

**ESL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES ON FORMATIVE
ASSESSMENTS IN CLASSROOM**

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Mahani, who made sure I went to school, my father, Husain, who helped me get through college and my beloved husband, Khayrul Anuar, who was always there to support me.

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of English teachers on formative assessment in secondary schools. It also aims to determine their current understanding on formative assessment, their practices of formative language assessment and to discover the challenges they might perceived when implementing formative language assessment especially in classroom situation and how they overcome the challenges. A descriptive-correlation research design was employed to allow both quantitative and qualitative description of the relevant features of data collected. The study involved the use of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was employed to English teachers from selected schools in Kuantan district. Data collected was analyzed using the SPSS software and the data gathered from interview responses were compared to probe the related understandings and experiences of English teachers. Majority of ESL teachers understand the main concepts of formative assessment although some of the teachers have misconceptions on formative assessment. The findings also indicated the challenges that ESL teachers perceived in implementing formative assessment. The challenge of entering the online data was identified to be the major reason that made the report of assessment seems burdensome to the teachers.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat persepsi guru Bahasa Inggeris terhadap pentaksiran formatif di sekolah menengah. Ia juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti kefahaman semasa guru tentang pentaksiran formatif, cara-cara penggunaan penkaksiran formatif dan untuk mencari halangan-halangan yang mungkin dihadapi semasa mengendalikan pentaksiran formatif terutamanya di dalam situasi kelas dan bagaimana mereka mengatasinya. Satu kesinambungan-deskriptif telah dijalankan untuk membolehkan deskripsi kualitatif dan kuantitatif dijalankan pada data terkumpul. Kajian ini menggunakan borang kaji selidik dan semi-struktur temubual. Sample terpilih digunakan digunakan kepada guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris di dalam daerah Kuantan. Data terkumpul di analisa menggunakan SPSS 20.0 dan data terkumpul daripada respons temubual dibandingkan untuk mencari kefahaman yang berkaitan dan pengalaman guru Bahasa Inggeris. Majoriti guru ESL memahami konsep-konsep utama pentaksiran formatif walaupun terdapat kesalahfahaman konsep mengenai mengenai pentaksiran formatif. Hasil kajian turut menunjukkan cabaran-cabaran yang mungkin dihadapi oleh guru ESL. Cabaran memasukkan data online dikenalpasti sebagai sebab utama yang menjadikan laporan pentaksiran menjadi bebanan kepada guru-guru.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study focuses on addressing the current understandings of English teachers about the implementation of formative assessment in the English language classroom. The purpose of this chapter is to provide background on the implementation of formative assessment as part of integral part in Malaysian School-Based Assessment.

1.1 Background of the Study

School-Based Assessment (SBA) for secondary school was first introduced to the Form One students in 2012 to assess students' learning. It involves two types of assessments which are; 1) Formative assessment and 2) Summative assessment. Formative and summative assessments play a critical role in measuring students' learning. Assessment for formative purposes is intended to assist learning while instruction and learning are taking place so as to close the gap between a learner's current status and intended learning goals. By contrast, assessment for summative purposes helps determine whether a student has achieved a certain level of competency after a particular phase of education, for example, a unit of study, or public examinations (Black & William, 1998).

There has been a great quantity of research around the topic of assessment. However, most of the research have more expansive look at summative assessment than focusing on formative assessments. Recently, there has been a shift in educational research from focusing solely on summative assessment to a broader look at assessments including formative assessments. This newer line of research examines not only the implementation of formative assessment in the classroom but also the effectiveness of formative assessments at guiding teachers in their next instructional moves. Implementing changes in the assessment system from the traditional public assessment to school-based assessment would certainly generate various opinions and perceptions among ESL teachers as the practitioners.

There are several important key terms raised when using formative assessment in the classroom such as 'design' (Brookhart, 2007), 'technique, tool and activity' (Pinchock & Brandt, 2009). Formative assessment practices is a measurement process incorporated in teaching and learning, All of the key terms stated above can

be used as there is no clear boundary when explaining the function of formative assessment as it is depicted as an informal and continuous process, embedded in the teaching and learning process (Brookhart, 2007; Mohd Azhar & Shahrir; Stiggin & Chappuis, 2006). This type of evaluation is formative as it aims to strengthen and improve the curriculum. Therefore, formative assessment can be defined from its purpose to provide learners with information about their progress which they can use to guide their continuing learning, to provide teachers with information which they can use to guide course development, lesson planning or curriculum development. Such evaluations are ongoing and monitor developments by identifying strengths and weaknesses of all aspects of teaching and learning. It is designed to provide information that may be used as the basis for future planning and action.

Informal type of formative assessment includes discussion, observation, oral questioning, seatwork, reflection, homework, project, portfolio, group work, quizzes, assignment, self-assessment, and dialogue. These formative assessment techniques will be able to help students to think critically reflect, and demonstrate their ideas (Black & William, 1998; Brookhart, 2007; Cizek, 2007; Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008; Harlen, 2007; Scherer, 2007). The use of formative techniques will also lead to students' active participation in the classroom (Black & William, 1998; Crooks, 1998; Hamm & Adams, 2009; Scherer, 2005; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). Therefore, the use of proper formative assessment techniques is vital in the teaching and learning process because it helps students to master what is taught in the classroom, gives them the opportunity to communicate and to show their understanding and meet the needs of students to improve their learning (Black & William, 1998). Chappuis & Chappuis (2008) further mentioned that formative assessment is capable in providing more relevant information to improve students' performances and achievements during the learning stage relatively to the aspects of achieving learning objectives. The use of formative assessment technique also provides information on the quality of teaching (Hall & Burke, 2003).

All of the above suggest that the change in the assessment system has further lead to a paradigm change in the teaching and learning processes of all secondary schools that deserve the attention of academicians, educators, and researchers, including stakeholders. Therefore the role of teachers in this new assessment is vital, teachers have to have a variety of teaching approaches and assessment techniques that have a direct impact on the assessment outcomes (Chan, Sidhu, & Yunus, 2006). The questions of whether ESL teachers understand the concept of formative assessment and what the ESL teachers' perspectives are towards formative assessment has led to this study. More important is, what challenges would the teachers perceive when implementing formative assessment in the classroom.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teachers' lack of knowledge on the use of formative assessment techniques might hinder the implementation of effective formative assessment in the classroom. For example, from the study done by Mohd Azhar and Shadhrir (2007), it is found that teachers commonly used question and answer techniques as teaching techniques in their classroom but not as an assessment technique. Brookhart (2007) further indicates that primary school teachers consider observation techniques as the key techniques for formative assessments. This skilled up their formative assessment techniques by using various kind of observation techniques compared to secondary school teachers. This proves that the application of formative assessment is still considered weak because teachers have lack of skills to integrate formative assessment techniques in teaching and learning process with the assumptions that it is something foreign and separated,

whereas they are very familiar with their teaching practices (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart, 2007; Hall & Burke, 2003).

A study done by Watson (2006) showed that teachers experienced difficulty in effectively using formative assessment to guide further teachings. This study followed two highly experienced teachers self-identified as practicing many of the necessary aspects of quality formative assessment. The study found that in both cases, the teachers lacked a strong connection between the use of formative assessment and then using the information from the assessment to gain an understanding of where students are and how to move them forward. The author suggested that a direction for improvement in using formative assessment would be extending teachers' questioning and tasks so that they were more focused on the development of conceptual understanding, as well as teaching students how to self-assess in terms of their understanding.

Black and William (1998) found that teachers still need training to implement formative assessment. They suggested teachers to use a variety of techniques as a tool for formative assessment as long as the technique is able to give information for upcoming changes in the teaching and lesson planning. Therefore, it is important for the teachers to develop a stronger sense of how students develop their understandings of specific subject matter content. The teacher must also know how they will be able to prepare lessons around their understandings as well as respond to common misconceptions of formative assessment. This is the type of information that is critical in successfully implementing formative assessment where a teacher is gathering data about the student understanding to successfully move individual students and the class forward, towards the desired learning goals.

In many countries, teachers have experienced great difficulties in effectively incorporating formative assessment into their teaching practices (Black & William, 1998). When formative assessment is identified as an area of concern or focus, it is often only labeled as such and no concrete guidance in the form of suggestions, strategies, or tools such as professional development are provided for teachers (Black & William, 1998; Heritage, 2007; Watson, 2006). Research studies that proved to be the most successful in moving teachers to effectively using formative assessment in their classroom were those that encompassed the following: practicing classroom teachers were provided access to information on formative assessment; a collegial network for support and feedback was in place to support and offer mentoring by education professionals trained in the area of formative assessment; and teachers had an authentic means to connect formative assessment to their existing practices and actual curriculum (Allsopp, 2008; William & Black, 2004; Gearhart & Saxe, 2004; Dixon; 2009).

Unfortunately, there have not been many studies conducted to gauge levels of knowledge and practices of Malaysian ESL teachers in school-based assessment, particularly in formative assessment. Improving best practices of teachers in testing and assessment should be an important objective to improve their levels of knowledge in school-based assessment. Therefore, the need to measure the levels of knowledge and practices of formative assessment among ESL teachers is essential considering the shift in Malaysian educational system from focusing solely on summative assessment to a broader look at assessments including formative assessments. With regards to this matter, it is very important to investigate the phenomenon.

1.3 Conceptual framework of study

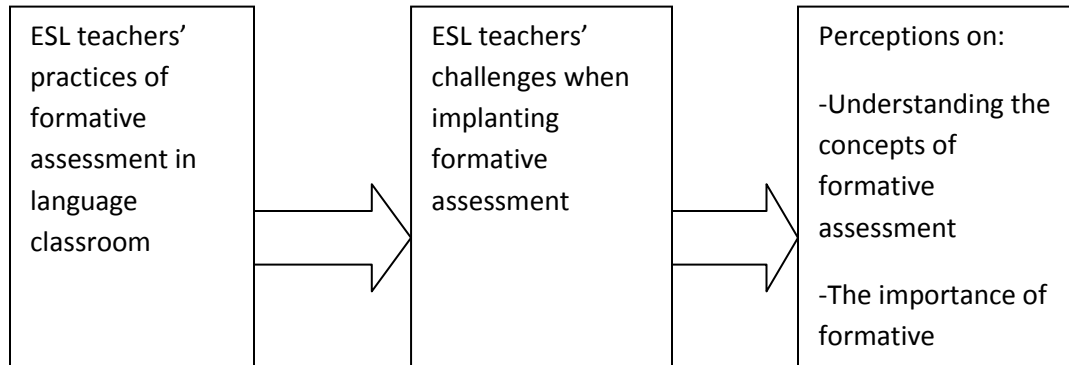


Figure 3.4.1: Conceptual framework of the study

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of English teachers on formative assessment in secondary schools. It also aims to determine their current understanding on formative assessment, their practice of formative language assessment, and to discover the challenges they perceive when implementing formative language assessment especially in the classroom situation and how they try to overcome these challenges.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study is set out to determine ESL teachers' perceptions on formative assessment and their practices in the language classroom. The additional purposes are to address how they view, believe and practice formative language assessment, and to discover the challenges they might perceive when implementing formative assessment especially in the classroom situation and how they try to overcome these challenges.

1.6 Research Questions

The purposes of this study are as follow:

- 1) What current understandings do ESL teachers hold about formative assessment?
- 2) How are language skills currently assessed using formative assessments in the language classroom?
- 3) What challenges do the teachers perceive when implementing formative assessment in the language classroom?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The finding of the study can serve as one of the ways for teachers and students to have different and new insights into the use of formative assessments in the English language classroom. Thus, the findings of the study could give some ideas to those who involved in the process of incorporating formative assessments in language classroom, to take the necessary steps, as to ensure its delivery effectiveness. Lastly, it is also to meet one of the objectives of Malaysian school based assessment that is to promote an ongoing process of assessment where it can be an integral part of the educational experience of each child (Ministry of Education, 2003).

1.8 Scope of the Study

The study was based on secondary schools in Malaysia. This study only focuses on the secondary school English language teachers. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the other subject teachers. The teachers' perceptions are solely based on their views, beliefs and practices on formative assessment in the English language classroom. Thus, this result cannot be generalized on using other types of assessments in the classroom.

1.9 Limitations of Study

The primary concern of this study is to examine secondary school ESL teachers' perceptions and practices of formative assessment in language classroom. It is only limited to investigate respondents from secondary schools located in the state of Pahang, particularly Kuantan district. The findings of this study can only be specifically used within the context of this study because it does not represent all English language teachers in Malaysia. It only reflects the perceptions and practices of formative assessments among ESL teachers in Kuantan district. In addition, the results could not be generalized to other subjects and context until further research is carried out, which might have different practices on the use of formative assessments techniques, although it is likely that the findings also fit other language subjects, such as Malay Language, where the teaching and learning components are similar.

1.10 Definitions of Key Term

The following definition is given to the terms based on the purpose of the study.

1.10.1 Perceptions

Campbell (1967) defines that perceptions is closely related about something that is being observed and what is and what is said about it. It is a process where one will form an impression about someone or something. It is formed close observation that will be stated as added information which in turn will be based on its suitability. The perception in this study refers to the teachers' interpretation and impression towards the implementation of formative assessment in the English language classroom and what they believe and value of using formative assessment as an essential element of teaching and learning.

1.10.2 Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is described as on-going dynamic process of assessment for learning (Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008) and this term is based on the concept of formative evaluation used in evaluating programmes or projects. It is focused on enhancing student development and often attends to the process of a

programme in order to provide immediate feedback which could lead to improvement (Dictionary of Language Testing, 1999).

1.11 School Based Assessment

School-based assessment (SBA) is a process of monitoring, evaluating and implementing plans to address perceived weakness and strengths of the school. The policymakers and educators are looking towards SBA as a catalyst for education reform. It is seen as leverage for instructional improvement in order to help teachers find out what students are learning in the classroom and how well they are learning it.

1.12 Practices

Practices refer to teachers' classroom practices in the language classroom. Teaching practices are closely related to effective classroom learning and students outcomes (Brophy & Good, 1986; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993). In the context of language teaching and testing, 'practices' refers to the use of formative assessment techniques in the teaching and learning process. A proper and effective implementation of formative assessment techniques in language classroom will help to improve students' learning. Thus, the use of various formative assessment

techniques enables teacher to make correct decision based on students' capacity, capability and skills. Various types of formative assessments techniques also helps to ensure high validity of the constructs measured (Mutalib and Ahmad, 2012).

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