instruments other than the tests which they were used to. Thirdly, class sizes were also not ideal in which teachers who taught classes in excess of 50 students were having a hard time organizing and managing learner-centred activities and assessments that catered to individual differences.

In terms of training and workshops given to teachers in preparation for the implementation of SBA, Yusof (2013) highlighted that the training might not be effective enough as there might be a dilution of information during the information transfer between trainer and trainee. Information is further diluted when it is transferred from one section to another. Cascading training models are not hands-on, so teachers cannot practice during the training due to a short period of time, and the training is not conducted in-situ, within a real school setting (Chan & Gurnam, 2011). However, Green (2014) explained that while many issues with assessment literacy may exist, teachers could improve on their current practice if given the right training and motivation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As this paper examines the perceptions of English teachers on the implementation of SBA, a descriptive study was conducted. A semi-structured in-depth individual interview was conducted by the researcher on 12 (N = 12) secondary school English teachers who were currently teaching in

lower secondary forms (Form 1 to Form 3) in two sub-districts, Kuching city, and Samarahan in Sarawak.

To ensure the questions were guided and properly framed, Stake's (1967) Countenance Model for evaluation was used as the framework to evaluate the implementation practices and perceptions of SBA. Stake's countenance model is unique as it provides description and judgment based on data collected. It is able to report how different stakeholders perceive the implementation and responds to the need for further information on the SBA system in Malaysia. Additionally, the formulation of questions in the interview schedule was conducted via corroborating information through the triangulation of multiple data sources. Here, an extensive literature review was conducted to shed light on the issues surrounding SBA implementation and the underlying perspectives. This helped the researcher to form questions that are relevant to the Malaysian context of SBA implementation and also avoids questions that could be biased or not meaningful to the study. Draft interview schedules were sent to the teachers and academicians and they were asked to comment on the credibility, relevance, and accuracy of the questions. The interview questions were pilot tested on three (N = 3) teachers who were not part of the main study. The questions were further refined based on their opinions and feedback.

Through the use of this model, the study was able to evaluate the learning outcomes, the impact of SBA implementation on

various stakeholders, immediate and also expected long term outcomes of SBA. Three sets of data were evaluated by looking at the different lenses of antecedents, transactions, and outcomes. Antecedents evaluate the conditions existing before implementation which can include any condition related to outcome (Stake, 1967). Transactions are successive engagements or dynamic encounters in the process of instruction (Popham, 1993). Transactions evaluate activities that occur during the implementation forms a two or more ways relationship with various parties, e.g. transactions that occur between teachers and students, students and students, etc. Outcomes provide a detailed observation after a period of time and judge the outcomes against external standards, e.g. comparing findings from other studies. Thus this model is useful as it provides extensive evidence to

evaluate the success of the implementation (Hamm, 1985) of SBA by documenting all plausible links between all components of the system which, therefore, also presents an in-depth view on its implementation. Figure 1 below displays the main sections and subsections of the interview schedule.

Interviews took an hour on average and were audio-recorded. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed both inductively and deductively to identify the themes that emerged based on the research questions.

The researchers sent out invitation letters to schools, requesting for English teachers, who had a minimum of four years of experience teaching English, in Forms 1 to 3, to participate. The invitation was sent to 31 public-national type schools in the sub-divisions of Kuching city and Samarahan in the district of Sarawak. To ensure maximum variation of interviewees

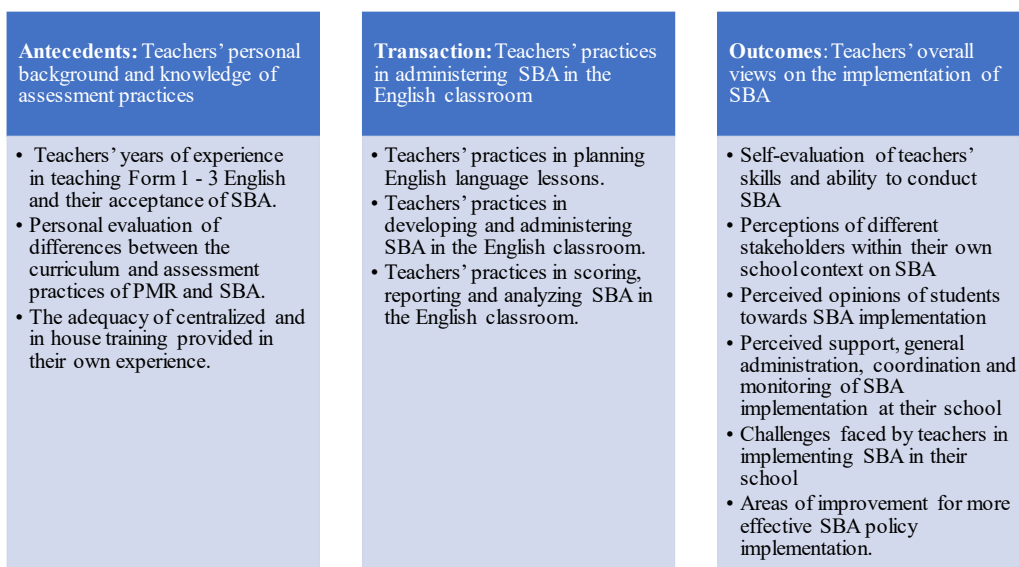


Figure 1. Sections and subsections of the interview schedule

and to identify if there are any differences in knowledge, practices, issues, and challenges faced by these teachers in the different types of schools, the sample of the study was stratified to include: types of schools, gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience and administrative position held (if any). A total of 13 teachers from 12 different public government secondary schools responded to the request for an interview, thus the researchers decided to select one teacher from every school. Based on the selection criteria mentioned above, 12 (N = 12) teachers were chosen. Table 2 displays the demographic data of the sample.

Demographic data indicated that out of the 12 respondents, 33% of them were male and 67% were females. This was reflective of the population where 65% of teachers in Sarawak were females (Jabatan

Pendidikan Negeri Sarawak, 2019). As for ethnic groups, 25% of the interviewees were Malay, 41.6% were Chinese, and the remaining 33.4% were local Sarawakian natives. 33% of the teachers currently hold or have held administrative positions (head of English subject, head of district marking, head of school level moderation, and head of the form) while the other interviewees were teachers who did not or have not held administrative positions. All interviewees possessed a Bachelor's degree and had a minimum of 6 years of teaching experience and were teaching English in lower secondary forms.

The teachers were selected from various range of factors with the intention of comparing the similarities or differences between how teachers from different demographics view the implementation

Table 2

Breakdown of teacher interviewee demographics

Teacher	Gender	Age range	Ethnicity	District	Teaching experience (years)
T1	M	26-30	Chinese	Kuching	6
T2	F	36-40	Malay	Samarahan	13
T3	F	36-40	Iban	Kuching	14
T4	M	41-45	Chinese	Samarahan	20
T5	F	26-30	Malay	Kuching	7
T6	F	31-35	Chinese	Samarahan	12
T7	F	56-60	Bidayuh	Kuching	34
T8	F	31-35	Chinese	Kuching	11
T9	F	41-45	Bidayuh	Kuching	19
T10	F	51-55	Iban	Kuching	32
T11	M	26-30	Chinese	Samarahan	6
T12	F	36-40	Malay	Kuching	16

of the SBA system through their own experiences and context. Each individual would represent a unique case study. As Robson (2002) aptly remarked, it was more often than not more appropriate to study more than a single case. Yin (1994) explained that multiple case studies provided us with analytic generalization which could not be made through statistical generalization from questionnaire data. As SBA is still fairly new, as the full implementation of SBA for lower secondary only began in 2014, teachers would be the most knowledgeable, most concerned, and most affected with the system compared to other stakeholders. Salmiah (2013) further argued that teachers were seen as the most important stakeholder in ensuring the success of the SBA implementation.

RESULTS

Antecedents: Training

The findings suggest that the interviewees had varying experience in receiving training and workshops pertaining to the implementation of SBA. 58% of the interviewees did not attend any centralized training but were only given in-house training. Thus the teachers were not trained first hand by experienced trainers but by a teacher from their school who had attended the centralized training. To illustrate, one teacher, T1 complained about the cascading training model, questioning its effectiveness: “often times when the teachers are sent for training, they have to replicate the workshop back in school, the material that they deliver

may have already been watered-down.” T11 added that the quality of the in-house training conducted in school was questionable as the training time was very short: “The teachers who go for the centralized training do it over a few days or even a week. At the district level, teachers have to digest everything in one or two days.” This suggests that certain information or content may have been left out due to time constraints.

To further illustrate the problem of training, T4 noted that limited amounts of training were provided: “I don’t think there are many pieces of training over the last few years. I have only attended one and I had to ask colleagues from other schools for more information”. T7 whom at the time of initial implementation of SBA was teaching in higher forms highlighted that teachers who were teaching higher forms in the past but were reassigned to teach lower forms, later on, were very disadvantaged as they did not get the opportunity to attend such training: “I taught different forms, form 4 and 5 when SBA was first implemented. When I went back to teach Form 3 there was no longer any training provided for SBA so I had to look for my own resources. I looked for friends and colleagues who had done the training before.”

Furthermore, another teacher, T9 reported that although she had attended the training, she did not grasp the pedagogies of implementing SBA and formative assessments: “I attended a workshop on designing formative assessments where we were only asked to create activities and do presentations, micro-teaching, and people

started to comment on their own practice. I am still not clear about how formative assessment really works.”

Antecedents: Fairness

All (100%) the interview respondents were in agreement that the SBA and the new PT3 were a fairer way to assess the students. T11 explained, “SBA does empower the teachers. We can test our students in school as we know our students better and they won’t feel so nervous or scared that the assessment will be conducted in a very formal setting.” T10 elaborated, “I think SBA is more genuine. We test all four skills of the students in SBA and this is better than PMR with just one test. Proficiency should be gauged on all four skills to be fair. I think that SBA is fair.” Additionally, T4 added, “looking at the learning process, I think the change from PMR to SBA and PT3 was necessary. The assessment in terms of language skills is more. We can get more accurate feedback from the test compared to the PMR.”

Furthermore, T10 added “for PMR, whenever we finish a topic taught, we will find the reference book to find exercises for students to complete. The questions were similar to the exams, it was teaching to the test. With SBA, I think about what activities can engage students and measure their ability. Teachers have to set up the questions appropriate for each skill tested and for what content, and although it is a lot of work I really love it.” However, other teachers have also reported difficulties in implementing effective formative assessments in the

classroom. T3 explains that while it is ideal to conduct formative assessments in the classroom, he cannot do it very often as they have limited time to complete the syllabus before the final PT3 exam. He explains, “my class is a mixed ability class so some students will find the assessment activities boring, while the poorer ones will struggle. We don’t have a teacher assistant and we have discipline issues to handle. Having the activities will just disrupt learning.”

Transactions: Class Sizes and Feedback

An integral part of SBA is the use of formative assessments in the classroom with feedback from teachers used for the continuous improvement of students. Eighty-three (83)% of teachers interviewed admitted that it had not always been feasible to provide meaningful and detailed feedback to students. Firstly, most teachers have noted a large class size being a hindrance. T1 illustrated: “I wish I could. I don’t give as much feedback to my students as I should... Class size is another hindrance, we get 35 to 40 in a class. Students need to also be taught what to do with the feedback they get.” T12 pointed out that the number of classes that a teacher needed to handle could also be an issue, “I am teaching 3 classes and it’s close to 100 students. If you have 3 English classes a day, you might mark about 100 pieces of exercise and give feedback. And that is not the only subject you teach because you may teach other subjects also.” Other teachers such as T3 claimed that feedback was also hard to give due to time constraints. T3 explained: “I have to rush through the

syllabus and activities. It is very hard to find the time, have a discussion and feedback one-on-one with them. It would be good if we could do that with the students on a personal basis.”

To ease giving feedback to students, 58% of interviewees preferred to give selective feedback or general feedback. Less individual feedback was provided but more collective feedback was given to the class instead. T4 stated she typically gave feedback in groups, “Taking into consideration only 35 minutes of class, we have to give feedback in groups, especially for group activities. If they want individual feedback, they have to see me personally.” T7, on the other hand, provided selective feedback. She stated: “I provide individual feedback only to very good students. For mediocre ones, sometimes they get left out. Kind of pity but I can’t really give individual attention to all. However, I try to give as much feedback to the class as a whole.” Most teachers have called for a reduction in class sizes to less than 30 students per class as they find it hard to give effective feedback with large class sizes.

Transactions: Marking and Moderation

Overall responses indicated that moderation of in-class informal formative assessments was not conducted. However, when it came to the official school-based assessments, moderation was considered to be important and was conducted. T2 argued that with moderation, teachers would be more careful with their marking as they know that a fellow teacher will be looking at the scores

and any large discrepancies would be highlighted. T11, a senior teacher who was also a division head moderator agreed that moderation is effective in ensuring that teachers mark fairly. She added, “When I moderated schools, I’m a neutral party and marked fairly. Compared with the score their teacher awarded, there wasn’t much of a difference. Any difference was minuscule. This is good as it confirms that we are marking fairly.”

However, T6 argued that moderation did not always yield an accurate representation. She illustrated: “moderation is basically taking a few scripts and getting another teacher to mark it. The discrepancies in marks could be in the scripts that were not chosen.” Ultimately, while the moderation process could be flawed, all teachers see the benefits. T10 highlighted, “Without moderation, in some schools, the students might get 85 or 80 for a particular assessment but could get a lower result in another school for the same assessment. I think it’s not nice in terms of integrity.” T4 added: “moderation is only done for centralized assessments. For school assessments, the teacher’s marked assessments are supposed to be moderated by the head of the subject, but this was not done in my school. They don’t have time to come and monitor the class either.”

Outcomes: Stakeholder Support and Beliefs

Overall, all teachers had highlighted that their school management had been supportive of implementing SBA if albeit to comply with

government policy. T11 pointed out that her principal had encouraged better formative assessment practices by promoting group-like seating in the classroom. She quipped: “My principal doesn’t want classes to be in lecture-style settings” while T3 pointed out that “the school is being supportive because they have to but at least they are giving us the support that we need”. T7 added that the principal had to support the policy implementation because if not, “this policy would not work”.

Similarly, the interviewees felt there were mixed opinions by parents on SBA implementation. Some parents understand and support SBA while others do not. Most parents trust the teachers in conducting SBA and providing fair marking to the students. T2 highlighted: “In my school, very little parents actually care about new policies like SBA. Many are not very highly educated and lack internet access and some may be too busy to care about what their children are doing or what their assessments are like.” T4 thought “parents do not understand the importance of the SBA and because in SBA, the score and weight are not part of the external examination (PT3)” therefore less emphasis is placed on SBA.

T8 mentioned that “different parents have differing opinions when it came to conducting SBA. Some parents thought that it was not good while some thought otherwise because the students were so close to the teacher so this could be seen as an advantage (to score better marks).” Furthermore, she added that within Asian contexts, parents typically did not interfere

or question teachers as they felt that it would be disrespectful. T8 states: “in Asian countries, questioning the teacher will affect the relationship between the parents and the teacher so they rarely do it.” In some circumstances, as T1 suggested, “parents may not be well educated and may not understand the policy at all. They cannot determine whether SBA is a better policy nor do they care much about it.”

DISCUSSIONS

In general, all English teachers in this study were aware of the benefits and challenges in the implementation of SBA. A lack of clear or coherent instruction from the MOE hampered the initial implementation of the policy. This has also impacted not only the English subject but also other subjects such as mathematics (Lim & Chew, 2019). In this study, teachers strongly believed that the underlying principle of SBA was beneficial in improving teaching and learning quality. They, however, did also note that physical constraints, scepticism from stakeholders, lack of training and follow-up support hampered the implementation of SBA. One such constraint was with giving feedback in which teachers felt burdened and unable to provide good individual feedback to students due to the number of students. Other issues included the need to complete the syllabus, heavy teaching load, and administrative duties. The MOE should consider reducing the workload of the teachers or reduce class sizes to ensure better SBA implementation.

Teachers also reported huge consternation over the training provided.

A large majority of teachers did not attend centralized training and were only provided short in-house training by teachers who did. Very often, centralized training would last for 3 days to a week whereas the in-house training conducted at school level ranged from half a day to 2 days. This they felt was not adequate and that more training opportunities would be welcomed. The lack of adequate training also led to different interpretations and practices of SBA. As Stiggins (2004) had highlighted, a major reason why SBA had failed in schools was due to the lack of formal, high-quality training given to teachers and administrators. He argued that for decades, governments sought to separate assessment from instruction, to show objectivity and third party evidence of learning. However, governments and training institutions have largely ignored assessment training for teachers and teacher licensing laws in the United States of America as an example, have failed to require competence in the assessment as a condition of licensure to teach. Proper implementation requires that teachers be adequately trained to plan, conduct, evaluate and provide proper feedback. Respondents noted that an increase in workshops, via centralized training or online training modules could help teachers in better understanding the policy and methods in implementing effective assessment practices. This will require the MOE, district and state education departments to monitor and provide continuous training that is necessary in order to make SBA a

successful implementation. Hudson et al. (2019) argued that the implementation of good policy involved investing in skills and competencies that would be sustainable in meeting future implementation challenges. Training, peer learning, information, and guidance are all key capacity building criteria for effective policy implementation. Additionally, curriculum content for teacher trainees should be reviewed to emphasize more on classroom assessment practices.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, it can be seen that parents have mixed views in regard to the SBA policy. As such, more could be done to better educate parents on the benefits and importance of the policy. Cromey and Hanson (2000) argued that there needed to be a shared vision and understanding among all school stakeholders for effective policy implementation. As parents may not be aware of the benefits of the policy, the school management must be proactive in disseminating information through parent-teacher association meetings. Parents must be convinced that the SBA is a better and fairer way of gauging students' performance. They need to move away from the perception that standardized tests are the only measure to test students' abilities. Interview findings also indicate that while proper moderation process was put in place for the marking of the PT3 exam paper, monitoring of the SBA school assessments which should usually be conducted by the head of the English language panel of each school was rarely done. As mentioned by T2 above, teachers

should provide fair and reliable marking and poor marking could have led to large discrepancies between marks attained by students in the SBA and in the PT3 exam.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have shared the implementation of the School-Based Assessment (SBA) policy implementation in secondary schools in Kuching, Sarawak. Based on the findings, similar responses were recorded between the studies in West Malaysia (Majid, 2011; Malakolunthu & Sim, 2010; Salmiah, 2013; Sidek & Salleh, 2010) and the findings found in this study. The cascading training model has proven to be less effective than desired thus teacher's ability to conduct proper SBA implementation has been hampered. Follow up training programs have also been lacking. Adequate knowledge must be acquired by teachers and guiding teachers on best practices will enhance the teaching and learning experience. Lack of physical resources such as projectors and large student to teacher ratios have also caused teachers consternation. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Research, Sarawak is aware since 2017 that the classrooms need to be better digitally equipped to enhance learning (Dayak Daily, 2018) and they have since admitted that 1,020 out of the total 1,457 schools in the state were identified as dilapidated ("Tripartite committee to manage", 2019). However, repairs and upgrades to schools have yet to begin even due to financing issues between the local and federal governments (New

Sarawak Tribune, 2019). The researchers hope that the funding is expedited to improve the current classroom conditions that hamper better implementation of SBA. Proper implementation of SBA would mean teachers are well informed and well trained in SBA and are able to take advantage of assessment results in making crucial instructional decisions. It is hoped that the issues highlighted in this study will be scrutinized and improvements to the SBA policy will be implemented in the future.

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