

Managing School-Based Assessment: Challenges and Solutions for Educational Practice

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Student assessment is closely associated in the educational attempt to monitor student accomplishment and improve school performance. The research reported in this article examines the implementation of school-based assessment (SBA), exploring the practice and challenges upon which the framework is based, and educators' efforts to overcome problems faced in using SBA information to monitor the effectiveness of their reform efforts. Through in-depth and focus group interviews involving twenty teachers, the findings highlight the challenges and implications surrounding the accountability of SBA implementation in 10 primary schools in Malaysia. The findings suggest that challenges in SBA implementation include administrative support, teacher readiness, technical support and professional support from the state education department. Revamping strategies on teacher training and professional development that inculcate SBA as the core culture in the school learning ecosystem is therefore necessary.

Key words: *School-based assessment; qualitative case-study; SBA challenges; SBA implications.*

Introduction

Assessment is a way to provide teachers and students with information about the outcomes, and strengths and weaknesses of student learning. Based on the learning outcomes, assessment in education is regarded as the ultimate goal of making responsive changes in teaching and learning. The types of assessment are a highly regarded area in the field of teaching and learning especially in the 21st century classroom. According to Arbaa, Jamil and



Ahmad (2017), the 21st century classroom is where students are supposed to be given equal opportunity to perform, a democratic environment is sustained, and a cooperative learning approach is implemented to motivate student holistic learning. Assessment is on-going in the classroom and not solely depending on examination scores. In the near past, education stakeholders and academics around the world have been criticising how high-stakes examinations can have a harmful effect on student learning and should be reduced to a minimum (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Harlen & Crick, 2003; Morrison & Tang, 2002; Shepard et al., 2001). To rectify the situation, Brown (2007) believed that school-based assessment (SBA), if properly implemented, can reduce the damage and at the same time be used as a powerful means to improve classroom teaching and learning activities.

As such, SBA has been practised in schools around the world including in Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, Scotland and Hong Kong (OECD, 2005). Hoping to achieve the same goal as these countries, the Malaysia Examinations Syndicate (MES) implemented its latest educational reform – SBA – in-line with the Standards-based Primary School Curriculum (KSSR) in stages starting in 2011. SBA was implemented on the belief that types of assessment can be a strong determinant of teaching and learning (MOE, 2012), providing teachers are willing and able to change their classroom activity practices to finally move away from a focus largely on academic excellence to a more holistic assessment. In 2019, the mid-term examination and final-term examination was completely terminated for Primary 1, 2 and 3 students and replaced by the SBA approach in all schools nationwide (MOE, 2018) to create an ‘exam-free’ environment. In the SBA system, teachers need to constantly monitor, manage, assess, record drop-outs and affective achievement of students at the school level (Mahamod, Embi & Yusoff, 2010; Muhammad Azam, 2019). By implementing SBA, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Malaysia are giving teachers more responsibility and assessment empowerment that will hopefully lead to a more robust, innovative, creative; teaching and learning-friendly culture mainly in the classroom. Accepting SBA therefore clearly has the potential to bring additional reliability to the learning outcomes of the educational system. The system creates a strong connection between teachers and students in producing quality results from the daily teaching and learning process which does not rely solely on examination marks or gradings.

Although SBA practice is being accepted internationally, empirical research on its implementation in terms of success, strength and weaknesses is still lacking, especially in Malaysia. The most comprehensive study done on SBA was by the OECD (2005), which documented SBA best practices in eight western countries including Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Italy, New Zealand and Scotland. The absence of SBA research studies in Asian countries is more significant, and this gap was one of the reasons leading to this study (Mowlaei, 2017).



Objective of the study

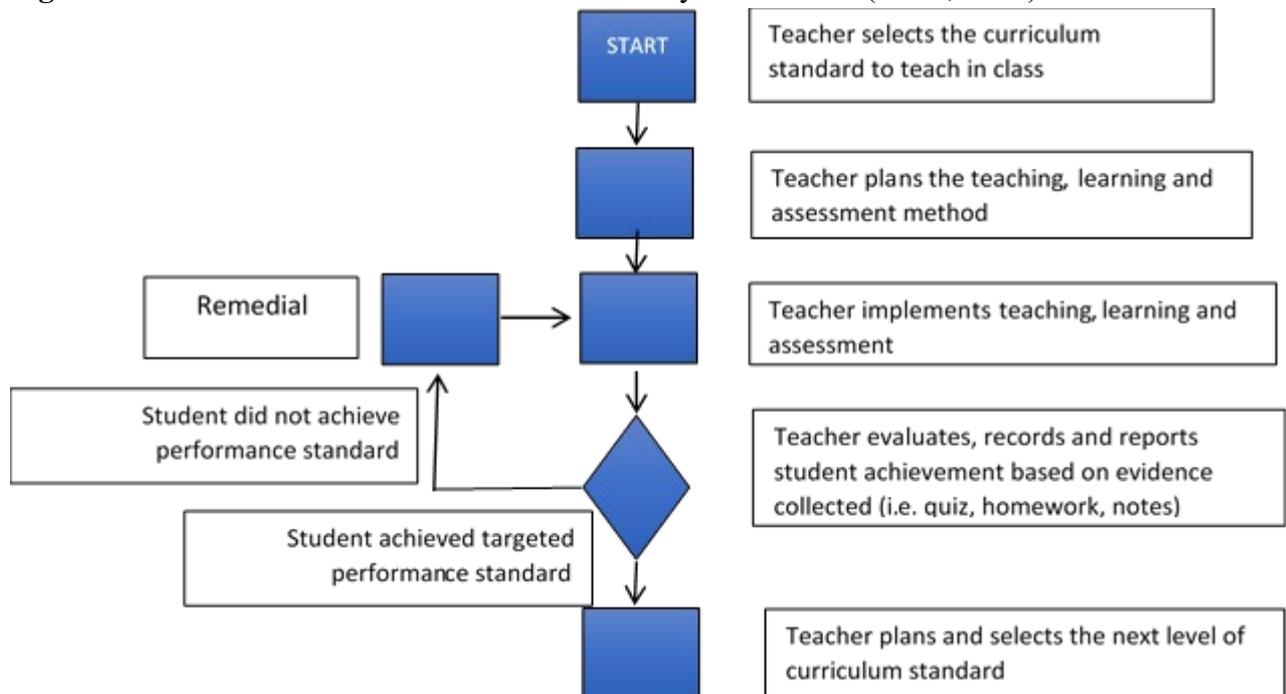
This paper reports the practices, challenges and weaknesses of SBA based on the perceptions of 10 primary school teachers. This paper also seeks to identify the strategies used by these teachers in overcoming the challenges faced in implementing SBA in a language-based subject. It also aims to understand how teachers handle the problems and weaknesses of SBA for both teachers and students. The findings provide real-life scenarios of the practices and challenges in SBA implementation coming from on-the-ground implementers. The findings should benefit policymakers in ensuring a smooth and successful SBA policy transition and, most importantly, the teachers who value and appreciate ensuring a low-stress learning environment for students around the world.

Concepts of school-based assessment

In the Malaysian context, SBA is defined as assessment that is planned, built, managed, checked, recorded and reported by the subject teacher, which can be conducted in the form of formative assessment during classroom activities designed to evaluate the extent of the learning outcomes achieved. Student achievements will be judged and graded based on the criteria and standards specified in subject syllabuses embedded in the Standard Curriculum for Primary School (SCPS).

This policy will ensure that all schools move from the traditional summative regional-based and state-wide examinations to school-based assessment to improve students' learning skills and promote their life-long learning abilities (AACU, 2011). Because the main goal is to reduce examination-oriented learning in schools (MOE, 2007), SBA expedites the change from a one-off certification system to one that propagates accumulative graduation. Beginning in 2016, at the end of Year 6, students' cumulative SBA results and their personal development constitute 60% of the final assessment, and the remaining 40% will come from the national primary assessment. In implementing SBA, the teachers followed the SBA model as simplified in Figure 1.

Figure 1. School-based Assessment Process – Malaysian Version (MOE, 2012)



The Malaysia Examinations Syndicate (MES) has emphasised that SBA is to function as both ‘assessment for learning’ and ‘assessment of learning’. This is to ensure a more systematic and holistic mastery of knowledge, whilst taking into account the learner’s overall well-being, including the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains and encompassing intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects (Mirzajani et al., 2016).

The MES highlights four components in the SBA. The first is central assessment that involves one or more tasks set by the MES but administered and graded by teachers based on scoring rubrics provided by the central body. Second, there is a school assessment that is set, administered, graded and reported by the school based on the requirements of the curriculum. The third component is learner participation and involvement in sports and co-curricular activities that are recorded and reported. The final component is a psychometric assessment, a non-academic element that measures pupils’ innate and acquired abilities.

SBA in practice

Based on the four components of SBA, the objectives of SBA are: (1) to enhance the significance of assessment as a tool to monitor student development and growth in learning rather than focusing merely on scores or grades; (2) to reduce sole reliance on data (grades and scores) from centralised examinations; (3) to empower and acknowledge the roles of



schools and teachers in conducting quality assessment; and, (4) to ensure the students meet the accepted standards of various areas of knowledge, skills and competence as specified in the SCPS.

Based on these four objectives, implementation-wise, SBA in practice is not much different from what the teachers would normally do in the classroom. As such, SBA is best conducted during the learning process through creative, fun classroom activities, followed by a summative assessment at the end of a learning unit or at the end of the year. Assessing students' learning progress while they are actively doing fun activities induces a low-stress learning experience, which is the ultimate target of the SBA (Mohajan, 2016). Other activities such as homework, quizzes, group projects, group presentations, class discussions, pop quizzes and even observations are all examples of activities that teachers could use as instruments to assess pupils' development and personal growth. The extra work for teachers under this policy is that they have to record students' learning progress continuously and systematically into a web-based SBA management system, developed by the MES.

With SBA, student achievement is not measured by comparison with the grades or exam scores of others and students are not ranked in their classes. Their achievements are measured against a standard developed by the MES, based on an identified benchmark mapped from the SCPS; student achievement is ranked with reference to bands one to six, with one being the lowest and six the highest: band one means that 'learner knows'; band two, the 'learner knows and understands'; band three, the 'learner is able to apply knowledge acquired'; band four, the 'learner is able to solve problems using the correct protocol'; band five, the 'learner is able to solve problems creatively'; and band six, the 'learner is able to solve problem independently at the same time demonstrating certain aspects of value judgment'. Based on their learning performance, every learner can move up the bands. A learner therefore only competes with him or herself and not with his or her peers.

Further to this, Adi Badiozaman Tuah (2006) points out that most Malaysian teachers are far from ready to implement the SBA in their classroom, but rather teachers have yet to understand the concept of SBA and thus lack the know-how in developing assessment tasks that would lead to the validity of the SBA. The existing literature has also cautioned against teacher bias in awarding grades using assessment criteria that do not comply with the official guidelines (Davison, 2004; Filer & Polard, 2000; Masole 2005; McMillan et al., 2002; Yale University, 2013).

Previous research on SBA shows that teachers have expressed concern about the smoothness of the SBA system (Chun & Wong, 2012; Majid 2011). Boon and Shaharuddin (2011) reported that schoolteachers lacked guidance from school heads though school heads were found in the study to have high understanding in practicing SBA. Ghazali (2017), examined

the effectiveness of the SBA implementation and the impact on the product (student) using the CIPP (context-input-process-product) model. The study concluded that process plays a crucial role in reflecting the output aimed by SBA. Implications presented that schools should be supported with sufficient detailed information on the evaluation process for effective implementation of the SBA. This was initially also reported by Hashim, Ariffin, & Hashim, (2014). Some of the hurdles most frequently mentioned by these teachers are the big class size (up to 50 students per class), lack of support for classroom aid resources, wide-ranging curriculum requirement and teacher bias. Too many students per class increases grading time significantly as students are graded on a personal basis, which does not go well with extensive curriculum coverage. Their concern and perception is a priority, because teachers are the implementers of SBA and determine the success or failure of this programme. Teachers may feel overwhelmed and frustrated, which might lead to undesirable work behaviours that would reduce the effectiveness of SBA.

Parents have also raised concerns about the future of their children, worried that the standard of the education will be lower. From the management perspective, the principals will lead the transformation at the school level and believe that the MOE's aim in this reform is to bring improvement for the country rather than lower the existing standard. An effective assessment should be able to reflect student knowledge and experience, assess the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and to prove students' abilities in a particular subject area (Herman 2010; Moussa, 2018). SBA is seen to be beneficial when teachers are committed to the approach that demands teachers to be creative not only in their classroom teaching but also assessment strategies that forgoes examination scores and evaluates students based on their learning process (Mansor et al., 2013). Some of the benefits clearly stated as student's continuous personal progress, development of positive learning attitude in an 'exam stress-free' classroom climate, enhanced collaborative skills due to loads of group work and improving teacher's creativity in teaching.

Methodology

This qualitative research used interviews as the main data collection method. Ten experienced language teachers were interviewed from ten different primary schools (called T1–T10). Respondents T1–T3 teach Malay language; T4–T6 teach English as a second language; T7 & T8 teach Chinese language; and T9 & T10 teach Tamil language. They are all primary school teachers, have more than 15 years' experience teaching Year 1 to Year 3, attended the SBA workshop organised by the MOE and were interviewed on a voluntary basis to ensure full cooperation, thus authenticating data validity. The interview focused on the challenges of SBA, including the weaknesses, implementation problems and strategies for handling these problems.

To seek greater reliability, data was coded independently, and the inter-rater reliability test was used to examine the relative importance of the data, as well as which data should be combined into one concept. Two independent teachers from another primary school were invited to go through all the data to complete the inter-rater test process. During this matching process, the research questions were provided to the two independent teachers and they carried out this test individually. When this was done, the relevance of the data and the themes were discussed. Both suggested reducing the number of themes to three because the problems faced by the teachers when implementing SBA could be categorised under the weaknesses of the system. All data were carefully examined to ensure they matched with themes. Further discussion compared and examined which themes were more relevant. Once complete, the themes were narrowed down into two main themes: (1) the challenges and (2) the strategies used to improve teaching and learning.

Findings

The findings discuss the challenges faced by teachers and students, as well as the strategies used by the teachers to overcome the difficulties of implementing the SBA system and to improve the teaching and learning process.

SBA implementation challenges

According to the teachers, although shifting to an SBA is the right move, there are concerns about the weaknesses of the system. Findings show that SBA implementation challenges include administrative support, teacher readiness, teacher workload, technical provision and professional support from the state education department. This suggests that it is necessary to revamp strategies for teacher professional development that inculcate SBA as the core culture in the school learning ecosystem.

Teacher readiness

This study was undertaken in 2018. After seven years of SBA implementation, the majority of the respondents felt that teachers and students were not quite ready to accept SBA. Overall, they felt that SBA has caused students to take learning very lightly due to the non-exam culture, decreased emphasis on writing skills and increased teacher workload, including more time-consuming class preparation (Ahmad & Mahamod, 2016).

Teachers feel that most students may not be serious. From this study, it is clear that this assessment system is relying on the students' day-to-day performance, and teachers are collecting the evidence from students on a daily basis to examine their achievement towards

learning outcomes. However, due to student misconceptions about the purpose of this assessment, they might not be serious in completing their tasks when being assessed.

“...because this assessment method does not look like the ‘real test’ to the students, some students did not respond to it seriously, especially when they are not in a good mood, they will just answer simply or might not answer at all.” (T1)

“Before SBA, students and parents knew when they would be assessed, so students would prepare and parents would make sure their children studied for the exams. But now, there are practically no exams and just continuous assessment.” (T2)

“Another concern is, when students don’t take continuous assessment seriously, and they don’t show ‘improvement’, the State Education Department will question us about what is happening on the ground.” (T3)

“But the students still take the mid-term and final exam seriously. They will study for the exam, but sometimes I think it is a bit to late and they don’t really score well.” (T10)

This mixture with the non-exam system also confused parents. They did not understand why students were given a band ranking instead of the usual grading system, which made it difficult for parents to monitor their children’s achievements.

“We understand the purpose of continuous assessment, but most parents do not. They still want to know the grades, marks, all the exam-related things.” (T4)

“During ‘Open Day’ we invited parents to school, and we explained to them, but not all parents accepted this new assessment system. Besides not all parents came and saw us, so we did not get the chance to explain to all of them.” (T1)

Less emphasis on writing skills

There are two respondents concerned about the writing skills of the students. They thought that as this assessment system is more focused on the speaking skill in lower primary that might cause the teachers and students to neglect the writing skill. They were worried about the students’ ability to express their feelings and ideas in writing in upper primary, particularly during Year Six examination:

“Now the language subject is more focus on speaking and listening and most of the time we spend time on these skills. Before SBA, we used to ask students to write a vocabulary for ten times, now cannot, we only allow to let them write the most five

times. So, sometimes we are a bit worry, whether they have enough vocabulary to write essay in future. We also used to focus on writing sentences, now we don't anymore". (T4)

"The syllabus is more focus on speaking, so we encourage the students to talk more, giving their ideas, expressing their feelings, we are shifting from teaching writing skill to speaking skill". (T3)

"To let them speak is easy, but to make sure they write correctly, sometimes is a little challenging because they do not do writing practice, so they tend to make mistake in writing the Chinese characters, they can speak, but cannot write articulately." (T4)

Teachers' workload

All the respondents agreed that this system has increased their workload tremendously. To achieve the goal of SBA and that 'no student will be left behind', teachers have to be well prepared with their lesson plan and know the learning outcomes precisely. In addition to the extra planning, teachers have been spending time searching for teaching materials such as pictures, objects and worksheets for their lessons; they also have had to prepare different sets of assessment papers for students at different levels.

"It has definitely increased our workload. We have to prepare worksheets for different abilities, different assessment sets, different learning materials and we have to key in or write reports for every assessment. Some subjects we have to do more than 10 assessments a month, for each class with 30 students each class, and I am teaching six different classes, so can you imagine that." (T5)

"Because I need to prepare different worksheets for different level students, I need a lot of preparation time, teachers have to work 'overtime' just to do the preparation." (T2)

"Now I have to spend more time on the weak students so that they pass the minimum level of assessment and I have to do it individually, because different student are at different levels or bands. Previously, we could just group them, the ones that pass, the ones that almost pass and the failures, and we addressed them accordingly. Now based on individual needs – 40 different students with maybe 20 different bands!" (T4)

Despite the increased workloads, all respondents were very positive concerning SBA, based on their additional comments such as, "I believe it is just a matter of time though, once we are used to these new process, it will become easier"; "we share our worksheets among teachers";

“Seeing the students much happier, I think it is worth the trouble”; and “Now we can buy the work sheets. That will really reduce our preparation time.”

Administrative support

Teacher clerical work has also increased. With SBA, teachers need to key in students’ marks from time to time as stated or as suggested in the subject syllabus. Different subjects have different outcomes with various targets to be achieved.

“Initially when it was implemented, we had to key in the students’ assessment marks on-line, with due dates. Why? Because they (the State Education Department) want to monitor whether or not we are doing our job. I don’t understand why. The SBA is supposed to be a school-based assessment, and we are the ones who should be monitoring our students and it is for us to do continuous improvement based on our students’ abilities. Our results are not to be compared with other schools because different schools have different students with their own background and problems.”
(T1)

“It was so troublesome for us, to do key in on-line, because we have problems getting access to the Internet, and sometimes we have to stay up late to finish the job.” (T10)

“Lucky for us, now we need to do it at certain time only, and we can focus on our teaching more.” (T2)

Professional support

The responses were mixed on whether the schools were guided by the District Education Department.

“I am not sure to what extent they really help; because sometime I feel different officers have different levels of understanding. Personally, I think some officers are as confused as we are, but because we are the implementers, we are the ones that have to deal with the students and parents.” (T5)

“It’s funny because sometimes when I checked with the Examination Syndicate website, I get different information than these officers told us. But we have to follow what these officers told us to do, because our heads (principal) would say ...just follow lah (suffix or colloquial language used widely among Malaysian in social communication.)” (T2)



“Yes, I think the support system is there. Most of us went for training at the State and/or District level, and for those who did not, we conducted an in-school training for them. We were given modules and examples. But because the training was prior to the practice, we didn’t have questions then.” (T1)

“We have a help centre, but when we called the number, it is either not answered or the person answering the phone cannot answer our queries. It is frustrating.” (T5)

These mixed responses show that miscommunications about SBA policy can affect the implementation process. We also asked the respondents about teacher acceptance of SBA policy and the support they did or did not receive from school management. Their responses were also mixed;

“The first year was the most difficult. This is the sixth year for me, and so far, most teachers have a better understanding of SBA. We have a support group where we discuss our problems and we brainstorm possible interventions based on the issues raised.” (T2)

“Our admin even go to the extent of rescheduling our teaching period because some of us have big classes and also re-align our co-curriculum responsibilities. I really appreciate that.” (T10)

“I feel that the guide on giving bands are too general. Some teachers here, they just simply give the marks or band without really assessing them. Some even doctored the marks to fit the school target. That is why some students achieve the same bands although they have different capabilities.” (T6)

“My students are very competitive and high achievers compared to the other school. But only 80 per cent of my students achieve the highest band, and almost 90 per cent in the other school: how do you explain that?” (T7)

“SBA is niche oriented right? My students are kampong (village) students, poor families, they don’t know what McD or Pizza is or even certain imported fruits. So we teach them using materials known to them and relevant to their daily activities. But in the national exams, and even in the exercise book, some questions are relevant for city students and our students cannot answer them. Even the standard of language is different.” (T8)

“My headmaster is seldom seen in the school. But the assistant headmaster is very helpful. She connects me with the right people if I need any help.” (T9)

These challenges mentioned do not appear to be challenges concerning SBA per se. In fact, addressing student differences has been the core of teaching pedagogy, and ensuring students mastering one concept before moving on to the next concept is also mandatory. While it is true that documenting student progress in SBA is a monitoring imperative, doing it excessively is a waste of teaching time. Monitoring student progress is important to keep track of students' cognitive development, but the information is vital only at the school level for the teachers to strategise the precise interventions.

Because SBA was recently introduced nationwide, we anticipated that discrepancies would exist in the understanding of SBA policies and strategies among teachers, parents and students. The extra workload and mixed acceptance of the policy are the problem that needs to be addressed. This study also shows, however, that inconsistencies also exist among the State Education Department officers in delivering the transformation process. We also did not anticipate the concerns raised regarding the changes in the syllabus and how these changes would affect SBA implementation. This is beyond the scope of the present paper, but it does call for future research.

SBA improvement strategies

Because exams are not the focus of SBA, teachers felt that students did not take learning seriously, which led to their main concern that academic achievement would drop. To overcome this setback, respondents had the following suggestions.

“Because I have big classes, I put them into small groups of 4 to 5 by ability. I will let them do their work in the group. Sometimes I will put the fast achievers to help their friends. I can do this with the Year 3 students, but it is a little bit challenging for the Year 1 students.” (T1)

“With these kids, you must do it hands-on. Assessment must not always use activity sheets, but should include observations, game-play or role-play, or even competition. The difficult part is in giving them marks because you have to do it right after class.” (T8)

“I gave different work to different ability levels: I may want the good students to write five sentences but the weaker students may only need to write three sentences for the same task.” (T5)

“Sometimes I give extra classes and give them one-to-one guidance. And, of course I gave some extra worksheets for them to practise too.” (T9)

“Allow weaker students to have an extra five minutes to complete their assessment.” (T7)

“Standard 1 kids get bored easily, we are like a ‘magician’ and try to change our teaching strategies every day to attract them – I tell them stories, play dice with them, they throw the dice with Chinese characters and build sentences.” (T10)

As students’ capabilities are different and the learning pace needs to be different, there are always some students who are slower in achieving the targets. All the respondents mentioned that, to help those students, various strategies have been used to generate interest in learning among students. To ensure each student can achieve the learning outcomes, many teachers grouped students according to capability, and then, different approaches were used to explain the task to be performed either in class or during assessment. This explains reasons to opt for formative assessments to evaluate student performance to be much meaningful compared to summative examination that only shows final scores. Teachers are able to assess their student’s capability, capacity and skills gradually (in accordance to student’s learning phase) in order to achieve the final learning goals without rushing through syllabus or examination dates (Mutalib and Ahmad, 2016). This also promotes fun-learning, stress free learning environment. Teachers also became aware of the needs to create various types classroom activities to assess students’ physical, emotional, cognitive, affective and social performance.

The challenges in the classroom are mostly resolvable by the teachers. However, none of the respondents could come up with suggestions on how to cope with the increased workload caused by SBA documentation because “its beyond our control” (T5); “we only follow orders” (T2); “some of those officers don’t listen to us” (T10); “they also don’t know what is happening in the school” (T4) and “if we don’t follow (orders), the head teacher will get us” (T1).

Deeper explanation on SBA implementation, reporting, assessment and teaching approaches are strongly recommended for long term sustenance of this initiative. SBA firstly depends on teachers’ knowledge and preparedness to carry out the change from the before exam oriented to an exam free curriculum. This needs ample time for adapting and adopting into a new system. Failures may occur but eventually with the support of higher authorities e.g. principal, state departments and ministry and parents as well; teachers will be able to cope and see success.

Another area that strongly needs attention as an implication in improving SBA is the role of the principal. The principal’s role, actions and leadership practices change accordingly when there is change in the system, curriculum, pedagogical approaches, school academic and instructional management; student learning style and teaching adaptations; and school classroom learning climate. Apparently, this process takes time and ample understanding from the principal on the entire reform to be transmitted to the teachers. Hallinger and Lee

(2014) in a study on the impact on principals during education reform found that the role of the principal as an instructional leader is still misunderstood and mislead when education reform took place back in 1999. The case of adapting to change is much more challenging among novice principals (Galdames, Montecinos, Campos, Ahumada, & Leiva, , 2018) whereby the study suggested effective district level measures according to school demographic profiling.

Discussion

We conclude that the biggest challenges for these teachers in implementing SBA are the acceptance or ‘buy-in’ factors for the implementers, such as the effective delivery system, affective support mechanisms and getting correct facts about SBA. Clearly, the respondents in this study agreed with the move from an exam-oriented education system to an SBA system and acknowledged the effectiveness of the current system. They were aware that this assessment method is an on-going process, and they have to monitor the achievement of each student to ensure the effectiveness of learning. They felt that SBA is meaningful to students, and the benefits they gained are multidimensional. Firstly, students are allowed to learn according to their own pace, and that has encouraged and increased their interest in learning. Secondly, students have developed a positive attitude through SBA, including: greater enjoyment in learning which will enhance life-long learning skills; being out-spoken and able to communicate confidently and efficiently; and being encouraged to use collaboration skills that are needed in future working environments.

All respondents agreed that both learning and assessment should be authentic and should not only emphasise the end-of-year exam, which is just a focus on textbook skills. Additionally, they commented that students who are learning in this environment are happier, and more creative and talented; this has been proven through impressive results in the assessments. This system also provides immediate feedback to teachers, allowing them to make further decisions as to whether to give remedial help or enrichment. This matches the findings of other research (Chan & Sihdu, 2006) where SBA allowed teachers to decide on further strategies to be used in future.

There are some concerns, however, about students’ level of achievement in higher primary when they have to sit for the Year Six Assessment or UPSR. Some teachers mentioned their worries about student achievement among higher primary students because there was lower emphasis on writing skills in the lower primary grades. There has, however, been no research on such weaknesses under SBA to verify the concerns expressed in this study. Similarly, there was concern about the negative attitude of students in doing assessments, and some teachers were having difficulty in motivating students during assessments because of student misconceptions, while some teachers had a very positive response from students and found



that students performed better under SBA. These concerns are, so far, inconclusive, but indicate that both teachers and students should allow a longer period to adopt the system. Perhaps under full adoption of SBA, students will understand the system more and the issue of motivation will be overcome.

Because SBA is a newly implemented system, the heavy workload and time constraints were the major concerns of all respondents and had hindered some teachers in moving forward. One respondent thought that he did not gain any advantages from SBA, but instead it had increased his workload. Majid (2011) discovered similar findings when the respondents claimed that they needed further training on time management to implement SBA more efficiently. Other teachers thought SBA was an opportunity for self-improvement and a chance to examine the effectiveness of their teaching – and this is the positive attitude that we might want to promote among teachers. Noorazam (2011) commented that the right attitude from teachers, parents and students towards learning is crucial and is the best way to make SBA successful.

From the teachers' point of view, the strategies used in delivering knowledge or in assessment have changed due to the different assessment method. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that students are familiar with the assessment method. This has had an impact on teaching planning and daily teaching practices, as teachers are trying to raise interest in learning among students. Teachers should create more curiosity in learning to nurture creative and innovative humans. Several studies (Chapman, Tan, & Tan, 2010) have even suggested teachers should consider communication, critical thinking and teamwork skills in their assessments, and that those skills can be assessed through the activities such as role-play, dramas and project work – and these are some of the activities being carried out by the respondents in their lessons. Some respondents claimed that to reduce their workload in planning, they tried to collaborate with other teachers and share their experiences with each other. This indicated that there was some level of awareness about the importance of cooperation among teachers. In relation to this, some studies have suggested that teachers could organise field trips and excursions, which would allow students to nurture their learning opportunities and have the close contact with nature that they may not experience in the classroom (Chapman et al., 2010). The effectiveness of learning and assessment is dependent on the creativity of the teachers, which should be pre-designed together with the lesson plan. Regarding the strategies used to help the weaker students, all respondents had similar experiences using similar strategies, such as pulling students out from the classroom, giving extra lessons, providing individual help, differentiation, peer help, giving extra time in assessments, further explanation, explaining in a different language and underlining the key-words that have been used.

Implications

As indicated by the respondents and other researchers, training is needed for teachers to learn more about the new strategies in implementing SBA. Majid (2011) stated in his research that teachers claimed they needed time management training. One of the respondents from this study claimed that she has not been for official training but had only attended the training in the school. The government also acknowledged the importance of training to support teachers in implementing this new system. As such, the training programmes or the workshops should be increased, and every teacher should be given the opportunity to attend these programmes. The Principal's role in transferring skills and knowledge as well as giving best support during a change in the education system is vital. In addition, there are major concerns from teachers about heavy workloads in preparing teaching or assessment materials, as well as other management work related to SBA. Although the monthly or semester-based exam have been removed, teachers still think that their workload is heavy. The governing authorities and other stakeholders should help teachers by providing sufficient teaching materials or more collaboration time for teachers to discuss and exchange ideas and work together to decrease the time used in planning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that teachers have a basic understanding of the characteristics of SBA in primary schools. The findings are presented for three major aspects: the benefits of SBA, the weaknesses of SBA and the strategies used by the teachers to handle these difficulties. This study shows that SBA has benefited both teachers and students; the lively teaching approaches have had a positive impact on student learning, and this has been reflected in high-standard of student performance in the SBA. A limitation of this study is that the findings are only based on the points of view of twenty respondents on three aspects of SBA. This was also only a small-scale study, and it should not be seen to represent the perspectives of all teachers. This study should be followed up with other qualitative and quantitative research on the implementation of SBA.

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