

ACCEPTANCE TOWARDS SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENT AMONG AGRICULTURAL INTEGRATED LIVING SKILLS TEACHERS: CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at identifying the acceptance of teachers teaching Agricultural Integrated Living Skills (ILS) towards the School Based Assessment (SBA). Acceptance is associated with teachers' beliefs, attitudes and willingness to implement the assessment and involves a change in educational values. The quantitative approach was adapted from previous studies and contained 80 variables. The response rate was 80.5% from 322 teachers of Agricultural ILS from secondary schools throughout the country. Results showed that a majority of respondents were male teachers aged 42 years and younger and many had teaching experience in excess of 10 years. A large percentage of the respondents (86.3%) had taken a course on SBA, 60.6% were non-option teachers in agriculture, and a large percentage (51.8%) taught the subject in more than one level. The study revealed a moderate relationship between belief and practices ($r = 0.391$) while a weak relationship was found between attitude and teachers' practices ($r = 0.193$) and between willingness and teachers' practices ($r = 0.132$). Heavy workload contributed to a moderate belief that subsequently led to a weak attitude and a low willingness to implement SBA. The low level of belief, attitude and willingness clearly demonstrated that teachers' acceptance toward holistic assessment was low. Teachers were unable to accept SBA as a shift in educational assessment methods, let alone to replace the existing system of assessment.

Keywords: *Holistic assessment, school based assessment, teacher acceptance, teacher practices*

1 INTRODUCTION

In its effort to achieve a zero-dropout rate in this country, the Ministry of Education introduced School Based Assessment (SBA) to evaluate students' achievement in academic and non-academic fields. Its aim is to polish the potential of an individual towards producing excellent human capital in congruent with the aspirations and objectives of the National Education Philosophy. In a speech by the Deputy Prime Minister, Hj Muhyiddin Hj Mohd Yassin, who is also the Minister of Education, he stressed that SBA would provide opportunities for pupils to improve their overall self-potential and to become more creative and innovative with continuous assistance from teachers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012).

SBA is formative in nature, i.e. it is an assessment for learning. It is new to Malaysian teachers because examination based assessment has been an integral part of the national education system for so long (Adi Badiozaman, 2006). The public at large has been comfortable with the assessment of learning method that emphasized on students' achievement at the end of the learning period.

School based assessment has long been used in advanced countries like the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Most recently, Hong Kong applied SBA in all taught subjects. However, according to a preliminary study by Black and William (1998), it was not easy to cultivate a culture of assessment among teachers because of differences in levels of acceptance. Nonetheless, formative evaluation methods were still seen as authentic and when well implemented, would ensure that students would not only gain knowledge but would also master skills. The responsibility to realize the ministry's aspirations falls on the shoulders of teachers as primary agents of change.

As front liners, teachers must be confident of their ability to implement change. They should possess a positive attitude to effect and to sustain change. However, Baird's (2010) study on teachers' belief during an assessment revealed that the latter reported an increase in workload especially in administrative tasks such as filing and recording and repositing evidence. The situation is stressful for the teachers, so they would like the principle authority to take into account and prioritize their beliefs before implementing the assessment system on a large scale. Teachers' beliefs and attitude towards change and their willingness to act is related to their acceptance of change.

According to Ajzen (1991), an individual accepts a change when he or she fully believes in the change. Consequently, he or she would develop a positive attitude and would display his or her willingness to effect the change. Therefore, teachers should set aside their existing beliefs about summative assessment before accepting formative assessment, in order to ensure a successful implementation (Black, *et al.*, 2010). Teachers' acceptance is very important in ensuring that SBA's implementation is geared towards achieving the desired objectives and towards producing excellent human capital.

Therefore, a study to measure teachers' acceptance, i.e. their belief, attitude and willingness towards the implementation of SBA is very relevant to achieve a holistic system of assessment.

2 HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT AS A COMPONENT IN IMPLEMENTING A CURRICULUM

School based assessment is an effort by the government, through the Ministry of Education, to build a holistic human capital. SBA emphasizes on mastering knowledge, building intellectual capital, nurturing a culture of progressive attitude and encouraging the practice of high virtues, ethics and moral values. Its implementation is embodied in the Master Plan for Education Development and the Plan for National Integrity and it shares the aspirations and objectives of the National Mission. A holistic assessment combines SBA with central assessment. It is said to be capable of evaluating students' cognitive (intellectual), affective (emotional and mental) and psychomotor (physical) abilities in line with the requirements of the National Education Philosophy. Students are no longer evaluated at the end of the year or at the end of a lesson. Instead, they are evaluated throughout the learning process (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2007).

SBA for Agricultural Integrated Living Skills (ILS) was initiated as a pilot project in 2007 before it could be expanded into other subjects. As a formative assessment, evaluations were conducted throughout the learning period and a final examination was conducted as a summative assessment. SBA, which includes coursework, contributes towards 40% of the marks while central examination constitutes the remaining 60%. Formative assessment enables students to be evaluated on their knowledge and skills that cannot be measured during final examinations (Shepard, 2008).

Objectives of the curriculum could be achieved as students are evaluated throughout the learning process instead of at the end. By the end of the assessment period, students would be able to assess their own learning abilities, while teachers would be able to gauge the efficacy of their teaching. Therefore, SBA does not only serve as a teaching component but it is also the key to achieving the objectives of assessment for learning – or formative assessment (Black and William, 1998).

Black and William (1998) emphasized that formative assessment would provide teachers with additional information to complement their observations of their students. Consequently, it would enable teachers to make necessary improvements or changes in their teaching approach to reduce the gaps between students. In addition, to ensure the success of assessment for learning, Hargreaves (2005) suggested that teachers needed to be more creative and innovative in conducting formative assessments.

2.1 The assessment for learning concept

Assessment for learning helps teachers to identify students' achievement level. Teachers would be able to evaluate students immediately as students demonstrate their knowledge and skills during the assessment process. According to the Assessment Reform Group (2002), assessment for learning provides teachers with the opportunity to evaluate how much the students have learned and how effective were the teaching methods. As such, teachers should possess as much knowledge as possible especially pertaining to the concept and the implementation policy. According to Shepard (2002), teachers should be able to integrate assessment and teaching to make the teaching process more interesting and to enhance the students' learning outcome. A teacher who is knowledgeable about the assessment would internalize a belief in the system. He or she would subsequently display a positive attitude and would be willing to implement the concept.

3 METHODOLOGY

Data were obtained from questionnaires sent to 322 secondary school teachers who were teaching Agricultural Integrated Living Skills to students in Forms 1, 2 and 3 and were implementing coursework assessment. The schools were randomly selected. Results in Table 1 show the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for 'acceptance' of $\alpha=0.86$ and for 'practices' of $\alpha=0.81$. These values satisfy the reliability conditions set out in Nunnally (1978). In addition, correlation analysis was used to establish the relationships between variables in 'acceptance' (belief, attitude and willingness) and teachers' practices in conducting the assessment.

Table 1. Cronbach alpha values for 'acceptance' and 'practices' constructs.

Construct	Variable	Cronbach alpha	
Acceptance	Belief	0.932	
	Attitude	0.780	0.865
	Willingness	0.808	
Practices			0.819

N = 322

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of teachers in Agricultural ILS in the sample are male (Table 2), reflecting a male-dominated sector. Most of them are below 42 years old, and many had working experience of more than 15 years, i.e. a career that is considered mature by Guskey and Huberman (1995).

Table 2. Profile of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency (%)
Gender:	
Male	192 (59.6)
Female	130 (40.4)
Age (yr.):	
23-32	47 (14.6)
33-42	145 (45.0)
43-52	112 (34.8)
52-62	18 (5.6)
Teaching experience (yr.):	
1-5	63 (19.6)
6-10	51 (15.8)
11-15	104 (32.2)
16-20	52 (16.1)
> 21	52 (16.1)

N = 322

A large proportion of the Agricultural ILS teachers had attended SBA-related courses at various levels – school, district education office, state education office and the Examination Board (Table 3). Also, a large number taught the subject in more than one Forms, – a quarter of the respondents were teaching in three Forms – suggesting teachers’ workload of having to evaluate four Agricultural ILS modules as stipulated by the Examination Board (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2007).

Table 3. Frequency of respondents by attendance in SBA courses, levels taught and teaching option.

Item	Frequency (%)
Attended SBA courses:	
Yes	278 (86.3)
No	44 (13.7)

Item	Frequency (%)
Levels of agricultural ILS taught:	
1 Form	155 (48.1)
2 Forms	87 (27.0)
3 Forms	80 (24.8)
Teaching option:	
Agriculture	127 (39.4)
Non-agriculture	195 (60.6)

N = 322

Current findings are consistent with those of Rohayah (2007) and Tan (2010) that point towards the excessive workload issues. In addition, many teachers who are currently teaching Agricultural ILS in schools nationwide are non-agriculture option teachers. Mohammad Azhar (2006) and Abdul Zubir (2007) who looked into teachers' practices in conducting SBA in a number of subjects, including ILS, at the lower secondary level revealed similar findings. Despite various recommendations, these issues – excessive workload and non-option teachers – are long overdue but remain unresolved.

Correlation between “acceptance” and “teachers’ practices” is shown in Table 4. A moderate relationship is found between “belief” and “practices” ($r = 0.391$) while a weaker relationship is found between “attitude” and “practices” ($r = 0.193$), and between “willingness” and “practices” ($r = 0.132$). Overall, this study found a moderately weak relationship between “acceptance” and “teachers’ practices” in implementing SBA in schools. Belief is an initial emotional response. An individual who holds a positive belief would show a positive attitude. It would be followed by the behavior – a willingness to do certain tasks (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Since the Agricultural ILS teachers’ beliefs were moderate, they were unable to display the necessary attitude and effort because they were only following instructions (Rohayah, 2007 and Tan, 2010). Results from this study indicate that, in general, teachers – who should support holistic assessment in schools – have yet to fully accept SBA. It may be contributed by adverse emotions caused by heavy workloads, especially as teachers are also required to perform clerical tasks such as processing students’ marks, storing evidence and products and producing certifications.

Table 4. Relationship (r) between “acceptance” and “teachers’ practices”

	Belief	Attitude	Willingness
Practices	0.391 **	0.193 **	0.132 *

N = 322

** significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

* significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

From a student centered approach, SBA has changed to become teacher centered. Teachers are burdened with time and energy-consuming tasks of processing marks of hundreds of students. A majority of Agricultural ILS teachers teach more than one level. In fact, quite a number teach all three levels, i.e. Forms 1, 2 and 3, with a large number of students in each class. Current findings are consistent with Hill (2011) in suggesting that teachers' attitude and willingness to implement SBA are unpredictable despite having the necessary beliefs. A lot of time and effort would be required in order to see positive changes in teachers' attitude and willingness to implement holistic assessment.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The decision to support or oppose something is influenced by an individual's belief, which may be directly or indirectly influenced by one's experience. When belief is high, one would appear positive towards a new situation and display a willingness to act accordingly. On the contrary, when belief is low or negative, one would be unwilling to act.

In the context of the current study, a shift towards a holistic assessment requires teachers to trust the importance of SBA. According to Adi Badiozaman (2006), it is not easy to change public acceptance towards a new system of educational assessment, i.e. accepting holistic assessment to replace the present assessment system. Efforts to increase public acceptance towards a holistic assessment should start with the teachers. They should seek to increase teachers' beliefs to reach a high and sustainable level of attitude and willingness to implement SBA. The Ministry of Education must pay a closer attention to teachers' requirements as assessors at the school level. Knowledge and skills to implement SBA is much needed to help them carry out the assessment in schools. Dissatisfaction towards constant workload would affect teachers' emotions sufficiently to offset any beliefs about the importance and efficacy of holistic assessment to increase students' knowledge and skills. Focus must be directed towards managing teachers' acceptance of the assessment so that the required shift needed to produce excellent human capital is sustainable.

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