

**A STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED ORAL ENGLISH ASSESSMENT
IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
SANDAKAN DIVISION, SABAH**

PARAMASIVAN A/L SINNASAMY



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**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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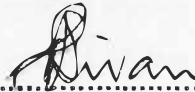
I hereby declare that the materials in this dissertation is my own except for quotations, excerpts, equations, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.



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02 June 2007

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paramasivan', is written over a dotted line.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors related to the implementation of School-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah. This study was aimed to find out the differences in the implementation of school-based oral English assessment based on selected demography factors. This study also aimed to find the level of English Language teachers' perception towards the implementation of school-based oral English assessment. This study went on further by identifying the relationship between the implementation of school-based oral English assessment with the influencing factors: content, function and perception of the teachers. A total of 56 respondents from 14 rural secondary schools from three rural areas under Sandakan Division were sampled and administered with structured questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for this study. It was found that there is no significant difference based on demography factors. It was also found the teachers have positive perception towards the implementation of school-based oral English assessment. It was found that the function factor has a strong correlation ($r=.520$) with the implementation of school-based oral English assessment. Whereas the perception factor ($r=.371$) and the content factor ($r=.366$) have a medium strength correlation with implementation of school-based oral English assessment. Finally, it was found that the function factor was the most influencing factor followed by the perception factor towards the implementation of school-based oral English assessment. This study showed that the content factor was not an influencing factor to the implementation of school-based oral English assessment.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan menjalankan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti factor-faktor berkaitan pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris, di sekolah-sekolah menengah di luar bandar Gabungan Sandakan, Sabah. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris terhadap pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris berdasarkan faktor-faktor demografi. Justeru, kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengetahui perbezaan yang terdapat dalam pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris berdasarkan faktor-faktor demografi yang terpilih. Kajian ini juga turut mengenal pasti hubungan pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris dengan factor-faktor seperti konten, fungsi dan persepsi guru yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaannya. Seramai 56 responden daripada 14 buah sekolah menengah di kawasan luar bandar di Gabungan Sandakan telah disampel dan ditadbir dengan soal selidik berstruktur. Statistik penghuraian dan inferen telah dibuat untuk kajian ini. Didapati tidak terdapat berbezaan signifikan di antara factor demografi and pelaksanaan terhadap pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Bahasa Ingeris. Didapati juga guru-guru mempunyai persepsi positif terhadap pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Bahasa Inggeris. Didapati faktor fungsi mempunyai korelasi yang tinggi ($r=.520$) dengan pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris. Manakala, faktor persepsi ($r=.371$) dan faktor konten ($r=.366$) mempunyai korelasi sederhana dengan pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris. Kesimpulannya, didapati faktor fungsi merupakan faktor yang paling berpengaruh diikuti dengan faktor persepsi terhadap pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris. Kajian ini menunjukkan faktor konten, tidak mempunyai pengaruh dalam pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Lisan Berasaskan Sekolah – Basaha Inggeris.

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List of Abbreviations

SBOEA	= School Based Oral English Assessment
CDC	= Curriculum Development Centre
MOE	= Ministry of Education
MSE	= Malaysian Examination Syndicate
ACTEL	= American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language
SPM	= Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SMK	= Sekolah Menengah Kerajaan (Government Secondary School)
LPM	= Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia (Malaysian Examination Syndicate)
PPG	= Pejabat Pendidikan Gabungan (Divisional Education Office)
PPD	= Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah (District Education Office)
PMR	= Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary Assessment)
UPSR	= Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (Primary School Assessment)
ECRS	= English Compendium for Rural Schools
T & L	= Teaching and Learning
TESL	= Teaching of English as Second Language.
ESL	= English as Second Language.
QCA	= Qualification and Curriculum Authority.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

Education in Malaysia focuses upon nurturing the holistic, well-balanced, and harmonious development of individuals. The education system has to fulfill the present and future needs of the individuals, society and national aspirations. Affords to this end have focused primarily on the major areas of curricular development and establishment of effective and efficient implementation system.

Tests and assessments are invariably an integral component of the teaching and learning process. Taken that despite the on-going revolutionary advances towards supplementing the traditional process of teaching and learning, tests as a teaching-learning tool would very much unlikely be expunged from our local education system. (Ong Teow Chong, 1999). Right from Primary 1 through secondary schooling and post-secondary level and at university level, tests in its multifarious forms continue to be organized, conducted and sat for. In Malaysia, more formalized, uniform cluster of each respective subject-matter test are systematically organized and conducted every year. The principal ones are the Primary School Assessment in year 6 (UPSR), the Lower Secondary Assessment Examination (PMR) for those completing Form 3, the Malaysia Certificate of Examination (SPM) at Form 5 level and Higher School Certificate (STPM) for the upper Form six students. Besides these layers of examination administered at national level, a fair number of other tests and assessments, both formative and summative are carried out at all levels in a school year. So tests and assessments are part and parcel of all Malaysian students' life. English as second language has on exception.

Malaysia being a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country practices bilingualism. Bilingualism as a phenomena is widespread in Malaysia and stands out as a feature, which characterizes the lives of most Malaysians (Ain Nadzimah & Rosli Talif, 1998) This is especially so now that Malaysia wants to create knowledgeable human capital under the ninth Malaysia Plan. The use of the two languages, Bahasa

Melayu and English, should be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Being bilingual it should be seen to increase earning power, provide individuals with flexibility to take advantage of job opportunities while allowing one to acquire more marketable skills to facilitate access to today's competitive job market. Thus, there is a necessity to master both the languages in Malaysia. Therefore, perception towards bilingualism should be positive as the bilingual is able to achieve and contribute more towards the development of Malaysia.

As all of us aware English language has been accorded the second language status in Malaysia. As can be seen the competency in the Malay language among students will be further enhanced while their proficiency in English language is being further strengthened. One of the emphasis that has been given in both primary and secondary schools Malaysian English Language syllabus is oral and speaking component. Previously these components have been examined by external examiners. This has been the traditional way of testing for a long time. For the past decade there has been a shift from the traditional way of testing to the new way – better known as the Alternative Assessment. With this change in trend in testing various forms of alternative assessment, better known as School-based assessment has been implemented.

As far as English is concerned the School-based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA) was implemented in 2002. The aims and objectives of this mode of assessment are noble and well-intentioned in line with the communicative language teaching approach adopted in Malaysian schools. However, from the researcher's observation this new endeavour is not carried out as it was intended. Schools are to carry out this oral assessment throughout the five years in the secondary schools. Sad to say, the manner in which the oral proficiency is evaluated is questionable. It is also believed that there were cases where the evaluation sheets were filled in haphazardly when the Head of the English Language Panel requested for the marks, and surprisingly most of them are able to come up with the marks quite magically, over a very short period of time. This is in spite of the large number of students the teachers are managing in the school. Some are teaching as many as five classes of English

Language with about 45 to 50 students in each class. There are also cases of teachers who are unsure of the criteria and how the School-based Oral English should be carried out. There are also cases of non-English option teachers carrying out the assessment.

The school-based oral English should be conducted professionally, sincerely and systematically. It can go a long way towards furnishing students with some certification of achievement, something which has long eluded the weaker students. The high proficiency students will have not much of a problem with school-based English oral assessment. It is the weaker ones who need to be assisted and guided in order to achieve the desired results. Ultimately how effectively the school-based oral English assessment is implemented is in the hands of teachers themselves. The success or failure of any programme is in the hands of the teachers as classroom managers and implementers at grass-root level. This fact has been emphasized by former Education Director-General from 1974 to 1985, Tan Sri Dr Murad Mohammad Nor (The Star, 2007):

"The most important part in the implementation of any plan, is the teachers. However good the plan, it will be of no use if the teachers do not implement it well."

Very often we hear and read in the newspapers regarding the deteriorating standard of English, especially those from the rural areas. There also have been numerous statements regarding this in the newspapers. Among them are a statement by Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussien Onn, "the Government's education agenda was to bridge the gap between schools in rural and urban areas, provide adequate quality teachers, improve school infrastructure especially in the rural areas, and provide access to quality education". (Daily Express dated 29 November 2006. p7). The former Chief Minister, Datuk Mohd. Salleh Tun Said Keruak, has urged the Education Ministry to consider providing additional incentives to teachers posted to the remote areas and outlying islands around Sabah. He has further said that such considerations were needed to motivate the teachers into providing quality education to rural students. He believed that lack of facilities, attitude of teachers has contributed to the poor performance of rural students. (Daily Express, 29/11/2006, p4)

1.2 Background of the study.

The new trend in various parts of the world has been moving away from the traditional form of testing to alternative assessment. There is also the move from summative test to formative assessments.

Black and William (1998:2) mention that:

"One of the outstanding features of studies of assessment in recent years has been the shift in the focus of attention, towards greater interest in the interaction between assessment and classroom learning and away from concentration on the properties of restricted forms of tests which are only weakly linked to the learning experiences of students."

Their findings on teachers' practices in formative assessment had several key weaknesses:

- i. Current classroom assessment practices generally encourage superficial and rote learning, concentrating on recall of isolated details, usually items of knowledge which pupils soon forget.
- ii. Teachers do not generally review the assessment questions they use and do not discuss them critically with their peers, so there is little reflection on what is being assessed.
- iii. The grading function is over-emphasised and the learning function under-emphasised.
- iv. The assessment does not bring about the desired washback effect.
- v. There is a tendency to use a normative rather than a criterion-based approach, which emphasizes competition between students rather than the personal improvement of each. There is indication that the effect of feedback is to teach the weaker students that they lack ability, so they are de-motivated and lose confidence in their own capacity to learn.

It has been found that formative assessment is not well understood by teachers (Wier:1994) and is weak in practice and that the implementation of formative assessment calls for deep changes both in teachers' perceptions of their own role in relation to their students and in their classroom practice. It has also been found that

the requirement for certification and accountability will exert a powerful influence on practice.

Based on the above findings, the researcher made a study on the implementation of school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division. This is based on teachers' selected demographic factors, knowledge of the contents and functions of the school-based oral English assessment, perception towards the implementation of the school-based assessment, and how these factors influence the proper implementation of school-based oral English assessment in the rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division.

1.3 Problem Statement

From the preliminary survey carried out on how the School-Based Oral English Assessment is being implemented, it was found that the assessment was not implemented according to guidelines and objectives provided by Malaysian Examination Syndicate. The school-based oral English assessment was carried out for the sake of fulfilling the administrative directives. There was skepticism in the teachers' answers about the school-based oral English assessment. This shows that there are some doubts or misconception as regards to the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment.

In this regard are the teachers, especially in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division familiar with content, objectives and the guidelines provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate as regards to the effective implementation of school-based oral English assessment. What is their perception towards the school-based oral English assessment which in turn has an effect on the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment? Whether the school-based oral English assessment is being carried out in accordance to the principles and guidelines given by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate? In doing so, to what extent they could achieve the objectives of English Language Curriculum and what is the English Language teachers' feelings towards the school-based oral English assessment?

1.4 Conceptual Framework

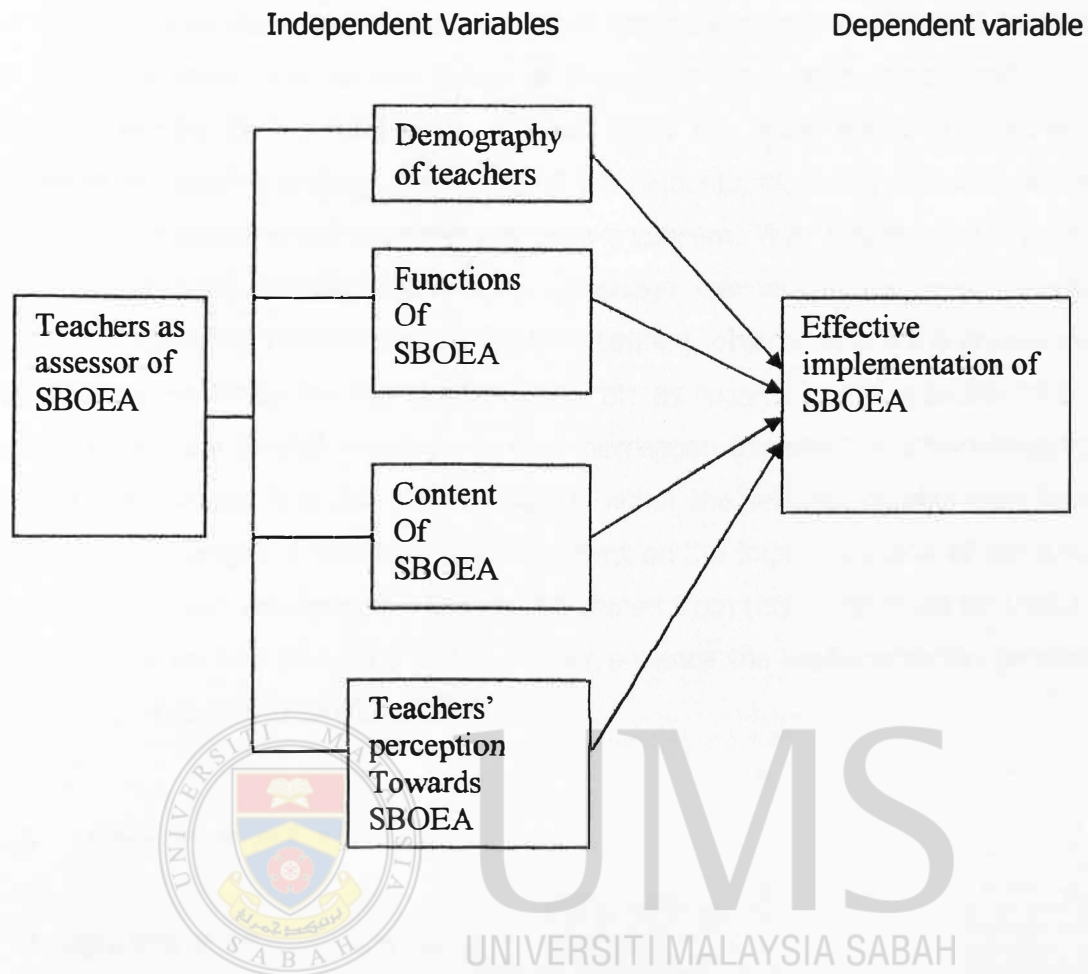


Diagram 1.1: Conceptual Framework

Diagram 1.1 shows that the correlation between the effective implementation of school-based oral English assessment (dependent variable) and the factors (independent variables) that influence it. The diagram also shows that the variables are the demographic factors and the other factors such as the knowledge of the content, the functions and the teachers' perception which influences the effective implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah.

1.5 Rationale of the study

Of recent various statements have been made about the standard of English Language in the rural areas and various forms of incentives have been announced for the teachers serving in the rural areas. Various steps are being taken to improve the standard of English Language proficiency of the students, especially in the rural areas. The oral proficiency of the students has been a concern. With this in mind, this study aims to determine whether the English Language teachers in the rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division are familiar with content, objectives and the guidelines as provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate as regards to the implementation of school based oral English assessment; their perception towards the school-based oral English assessment. It is also to determine whether the selected demographic factors of the English language teachers have any effect on the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment. The insight gained from this study could be useful for future reference and planning; and to further enhance the implementation process in these rural secondary schools.

1.6 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. find out to what extent the teachers in the rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division are familiar with the rationale, aims and objectives, the grading criteria, the guidelines and the process of implementing the school-based oral English assessment.
- ii. find out what is the perception of the teachers in the rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division towards the implementation of oral English assessment.
- iii. find out which demographic factors and other factors that have influence on the implementation of school-based oral English assessment.
- iv. find the correlation between the implementation of school-based oral English assessment and the influencing factors.

1.7 Research Questions

The research questions in this study are as follows:

- i. What are the differences towards the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment among the teachers in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah based on selected demographic factors (academic qualification, teaching qualification, option, teaching experience and number of students being taught).
- ii. Are the teachers in the rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division familiar with the rationale, aims and objectives, the grading criteria, the guidelines and the process of implementing the school-based oral English assessment and their perception towards the school-based oral English assessment. (the influencing factors – content, function and perception)
- iii. What is the relationship between the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah with the influencing factors (function, content, and perception).
- iv. What are the factors (function, content and perception factors) that most influences the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah.

1.8. Research Hypotheses

This study will be done on the following hypothesis:

- Ho 01 There is no significant difference towards the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment among the teachers in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah based on the academic qualification factor.
- Ho 02 There is no significant difference towards the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment among the teachers in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah based on the teaching qualification (trained or non-trained) factor.
- Ho 03 There is no significant difference towards the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment among the teachers in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah based on the option factor.
- Ho 04 There is no significant difference towards the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment among the teachers in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah based on the teaching experience factor.
- Ho 05 There is no significant difference towards the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment among the teachers in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah based on number of students taught per week.

- Ho 06 There is no significant relationship between the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah with functions factor.
- Ho 07 There is no significant relationship between the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah with content factor.
- Ho 08 There is no significant relationship between the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah with perception factor.
- Ho 09 There is no one factor that most influences the implementation of the school-based oral English assessment in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division, Sabah.

1.9 Operational Definitions

1.9.1 Assessment

Assessment can be defined as an on going strategy that monitors students' learning and simultaneously involve them in making decisions as to whether their performances matches their ability (Hancock, 1994). According to Arshad (2004) assessment is any of a variety of procedures used to inform on students' performance. Assessment is a process of gathering information to meet a broad range of evaluation needs. For the purpose of this study, assessment will be limited to oral English assessment termed as School-Based Oral English Assessment, carried out by English Language teachers based on the guidelines and criteria given by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (2002 & 2003).

1.9.2 Alternative Assessment:

Hamayan (1995) in Arshad (2004:100) considers alternative assessment to be "procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can easily be incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom'. This can be portfolio based, task based, or project based. Here it will refer to the school-based oral English assessment carried out in rural secondary schools in Sandakan Division as formative assessment.

1.9.3 School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA)

School-Based Assessment is any assessment done in the classroom or in the school. This can be both formative and summative assessment. For the purpose of this study school based assessment specifically refers to oral English assessment which are carried out in the classroom or outside the classroom by English Language teachers in secondary schools, that is from Form one to Form five, as stated by Malaysian Examination Syndicate (2002)

1.9.4 Test

A test is a sample behaviour. On the basis of the observed performance elicited on a test, inferences are made about the more general underlying competence of an individual to perform similar or related tasks. (Savignon: 1999.) According to Arshad (2004:2) a test can be defined as a systematic procedure for measuring a sample of behaviour by posing a set of questions in a unified manner.

For the purpose of this study assessment and test will be used intermittently. When reference is made to test or assessment it refers to the School-Based Oral English Assessment carried out from form one to form five.