

## **Teacher Readiness in Assessing Students for Malay Language Writing: An Exploratory Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the knowledge, understanding, and mastery of writing skills assessment among Malay language secondary school teachers in Malaysia. A total of 182 respondents from 91 secondary schools from seven different zones in Malaysia were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Survey design with a five-point Likert scale questionnaire instrument used in the study consisted of 117 items related to writing skills assessment. Statistical analysis is explained using standard deviation and mean score. The results of the study indicated that the determinants of the mastery level of writing skills assessment recorded the highest mean ( $M=3.92$ ,  $SD=0.494$ ). Then, it is followed by the second construct, which involves the implementation aspects of the evaluation was also rated highly ( $M=3.91$ ,  $SD=0.482$ ). The results also showed a significant and positive relationship between all respondents' knowledge and their understanding of writing assessment implementation and their mastery of writing skills assessment. The

findings showed that the role of teachers as school-based appraisers is established and consistent with the guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Future research focusing on the implementation of writing skill assessment is suggested to ensure that the evaluation done is systematic and reliable.

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## INTRODUCTION

Assessment of writing skills in the Malay language is a systematic process of collecting, interpreting, and responding to students' knowledge and experiences, which aims to understand the extent of students' knowledge, understanding, and abilities based on their learning. In Malaysia, the Secondary School Standards-based Curriculum (KSSM) for writing assessment standards of the Malay language was introduced in 2017, and it needs serious attention in investigating teachers' understanding of its implementation. In other words, ensuring that teachers have adequate knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum is crucial, especially since the new assessment system in KSSM gives teachers the autonomy to plan, administer, certify, and report student writing assessments. In general, student learning must be in line with what teachers are trying to assess. Teachers' understanding is directly proportional to the effectiveness of student learning.

However, society has limited information about how well teachers understand and master the assessment of writing skills. The issue mentioned above arose when the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document was introduced to Malay language teachers in April 2016. It has been presented through courses and briefings conducted by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) to prepare for School-Based Assessment (SBA), such as the Secondary School Standards-based Curriculum (KSSM) guidelines in 2017.

In a short period of eight months, it is insufficient for the Malay language teachers to understand, research, appreciate, grasp its content, and fully master the writing skills used to assess the students. The short duration of the course affects teachers' knowledge related to its implementation, particularly on how the actual assessment is applied (Norazilawati et al., 2015).

Although several prior studies have been conducted on the assessment of writing abilities, such as Hashim (2009), Izam et al. (2012), Marohaini et.al (1997) and Marzni (2014) these studies have not been conducted in the context of current situations. Prior to 2017, writing skills were assessed centrally and fully by the Malaysian Examinations Board in public examinations held throughout the country. Assessment is limited to specific groups. However, beginning in 2017, the centralized public examination was phased out, and School-Based Assessment (SBA) was used at all lower secondary school levels in Malaysia. No matter how prepared or unprepared they are, all teachers are directly involved in assessment at school (Ministry of Education, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). SBA empowers teachers and school administration with authority to plan, administer, issue certificates, and report on students' level of mastery of writing skills. Parents and the community now want to know how effectively the school, particularly the teachers, have acquired assessment knowledge after three years of implementation.

Adequate readiness and understanding of the evaluation method should be applied to teachers' prior preparation of the instrument, determining student's mastery level and interpreting their assessment scores (Lim et al., 2014). Curriculum change is a complex and challenging process that requires careful planning and sufficient time. Therefore, in the context of the recent developments in the assessment of the Malay language in Malaysian schools, this study aims to answer two main research questions. Firstly, this study attempts to determine the level of teacher's knowledge in regards to the performance standard for writing skills and implementation of writing skills assessment and the level of mastery in secondary school students' writing skills assessment. Secondly, to identify the relationship of all the three factors, knowledge, understanding of the appraisal, and the determining level of mastery in a writing skills assessment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Changes in the educational curriculum will always occur to meet the dynamic demands of life. Malaysia, similar to other countries, also encountered internal and external issues and challenges due to the effects of globalization, liberalization, and the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Thus, in Malaysia, the curriculum changed to a more holistic system focusing on School-Based Assessment (SBA). It enables the teachers throughout the year to monitor the learning and delivery of knowledge. Excellent examples of such assessment can

also be referred to in several countries, such as Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Finland, New Zealand, and Switzerland. They have taken earlier action in transforming their education system into 'school-based learning' to produce skilled students to compete globally. This type of learning experience involves teachers, parents, the community, the private sector, society, and friends (Ministry of Education, 2017d).

The implementation of School-Based Assessment (SBA) has been improved with the practice of Classroom Assessment (CA) for each subject, which is an alternative to the existing assessment and evaluation system. Through CA, teachers can track the effectiveness of the lesson and take action by replanning and modifying the lesson for the following teaching session. Teachers can also see the development of student learning as a whole because assessment occurs during daily activities in school and happens continuously (Heitink et al., 2016). Therefore, teachers will take subsequent action to improve the quality of pedagogy of the Malay language subject, especially in implementing the writing assessment. One compelling question is whether Malay language teachers are ready and have sufficient knowledge to make it successful. To what extent do teachers understand the meaning of SBA and CA, and how to implement them. Are Malay language teachers given adequate disclosure about how to evaluate writing skills? Do language teachers have the ability to assess student assignments. What are the matters, aspects, or skills to be assessed?

In the context of the challenges of implementing formative assessments, teachers were found to have low competencies and knowledge due to the limited duration of SBA courses conducted, which do not allow them to develop a clear understanding of how the assessment should be administered. It could be attributed to the lack of focus in terms of the SBA course content as the organizers only showed the teachers how to write Lesson Plans (LP) instead of guiding them on assessing students (Naim & Talib, 2014). What do the teachers need to master to make the writing assessment up to expectations? Knowledge related to the subject matter, understanding of assessment procedures, and teacher's mastery in determining level are closely related. A poor understanding of the assessment standards prevents teachers from performing accurate and appropriate assessments on the students' work. As a result, this situation is likely to raise uncertainty and create mistrust among parents and various parties towards the reporting of teacher assessment. Moreover, the quality of the evaluation may be questioned too. It is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Arsaythamby et al. (2015), who found that teachers face the challenge of doing self-assessment in the classroom, giving students an unfair and inaccurate score. However, writing skills are more structured and easier to assess because their scripts are readable, reviewed for verification, and can even be used as official records or documents

for various purposes. The educational transformation of the examination centred on the assessment of the classroom is in line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013), which reviews national exams and requires the percentage of questions to assess at least 50% of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in secondary schools by 2016.

In this regard, teachers need to equip themselves and always take a step forward by understanding the implementation of a system that mainly measures students' abilities. Teachers need to be knowledgeable, think critically, solve students' learning problems, have skills to access and analyze the information, and have effective oral and writing skills. Teachers should use versatile skills to teach new ideas, persuade others, record information, create imaginary worlds, express feelings, entertain others, heal psychological wounds, chronicle experiences, and explore the meaning of events and situations (Graham, 2019). For example, Singapore is implementing critical changes in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, theoretical-practice aspects of relationships, physical infrastructure to address concerns regarding skills that their teachers need to have (Lee, 2012),

“ Addressing the concern that teachers themselves need to have the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to teach those skills, the first of two pedagogical shifts is to increase emphasis on self-directed, inquiry-based, real-world learning ”.

The practice of assessment among incompetent teachers will result in the teacher failing to recognize the student's true potential. Teachers are incapable of performing writing evaluations due to the lack of knowledge, understanding, expertise, and skills to assess students. As a result, teachers fail to monitor students' learning progress due to their lack of knowledge. This will have a negative impact on the mastery of students' communication skills in the future. Hence, the implementation of the assessment should be understood so that the assessment's accountability will not fail and can be fully implemented by the teacher (Naim & Talib, 2014).

In the context of writing assessment, writing assessment is an important language skill to improve language proficiency among secondary school students. All parties, especially the Malay language teacher, should master the techniques of teaching writing assessments effectively and strengthen the students' writing proficiency. Malaysia Education Development Plan (PPPM), in their 2013-2025 Blueprint highlights 11 Shifts and the Second Shift, focuses on ensuring that students need to master the skills in Malay language and English, and they are also encouraged to learn an additional language. The emphasis proves that the communication aspect of language among students is essential in the education system. As a result, teachers are not ready to conduct writing assessments. They have yet to fully master the assessment standards in the new document (KSSM),

the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP), which is developed by the Curriculum Development Division, Minister of Education (MOE). The renewal of this document is in line with the new KSSM curriculum, which was introduced in 2017. Quantitative studies conducted by Arsaythamby et al. (2015) and Mei (2010) found that teachers face the challenge of scoring assessments in the classroom to the extent of giving students unfair and invalid scores. Teachers are found to be less prepared. Their knowledge of assessment is still at a low level as they are unclear on how to conduct an evaluation involving an assessment instrument.

In conclusion, Malay language teachers need to consider many factors in conducting SBA. Even though SBA is very good as a holistic instrument to assess students' efficiency and achievement, the issues raised regarding it may affect the implementation of SBA in school subjects in general, and the Malay language subject in particular. According to international study data, education based on the 'one-size-fits-all' model needs to provide different sets of interventions to suit different levels of school and student performance. Studies in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom have proven the advantages of SBA as an alternative in the current education system that measures students' academic achievement based on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Ministry of Education, 2016c).

### **Past Studies on the Assessment of Writing Skills**

An earlier study examined issues regarding the assessment of writing abilities from a variety of language scholars' perspectives. It is believed that this exposure would aid researchers in developing a knowledge of the subject and subsequently serve as a reference for assessing related concerns. In the Malay language education system, the essay is assessed by an inspector or by individual teachers who are tasked with the responsibility of checking students' work (Izam et al., 2012). Students' transcript essays will be reviewed first for the purpose of grading or marking on critical criteria, which will be evaluated using letters or numbers as deemed appropriate. After reading the student's transcript essay, the examiner will decide the student's score or will swiftly grade the student's essay. The purpose of scoring or grading essays that are completed quickly by reading is to obtain an overall result depending on the system defined previously. Assessment concerns in general, and assessment of essay writing in particular, remain a priority in the educational system. Alternative solutions are always sought in order to solve issues successfully.

According to Hashim (2009) and Malik et al. (2006), writing competency requires students to understand linguistic norms and structures in order for them to be utilized appropriately and comprehended accurately within a quantifiable context. To determine a person's level of competency, a rubric must be created that specifies precisely

what is to be measured. For instance, in the lower secondary level in Malaysia, students' writing proficiency is geared toward meeting personal requirements in the areas of career education and daily tasks (Ministry of Education, 2016b). These two scholars were found to disagree when composing skills were assessed in SBA only using an impressionistic or holistic approach.

Hymes (1972 as cited in Pride, 2019) proposed that the writing skills assessment approach is aligned with the communicative idea which asserts that essays are language behaviors that serve as indicators of a person's linguistic fluency and should be evaluated directly using sociolinguistic, discourse, and grammatical proficiency criteria. In general, school-based grading systems lack defined communication criteria and ignore critical features of the language, most notably cohesiveness and coherence. This is confirmed by the findings of a study performed by many language scholars (Huzaina, 2007; Izam et al., 2012; Normah, 2006; Rohaya & Najib, 2008), who concluded that every instructor must grasp the writing talent. This immediately assists instructors in comprehending and developing a more equitable scoring scheme with a high degree of dependability. Not only should robust assessment tools conform to international best practices, but they should also be accurate and efficient for use in school-based assessment.

Marzni (2014) discovered that teachers were assessing students based on the end result rather than the complete writing process learned by students. This has



resulted in teachers being deeply involved in the test content throughout the writing assessment. The consequence is that teachers are more likely to assess students' factual knowledge alone, rather than their mastery of essay writing abilities or specific parts of the writing procedure. As such, when a teacher selects an assessment method, the teacher should first define the learning outcomes to be assessed and then match them to the appropriate assessment method (Izam et al. 2012). A language teacher should possess a range of knowledge, expertise, and skills that enable them to motivate students by raising awareness of the assessment process's benefits, advising on appropriate building materials, and leading the assessment process, thereby guiding students to comprehend the significance of coding results (Chan & Sidhu, 2012). Mutalib and Jamil (2012) corroborate this conclusion by claiming that incompetent teachers' assessment practices result in teachers failing to monitor student progress owing to a lack of expertise and an inability to generate fair results. Inadequate logic, planning, and failure to uncover the student's potential.

### **The Concept of Assessment for Learning in the Classroom**

Formal or formative assessments have been practised for a long time in most countries around the world. The implementation, and the application of Assessment for Learning (AfL), involves continuous learning activities practised almost daily by students, peers, and teachers. It aims

at gaining a holistic view of learning through various activities, such as dialogues, demonstrations, and observations (Graham, 2019). Formative assessment is defined as the integration of assessment processes into classroom learning. Assessment is a progressive process, and it occurs with the combination of four elements: teacher, student, evaluation, and context (Mandinach & Jackson, 2012). This statement is similar to the perspective of Pedder and James (2012), who asserted that the role of teachers and students is an essential aspect of teaching and assessment. They further added that assessment is carried out by collecting students' learning evidence, such as assessment tools and processes.

Based on the formative assessments of writing skills in Malaysia, evidence is collected via various assessment tools such as observation, questionnaire, written test, presentation, project, product, practical excursion, worksheet, writing, quiz, checklist, homework, peer review, daily work, scrapbooks, demonstrations, holistic 'rating' scales, portfolios, discussions, and simulations (Malaysian Examination Board, 2012; Board of Examination, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2017b). Assessment purpose is closely linked to its context, and that context needs to be considered in assessing assessment. The context involves internal authorities such as school administrators and external parties such as education policies. In brief, to ensure effective implementation of AfL in schools, planning, regulation, understanding of the content of focused language skills, an appropriate level of

thinking and coding needs to be developed. Since all of these elements are interrelated, a balanced proportion of all elements must be accentuated during the assessment (Ministry of Education, 2016a).

The definition of writing skills assessment in the context of Malaysian education needs to be proportionate to the guidelines that have been outlined in the KSSM. In other words, the assessment of writing skills being practised in Malaysia should obtain information from students based on what students know, ability, and practice. Through this process, teachers play a role in making professional decisions about student performance, which is the ultimate product of an educational programme. Formative assessments throughout the year must have clear goals, and teachers should design them according to the Student Learning Development Guide (PPPM), which contains official statements, bands, and descriptors for each subject so that learning can be implemented efficiently and effectively.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The researchers conducted an exploratory research to assess writing skills among teachers to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. The findings can provide insights into the problem or help to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. A survey design using a questionnaire was utilized as the primary research instrument. Surveys are a tool that

researchers often use in obtaining research data. The advantage of using the census as a research instrument is the uniformity factor in the direction of the question, and the same query used to be answered by all study participants.

### **Respondents**

The need for a representative statistical sample in empirical research has created the demand for an effective method of determining sample size. To address the existing gap, this study used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size for a given population for easy reference. A total of 182 Malay language teachers with more than five years of teaching experience from 91 secondary schools across Malaysia participated in this study. Fifteen secondary schools in seven zones in Malaysia were selected using purposive sampling. Two teachers represented each secondary school. The seven zones are the southern zone, central zone, western zone, northern zone, Sabah zone, Sarawak zone, and Federal Territory zone.

### **Instrument of the Study**

Table 1 shows the description of research instrument. There are four parts of the questionnaire in this study. Part A covers individual profiles of the respondents.

Meanwhile, the statements, as well as the construction of all the questionnaire items in Parts B, C, and D of this study, were adapted from the units contained in the assessment of DSKP, KPM, 21st



Century Skills assessment: PPPM 2013-2025, Secondary School Syllabus and Lesson Syllabus KBSM (2004), KSSM, and Curriculum Development Center (2017). The questionnaire consisted of 117 items using a five-point Likert scale with 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Table 1

*Description of Research Instrument*

Section	Component/ Construct	No of items	Statistics	Sources of reference
Part B	The Aspect of Knowledge in KSSM Document Writing Skill	20 items	frequency, percentage, standard deviation and mean score based on Pallant (2013)	Ministry of Education (2016b) Ministry of Education (2017a)
Part C	The Aspect of Understanding of Implementation of Writing Skills Assessment	53 items		Ministry of Education (2017b) and Ministry of Education, (2017c)
Part D	The Aspect of Determining Levels of Mastery in Writing Skills Assessment	44 items	Pearson's correlation Product-Moment	Ministry of Education (2017d)

**Instrument Validity**

Validity and reliability are two important factors to consider when developing and testing any instrument (e.g., questionnaire) for a study. In this study, validity refers to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it intends to measure by appointing two subject matter experts to review the instrument development and to assess content validity. Then, a construct validity test and re-test were implemented to determine which measurement method accurately represents

the construct. Reliability refers to the concept of consistency and stability of an instrument constructed (Chin et al., 2019). Consistency refers to the high reliability of the instruments. Accordingly, to test the reliability of the study instrument, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient index is adequate. It is sufficient to test an instrument whereby a Cronbach's Alpha value is approaching a value of 1.00, indicating high reliability as shown in Table 2 (Cronbach, 1990).

Table 2

*Cronbach's Alpha coefficient*

Value	Levels
0.0-0.2	Low (modify items)
0.2-0.8	Moderate (modify some items)
0.8-1.0	High (items are acceptable)

Table 3 shows the overall reliability analysis in Cronbach's Alpha value index of the instrument based on a pilot study conducted by the researchers on 30 Malay language teachers at various schools in

Petaling Jaya. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. It is considered to be a measure of scale reliability.

Table 3

*Reliability of instruments*

Section	Component/ Construct	No of items	Alpha Cronbach
Part B	The Aspect of Knowledge in KSSM Document Writing Skill	20 items	0.928
Part C	The Aspect of Understanding of Implementation of Writing Skills Assessment	53 items	0.810
Part D	The Aspect of Determining Levels of Mastery in Writing Skills Assessment	44 items	0.940

The knowledge aspect of this questionnaire refers to teachers' knowledge of the philosophy of Malay language education, national curriculum definition, general and specific objectives of teaching and learning of writing skills in KSSM, teachers' knowledge of content assessment standards of writing skills, learning standards and performance standards in the DSKP, KSSM 2017. Meanwhile, the

aspect of teachers' understanding of the implementation of assessment skills in writing refers to assessment methods, planning, implementation principles, administration and records, item development, script inspection, focus and theme assessment, and including materials and domain references. Finally, the aspect of determining the level of mastery of writing skills refers to teachers'

understanding of the determination of mastery levels in hierarchical order, six forms of performance standards, observation methods, observation methods, project work methods, or otherwise. Determination of the mastery level also refers to seven content standards for writing skills or teachers' determining student mastery level in professional judgment and determined by the teacher's discretion. This aspect also investigates whether the determination of student writing levels is measured based on all of the skills outlined in KSSM.

**Analysis**

This quantitative study employed a descriptive survey method to describe and summarise all information obtained from the study participants. Pearson correlation was performed to identify the relationship between the two variables' data in this study. Mean and standard deviation were used to measure the level at which the analysed data could meet the study's objective. The use of statistics in research is vital to explain the characteristics of a

study population. According to Birenbaum et al. (2015) and Black (2015), descriptive studies are often aimed at providing a systematic explanation of the facts and characteristics of a population factually and accurately. Descriptive studies are useful when researchers collect data on an issue or phenomenon that cannot be directly observed.

**RESULTS**

The present study sought to discover how effectively the Malay language teachers implement writing assessment in terms of knowledge, understanding, and determination of students' level of mastery. The study is anticipated to provide an overview of the application of writing skills assessment in the classroom. The teacher's skills, knowledge, and actions are required to meet the criteria of the secondary school Malay language curriculum. It must be assessed in fulfilling the needs of the standard Malay language writing skills.

Table 4

*The Level of Teacher's Knowledge for Assessment Implementation in Secondary School Writing Skills based on the Standard Secondary School Level of Writing Skills Performance*

Questions	Construct	Mean	SD	Level
Part B	The Aspect of Knowledge of Writing Skills in KSSM Documents	3.857	0.434	High
Part C	The Aspect of Understanding the Implementation of Writing Skills	3.912	0.482	High
Part D	The Aspect of Determining Levels of Mastery in Writing Skills Assessment	3.923	0.494	High

As shown in Table 4, the results of the study indicated that the determinants of the mastery level of writing skills assessment recorded the highest mean  $M = 3.92$  with  $SD = 0.494$ . Among the five items that showed the highest mean in this construct (Part D) is that the teachers understand and comprehend benchmarks arranged in hierarchically  $M = 4.83 / SD = 0.420$ . Then, it is followed by the teachers' understanding that there are two forms of performance standards which are general performance standards for each language skill and general performance standards across language skills with  $M = 4.80 / SD = 0.415$ . Other items and their mean and standard deviations are: Weak students need to be given guidance, and they need to be given reinforcement  $M = 4.76 / SD = 0.425$ . The teachers are also skilled in determining the overall mastery level of language skills by professional judgement according to the teachers' ability,  $M = 4.73 / SP = 0.486$  through various methods  $M = 4.73 / SD = 0.486$ .

The second construct, which involves the implementation aspects of the evaluation was also rated highly ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 0.482$ ). Among the five items that showed the highest mean in the construct (Part C) was an understanding of the implementation procedure of writing skills assessment in a planned but flexible manner  $M = 4.75 / SD = 0.463$ , according to the suitability and readiness of students  $M = 4.64 / SD = 0.532$ , basic principles inclusive, authentic and place principle (localized)  $M = 4.63 / SD = 0.534$ . The implementation also aims to develop students' potential and respond

to KSSM's desire to produce students who master the skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at  $M = 0.4.63 / SD = 0.534$ .

The findings showed that the aspect of knowledge (Part B) is the third highest rated ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.434$ ). Among the five items that recorded the highest mean is the teacher knows KSSM that student is assessed continuously in PdPc,  $M = 4.83 / SD = 0.420$ , teachers also know all ten common objectives for KSSM with  $M = 4.83 / SD = 0.420$ . Teaching and learning strategies are clearly defined in the DSKP for teacher guidance  $M = 4.83 / SD = 0.420$ . Similarly, the cross-curricular elements (EMK) are clearly shown in the DSKP for teacher guidance,  $M = 4.76 / SD = 0.425$ .

Table 5 shows the results of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis which were performed to identify the relationships between the three aspects above. This method was chosen as suggested by Pallant (2013), who argues that Pearson product-moment can be used to observe the strength and direction of the relationship between the study variables.

Based on Table 5, there is a significant and positive relationship between respondents' content knowledge of writing skills (BB1) and understanding of the implementation of writing skills assessment (BC) among the students [ $r=0.710$ ,  $n=182$ ,  $p<0.000$ ]. As the respondents' knowledge of the implementation in writing skills assessment increases, the respondents' understanding of the implementation in writing skills assessment increases too.

Table 5

*The relationship between the content knowledge of writing skills, understanding the implementation of writing skill assessment, and determining the mastery level in the writing skills assessment*

		BB1	BC	BD	BE
BB1	Pearson		0.710	0.710	0.022
	Correlation		0.000	0.000	0.764
	Sig. (2-tailed)	182	182	182	182
	N				
BC	Pearson	710		0.814	0.076
	Correlation	0.000		0.000	0.311
	Sig. (2-tailed)	182	182	182	182
	N				
BD	Pearson	710	0.814		0.059
	Correlation	0.000	0.000		0.425
	Sig. (2-tailed)	182	182	182	182
	N				

BB1: Content knowledge of writing skills,

BC: Understanding of the implementation of writing skills assessment,

BD: Determining level of mastery in a writing skills assessment.

Significant  $p < 0.05$ .

In addition, the findings also showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between knowledge (BB1) and the determinants of the mastery level in writing (BD) assessment [ $r=0.710$ ,  $n=182$ ,  $p<0.000$ ]. As the respondents' knowledge of the implementation in writing skills assessment increases, the aspect of determining the mastery level of writing skills also increases. Similarly, the element of understanding (BC) and the determinants of the level of proficiency of the assessment of writing skills among outstanding teachers (BD) indicated a significant and positive relationship [ $r=0.814$ ,  $n=182$ ,  $p<0.000$ ]. This means that if teachers' understanding in literacy skills increase, the aspects in the mastery level of teaching literacy skills also increase.

It can be seen that all of the three variables showed a significant and positive relationship based on the Pearson product-moment coefficient correlation values and the significant values set for social science studies. Overall, it can be concluded that there is a meaningful relationship between knowledge, understanding, and determination of mastery in the writing skills assessment. The relationship that exists between variables is a strong positive relationship. However, for teacher self-reflection in evaluating writing skills, there is no significant relationship between the knowledge, understanding, and determination of teachers' mastery level over the evaluation of writing skills.

## DISCUSSION

Writing is a highly complex skill as learning how to write requires time and good instruction and to assess it (Coker et al., 2016; Vahapassi, 1988). Teachers conducting a classroom assessment is an essential factor in determining the success of educational reform (Norazilawati et al., 2015). With educational innovations based on school-based assessment practices, incompetent teachers accessing student's writing are most likely to affect students' learning performance. Different and inconsistent scoring or bias will result in insignificant scoring differences among 45 (Troia & Graham, 2017). The implementation of formative assessment is also considered to be complicated (Vingsle, 2014). Consequently, teachers will make a fair and accurate assessment result (Ministry of Education, 2014).

In light of the transformation, there are 11 shifts mentioned in the PPPM (2013-2025) that need to be implemented to bring about the change that everyone wants. The Government has established that quality is an essential element in achieving all the changes. Hence, quality must be given priority during its implementation. In the present study, the researcher focuses on the second shift, which is to ensure that each student has mastered the skills of the Malay language and is encouraged to learn additional languages. The second revision in chapter 4 of the PPPM (2013-2025) focuses on curriculum and assessment and mastery of language skills for the educational needs of students towards improving school

performance. The students' reading, writing, and speaking skills in the Malay language are vital to produce a competent generation that is capable of speaking the language fluently in the future. PPPM (2013-2025) also states that the Malay language results show the highest passing rates in the public examinations, specifically UPSR, PMR, and SPM. Therefore, to strengthen the Malay language proficiency among students, the ministry has taken reasonable steps by introducing a standardized secondary level Malay language curriculum that covers all Malaysian public schools.

Chapter 4 of the PPPM (2013-2025) focusing on Student Learning, explains the curriculum developed for schools, which are the Written Curriculum, the Teaching Curriculum, and the Assessed Curriculum. The curriculum includes the knowledge gained, the skills developed, and the values instilled in the students. Written Curriculum refers to anything written in the curriculum outlined by KPM, which is the knowledge, skills, and values that make up the content of the curriculum that teachers need to teach. The ministry develops its aims to achieve international standards by using benchmarks from the higher education system. In this regard, using the teacher-referenced KSSM standard document, the DSKP containing Content Standards, Performance Standards, and Learning Standards, is the approach adopted by teachers to make it attainable and student-centred. Meanwhile, the Curriculum Assessment involved the knowledge, skills, and benefits of the students being assessed. These three dimensions are interrelated



with each other in classroom practice. To put it differently, Ishak (2011) stated that assessment is critical in determining how well a student understands the concept of learning and skills taught by a teacher. In the present study, the implementation of writing assessment by the teacher should include all three dimensions mentioned above.

The move towards assessment-based evaluation is part of the effort taken by the KPM to produce well-balanced students in the aspects outlined in the PPPM (2013-2025) and aligned with the country's National Education Philosophy. The basis of curriculum development aligned to the aspects that include the six student aspirations, 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, national harmony, and communication skills. The transformation from exam-oriented evaluation to assessment-based evaluation that is happening in Malaysia is not isolated. Still, it is an effort to stay at par with others as the whole world of education changes towards a better education system in general. KSSM supports every aspect of equipping students with 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning skills as the new curriculum focuses on the importance of acquiring higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among students. In Malaysia, the sudden shift from KBSM to KSSM concerns the Malay language teachers' readiness and ability to master the new assessment system. On top of that, it is believed that it takes a much longer time for teachers to make KSSM successful.

Paramasivam and Ratnavadivel (2018) mentioned that the lack of time for training before implementing the new

curriculum affects the quality and teachers' understanding. Nevertheless, despite the concerns, the present study has revealed that the knowledge, understanding, and determining the level of mastery over the writing skills assessment based on band scoring as outlined in the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP), among the Malay language teachers are at a high level. This indicates that the Malay language teachers in Malaysia are showing positive signs of adapting to the change. In much the same way, Sabbir (2019) investigated the difference in English language assessment upon the introduction of KSSM, found that teachers gave positive feedback about the new assessment system. Apart from that, the present study's findings have also enlightened the ambiguity expressed in a previous study conducted by Jamil et al. (2017). Even though the researchers were uncertain of the success of the Standard-Based Secondary Curriculum (KSSM) as it was just implemented in that particular year, they hoped that the new curriculum would cause neither confusion nor hesitation among the Malay language teachers for its implementation in schools.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies about the pertinent role of teachers as assessors in assessment-based evaluation (Sabbir, 2019; Chin et al., 2019). The relationship among the aspects of teachers' knowledge, understanding, and mastery of the writing skills assessment exists. All the aspects are interconnected, signifying the need for teachers to acquire all three aspects to improve students'

performance. The mandate handed over to teachers at school to assess their own students' performance must be carried out fairly, wisely, and accurately. Thus, teachers need to equip themselves with adequate knowledge about the new assessment system, keep themselves revised and update any changes in the assessment in the future. This suggestion is in line with Rozita et al. (2019), who conducted a similar study of the relationship between knowledge and understanding of the Malay language subject, but among the SISC+BM officers.

It is strongly felt that the Malay language teachers should be guided and exposed consistently to the contemporary teaching method and learning according to the current demands and needs. Mentoring by the School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+) has also been proposed to assist teachers. Efforts towards guiding the teachers are essential, as it is strongly believed that the success of a school depends mainly on the quality of its teachers. Implementing the newly-introduced writing skills assessment is not going to be an easy journey. Professional courses or training should also be provided to teachers from time to time for personal development. Besides that, the monitoring issue was raised by Chin et al. (2019) and Rietdijk et al. (2018) as one of the concerns regarding the implementation of KSSM in general. Similarly, this calls for the need to monitor the implementation of the AfL concept in the Malay language writing skills assessment in Malaysian schools. Through consistent monitoring, courses, and training, the

chances of teachers diverging from their established courses will be alleviated.

It should also be noted that AfL has become a norm in mainstream education around the world. Therefore, to be at par with others in terms of its implementation, acquiring knowledge and understanding of the assessment system is no longer an option for teachers, but mandatory if they do not want to be left behind. To produce students with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills, teachers will first need to equip themselves with 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching skills. AfL is a reformation towards the education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is aimed at measuring student performance holistically and comprehensively, which is equal to the holistic characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. The present method of evaluation is no longer exam-oriented but performance-based. In addition, students' success is measured beyond the grades. Competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and teamwork, communication, and digital literacy are among the learning outcomes that need to be achieved. Teaching needs to be adjusted to match the outcomes. Since the process of learning matters, motivation, self-regulated learning, and progress monitoring are promoted during the teaching and learning process. Assessments are aligned with the teaching and learning outcome so that the measurement done is reliable. All these knowledge and skills must be acquired by teachers to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the assessment done. The impact of any misjudgment on students' performance is huge since the autonomy to

decide whether or not students can proceed to the next level of learning lies entirely on the teacher as the assessor in the school.

## CONCLUSION

As school-based assessors, teachers are accountable for their student's achievement. Therefore, they need to ensure that their role is consistent and robust. Teachers must also persistently increase their knowledge in the field of their expertise. The procedure for implementing the assessment in the classroom must be clear, and teachers must adhere to the correct procedure. It is to ensure that the assessment grades genuinely reflect the talent and potential of the students. The main findings of this study showed that the role of teachers as school-based appraisers is established and consistent with the guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. This provides input to various parties, especially to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), and acts as a call to action for the ministry to strive for a transparent and highly reliable implementation of assessments among teachers in the school.

Strictly speaking, a teacher must be skilled and educated in the art of composition before conducting an evaluation. The researchers emphasize the importance of developing an assessment system that considers the growth and development of the individuals being assessed on how a practical technique of assessment can be developed; and on the persons or agencies that may be engaged in the assessment. Objectivity in assessment must be studied

since the current educational landscape continues to demonstrate something that is diametrically opposed to the goals and purposes of the assessment system in teacher education. This is quite concerning, as these issues, if not addressed, might jeopardize the goal and vision of national education. Last but not least, the findings of this study are anticipated to benefit all relevant parties, especially those in the field of Malay language teaching and learning, focusing not only on classroom assessment practices but also on other forms of assessment such as virtual assessment and benchmarking in an AfL context.

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