

Schools-Based Assessment in Living Skills Subject at Secondary Schools: An Initial Study

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ABSTRACT

the purpose of this study was to explore the readiness, understanding and competence of teachers in the implementation of the School-Based Assessment (SBA) in Malaysia public secondary schools in 2012. Research sample consisted of 55 teachers teaching Living Skills subject from 16 secondary schools in Melaka. A set of questionnaires that contains 50 items was developed and used as an instrument to gather empirical data for this study. Results were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0. The key finding in this study shows that the respondents strongly agreed (M=4.39) that they faced problem in implementing SBA. In terms of preparation to implement SBA, the teachers were slightly agreed (M=3.85) that they were ready to conduct SBA. Interestingly, the respondents rated rather low reging their assessment competence (M=3.23) and understanding the SBA concept (M=2.89).

Keywords: Living Skills, School-Based Assessment, secondary schools, teachers' competency, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

School-Based Assessment (SBA) is a relatively new made of educational assessment system in Malaysia. Summative assessment is a traditional system that was used where the students were assessed at the end of their learning process in order to determine their academic achievement, such as Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR). In the Educational Development Master Plan, one of the aims was to produce quality students by strengthening the assessment system to be more holistic and authentic. For this purpose, the Ministry of Education has reviewed the existing assessment and evaluation system in the effort to make the schools not too exam-oriented. SBA is a more holistic approach and its emphases are on physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual domains as compared to the existing assessment, which is exam-oriented. In order to improve the existing assessment, Standard Reference Assessment was introduced, which used Performance Standard to measure the students' learning and performance. Standard Reference Assessment is used to measure students' understanding based on the established Performance Standard. Nowadays, SBA has replaced the centralized assessment system (external assessment). SBA is a type of assessment for learning, where it is continuously implemented in the teaching and learning process. Butler and McMunn (2006) stated that the purpose of the formative assessment is to provide students with feedback on their performance. While in the classroom, teachers need to know about the achievement of

their students in terms of knowledge and skills that they acquired whereas the students would be able to identify the level of their own learning and their weaknesses. Every time there is a change in the curriculum, teachers' readiness and perceptions toward particular implementation are very important because those input are critical for the assessment system's improvement in the future. It is also imperative for teachers to understand and appreciate all the changes in the curriculum in order to implement those changes in the teaching and learning process. In addition, teachers also have to adapt themselves with these changes and must be able to accept changes that happened in teaching and learning process.

Today, teachers have to play different roles with heavy responsibilities beyond teaching the students. Teachers are burdened with other heavy tasks such as administration and co-curriculum duties. The implementation of SBA in teaching and learning process is causing the increment of the workloads shouldered by teachers in school. Thus, it causes the teachers to implement the assessment as a product instead of a process. Furthermore, the teaching period for living skills is decreased from four sessions to three sessions in a week. Thus, more time for teachers to implement SBA. In this research, four different aspects regarding SBA implementation were studied. The first aspect was involving the preparation for the teachers toward SBA implementation in school. The fully prepared teachers were assumed to be able to plan their work better and more systematic since they were having sufficient knowledge toward a particular thing. The second aspect was to identify the understanding of the teachers toward the concept of SBA. As teachers, they need to understand and having sufficient knowledge related to the curriculum that would be implemented in order to avoid any difficulties in teaching and learning process later. Thus, it was important to determine the level of teachers' competence in implementing SBA and it became the third aspect that has been studied in this research. The last aspect of this research was to identify the problems faced by the Living Skills teachers during the implementation of SBA.

School-Based Assessment

School Based Assessment (SBA) was implemented in 2007 but starting in 2012, the assessment method experienced a change. SBA assesses both process and product formatively and summatively. Traditionally, the focus of the assessment was more on students' academic achievement at the end of their learning. As an effort to improve current assessment of schools, Standard Reference Assessment was introduced which uses Performance Standard to examine student's learning and performance achievement. It is a process to measure what they have learned. Furthermore, SBA is given autonomy for the teachers to implement the formative and summative school based assessment.

According to the Malaysian Examination Board, SBA is a category of assessment that is implemented at school. The concepts of SBA are as follows:

- i. Administrated at the school level by referring to the efforts of collecting assessment information and implemented by the classroom teachers which involved in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- ii. Validated assessment instruments must be used to collect accurate data.
- iii. Reported on the students composite score based on the established grading rules.
- iv. Coordinated and monitored mechanisms must be implemented in order to ensure the assessment quality by improving the reliability and validity of assessment instruments.
- v. Possessed validity and reliability. Validity refers to the extent the assessment scores can sufficiently reflect on the domains that are assessed and the relevancy of the domains that are assessed. On the other hand, reliability refers the extent to which the assessment scores are accurate and consistent. Validity and reliability of the assessment scores are monitored throughout the implementation of SBA.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research were as follows:

1. To identify the preparation of the teachers who taught Integrated Living Skills subject at secondary schools in Alor Gajah district in implementing SBA.
2. To identify the understanding of Integrated Living Skills teachers on the SBA concept at the secondary schools in Alor Gajah district.
3. To determine the level of Integrated Living Skills teachers' competence in implementing SBA at the secondary schools in Alor Gajah district.
4. To assess the problems faced by the Integrated Living Skills teachers in implementing SBA at the secondary schools in Alor Gajah district.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this descriptive research was to examine the teachers' preparation, understanding, competence and problems faced by the teachers in implementing School Based Assessment, which has been implemented in every secondary school since 2012. The sample of this research consisted of 55 teachers who taught Living Skills subject for form one students from 16 different secondary schools in Alor Gajah district in Melaka. A set of questionnaires that consisted of 50 items was constructed and it became the instrument to collect the empirical data for this study. The data were analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A random sample of 55 teachers who taught Living Skills subject for form one students were selected from 16 different secondary schools in Alor Gajah district in Melaka. A set of questionnaires consisted of 50 items was constructed and it became the instrument to collect the data for this research. The key finding in this study shows that the respondents strongly agreed ($M=4.39$) that they faced problem in implementing SBA. In terms of preparation to implement SBA, the teachers were slightly agreed ($M=3.85$) that they were ready to conduct SBA. Interestingly, the respondents rated rather low regarding their assessment competence ($M=3.23$) and understanding the SBA concept ($M=2.89$).

DISCUSSIONS

SBA is a paradigm shift from traditional to constructivist method in order to create a diversity of assessment (Murugaya, 2010). It is a progressive and continuous process. Teachers are constantly assessing the students from various aspects. In SBA, assessment focuses on evaluating students' knowledge, skills and affective domain. In addition, students' creativity and innovation are also assessed throughout the learning process. Therefore, the researchers felt that teachers' readiness is an important element in the implementation of SBA. With proper preparation, these teachers should be able to produce students with knowledge and skills in various aspects. Hence, the planning and implementation of the new assessment is critical for the teachers. From the findings, the teachers were barely agreed that they are well prepared to implement SBA. This shows that the teachers in the Alor Gajah district were not highly prepared with the new assessment system because SBA requires significant changes in their lesson planning, which indirectly affects the way they taught the students. Moreover, the teachers' readiness is pertinent in making a significant impact toward the students' achievement in their learning. This

statement is supported by Putnam and Borko (1996), which stated that *“when teachers try to learn new instructional practices, their existing view of teaching and learning and their knowledge of instructional strategies can have profound influence on the change they actually make”*. Lieberman and Miller (1999) asserted that the teachers’ readiness is important when embarking on innovation especially in teaching and learning.

The results also show that the teachers’ understanding of SBA is relatively low. This indicates that the teachers may have difficulty in understanding the goal and implementation procedure of SBA. The researchers found that the teachers still unclear about the purpose, the implementation and the evaluation process of SBA. Even though the teachers claimed that they already took a course on SBA, the teachers still did not have sufficient understanding to implement SBA, as they were not able to articulate on the objectives, concept and plans of SBA that have been outlined by Ministry of Education. In addition, the teachers also have poor understanding on how to use the evidence they obtained from the teaching and learning process in determining the band for the students. Thus, the teachers are still having problem and difficulties in grasping the proper concept of SBA since there are few senior teachers that have sufficient experience that can be referred to by the other inexperienced teachers in this matter. Alias (2001) stated that although teachers have attended courses on assessment, it is still not enough for the teachers to understand the steps and components in the SBA. Teachers have never been exposed to the new assessment would find it difficult to implement the system. Finally, teachers who lack of understanding about SBA may not have sufficient knowledge in developing the assessment tasks (Yong and Lim, 2008). This deficiency may pose serious threat to the SBA. Hence, teachers need to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge or skills that make SBA as an important part for school-based curriculum development process.

In terms of teachers’ competency on SBA, this study found that the teachers have relatively low mastery on SBA. This shows that although the majority of teachers have attended the course, but they still lacked of skills to implement SBA in their classroom. Their skills can be divided into two parts, which are the skills to evaluate the students’ results and the skills of teachers in conducting SBA according to the procedure stipulated by the Malaysian Examination Board. The results show that teachers are having the skill to evaluate the results of the students but the teachers may have problem in conducting SBA holistically. Majority of the respondents faced challenges to prepare the SBA instruments according to the criteria that have been set in the curriculum standard. Thus, Salbiah (1999) stated that the Ministry of Education should create more courses on classroom assessment for the new teachers or the teachers that already served for a long time. Through these courses, the teachers would be able to develop their skills to implement SBA in their teaching process, which may lead to the enhancement of assessment quality in the classroom. At the same time, Mohamad Sani (1992) also suggests that a professional development program should be held consistently in terms of format, aims of various kinds of classroom or school-based evaluation especially that involves classroom assessment. As teachers, they should be proficient in conducting assessment, which require them to be certified in assessment including knowing the basic principles of educational assessment, and the standard in the matter of assessment. Furthermore, teachers must be fully equipped with a variety of solid knowledge and skills in assessment before they could evaluate the students (Yuszaida, 2009).

The finding of this study also indicates that the teachers were facing with significant challenges in implementing SBA at their school. In this respect, the researchers found that the main problem faced by teachers was time constraints - limited time to evaluate the students’ work of individually. This finding is supported by Sharifah Shafie, Shuhaida Abdul Kadir and Soaib Asimiran (2014), which claimed that the workloads of teachers nowadays are quite heavy. Their work is not only to teach the students, but they have to do other things such as helping the school’s administrators, interacting with the community, taking attendance of the students, checking the books, grading the examination papers, collecting fees and participating in association activities and co-curricular activities. In addition, the finding also shows that the problems faced by teachers include that the instruments given to the students were not returned to the teachers since some of the students were often absent, which eventually caused some of the assessments cannot be carried out smoothly. The teacher also felt burdened due to the SBA implementation since there

were diversified elements need to be assessed. At the same time, the teachers also held the responsibility to complete the syllabus, which required substantial time since some of the students needed quite a long time to understand a particular topic. Thus, the teachers claimed that they were having difficulties to divide the time to teach the students and to do the assessment. Moreover, if they were focusing to teach the students, they did not have enough time to record the students' performance. In addition, if they were focusing to assess the students by using SBA, they may not have enough time to prepare the teaching materials and to complete the syllabus. Thus, this situation leads the majority of teachers to spend their spare time and holiday to manage SBA, as the teachers feel the increment of workloads in their daily work. Nevertheless, teachers are the key drivers in the implementation of SBA in the classroom. Thus, teachers should wisely plan their assessment strategies in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study was designed to determine the level of readiness, understanding and competence of the teachers in implementing SBA at public secondary schools for Integrated Living Skills subject. The effectiveness of the assessment depends on the level of teachers' understanding. Teachers who have solid understanding and skills in assessment would be able to plan and set objectives for the assessment that are appropriate to the level of the students. Therefore, in order to realize the government's intention to implement SBA successfully, all teachers need to enhance their knowledge and skills in SBA.

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