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# I-RoLE 2023

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
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**EMBRACING CHANGE:  
EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE  
OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC,  
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**13 - 14 MARCH 2023**

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**“Embracing Change: Emancipating the Landscape of  
Research in Linguistics, Language and Literature”**

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# EXPLORING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTING CEFR-ALIGNED FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Hanisah Mohd Yunus<sup>1</sup>; \*Lilliati Ismail<sup>2</sup>, Abu Bakar Mohamed Razali<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia

<sup>1</sup>gs55254@student.upm.edu.my

<sup>2</sup>lilliati@upm.edu.my

<sup>3</sup>abmr\_bakar@upm.edu.my

\*Corresponding author

## ABSTRACT:

The adoption of the CEFR undeniably leads to changes in curriculum, teaching and learning, as well as assessment. Changes in curriculum requires changes in teachers' practices and this demand puts strain on teachers as it requires them to change their practice and resume the role of "novice" again. This study explored English language teachers' beliefs about CEFR-aligned formative assessment and their classroom practices in the Malaysian primary school context. This study employed an explanatory sequential quantitative-driven design. In this design, the researcher collected data through two questionnaires, namely the Assessment Beliefs Questionnaire and the Assessment Practice Questionnaire. A cluster random sampling was used to collect data from 134 teachers at 30 selected schools in Selangor. The data was analysed using descriptive analysis (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis (Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient) using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 25. Findings of this study indicated that teachers held positive perceptions of formative assessment and these positive perceptions are reflected in their practices.

**Keywords:** CEFR-aligned formative assessment, teachers' beliefs and practices, primary schools

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The English language has become a universally accepted language of networking and communication as well as the unofficial international language of the Internet. In Malaysia, the English language is a necessity for business, entertainment, information technology, and science sectors of the economy. Living in this age of communication and information, in order to partake in the local and global dissemination of knowledge effectively and efficiently, students need to master the English language well. Although the medium of instruction in the Malaysian schools is Bahasa Malaysia (also known as the Malay language), the importance and significance of English as the second language certainly cannot be denied. As the English language "is promoted for its utilitarian value for employment, technology and globalisation" (Hardman & Rahman, 2014), the Malaysian education development needs to keep up with the constant demand for improvements in its delivery and effectiveness as well as to be relevant to the current needs of employment (Aziz, Rashid & Zainuddin, 2018).

In order to respond to such needs, the Malaysian education policy has constantly been reviewed, resulting in the most recent adaptation known as the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Implemented almost a decade ago, the Blueprint addresses various concerns and includes various shifts in theory and practice, involving numerous stakeholders throughout the country. It also specifies the importance of the development and the application of 21st century curriculum and assessment, 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” (Arbaa, Jamil & Ahmad, 2017, p.1). In addition, the Blueprint emphasises that student assessment is an on-going process and does not solely depend on examination scores.

As the concern about the effectiveness of student assessment continues to gain attention in education systems worldwide. Malaysian ESL (English as a Second Language) providers have shifted from a more traditional summative testing culture towards a more formative assessment environment which allows teachers to monitor and chart student learning and achievement (Ong, 2010; Othman, Salleh & Md. Norani, 2013; Swaran Singh, 2014). Subsequently, the movement towards a more formative assessment environment was strengthened in 2011 with the introduction of school-based assessment (SBA) in all primary schools by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). SBA was implemented under a new curriculum reform referred to as *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah* (KSSR). KSSR set national standards and performance levels for all primary school subjects including ESL.

Eventually, in line with the MOE’s decision to adopt international standards for the teaching and learning of English in order to produce students who can communicate in English effectively and compete in the global market as skilled workers, the KSSR standards were revised to align with the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for Languages (MOE, 2015). The CEFR sets internationally accepted standards tailored to meet the specific needs of Malaysia (Sidhu et. al, 2018). The adoption of the CEFR undeniably leads to changes in curriculum, teaching and learning, as well as assessment. Since changes in curriculum requires changes in teachers’ practices, “teachers are expected to adopt the new ideas and implement them in their teaching” (Fullan, 2001).

In a case study where ten Malaysian primary school ESL teachers were interviewed to identify the extent of their understanding of formative assessment and their reported practices of providing feedback in an SBA environment, teachers reported a lack of understanding in differentiating the formative and summative assessment (Hasim et., al, 2018). In another study carried out by Sidhu et al. (2018), it is indicated that teachers held positive perceptions of formative assessment, their practices however, revealed their inability to embrace the shift towards assessment for learning.

Synthesis of research related to teachers’ assessment practices has established strong links between teachers’ assessment practices and students’ learning achievement (Black & William, 1998; Moon, 2010; McMillan, 2013). According to Hasim et. al. (2018), research into teacher cognition focusing on what teachers think, know, and believe has emerged as a major area of inquiry in the field of language teaching over the past three decades, and in particular, the extent to which teachers’ stated beliefs match what they practice in their classrooms. Understanding the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices is essential for improving educational outcomes. Furthermore, in the assimilation of the new ideas and practices that teachers are required to adopt, in this case the CEFR-aligned formative assessment, encouraging teachers to reflect on their existing beliefs and behaviours could help them become more receptive to alternative perspectives and also prepare them to modify their knowledge and work in ways that are consistent with their developing views and research-based standards.





#### 4.8. Project Objective / Purpose

The main intention of the current study is to explore English language teachers' beliefs about CEFR-aligned formative assessment and their classroom practices in the Malaysian primary school context. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are English language teachers' beliefs about CEFR-aligned formative assessment in the primary school context?
- 2) What are the CEFR-aligned formative assessment practices carried out by the English language teachers in the primary school context?
- 3) To what extent do English language teachers' beliefs about CEFR-aligned formative assessment correspond to their practices in the primary school context?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed an explanatory sequential quantitative-driven design. In this design, the researcher collected data through two questionnaires, namely the Assessment Beliefs Questionnaire and the Assessment Practice Questionnaire. A cluster random sampling method was used to collect data from 134 teachers at 30 selected schools in Selangor. The data was analysed using descriptive analysis (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis (Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient) using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 25.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH QUESTION	STATISTICAL ANALYSES	RESULTS & FINDINGS
1. What are English language teachers' beliefs about CEFR-aligned formative assessment in the primary school context?	Frequency, Percentage, Mean, SD	The analysis of the data from the first section of the questionnaire revealed that the English language teachers believed that formative assessment serves the purpose to focus on students' improvement and progress towards the learning goals.
2. What are the CEFR-aligned formative assessment practices carried out by the English language teachers in the primary school context?	Frequency, Percentage, Mean, SD	The analysis of the data from the second section of the questionnaire revealed that the English language teachers used formative assessment for various purposes.
3. To what extent do English language teachers' beliefs about CEFR-aligned formative assessment correspond to their practices in the primary school context?	Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient	The results of the statistical analysis show significant correlations between all the subscales of the assessment beliefs and the assessment practices. Accordingly, there were no conflicts or differences in their beliefs and practices

Table 1

Results show that the assessment beliefs of the English language teachers in the Malaysian primary school context go in line with their practices. Regarding the assessment beliefs and practices that are related to the formative assessment purposes, analysis of the data show that the items that received the highest percentage of frequent use and of agreement for beliefs and practices were diagnosing strength and weaknesses in students, providing information about students' progress, and providing feedback to students as they learn

respectively. These results provide evidence that the EL teachers in the Malaysian primary school context tend to view the important role of assessment in improving teaching and learning.

Regarding the assessment beliefs and practices related to the methods and techniques in implementing formative assessment, the results of this study revealed that EL teachers tended to use a variety of assessment methods to assess students' language ability in their classrooms. In a review of studies on teachers' assessment beliefs, Barnes, Fives & Dacey, (2015) found that most of the research on teachers' beliefs about the use of various assessment methods highlights a certain degree of alignment with the notion where assessment advances teaching and guides learning.

Regarding the assessment beliefs and practices that are related to feedback, interpreting, and reporting of results in formative assessment, the analysis of the data show that EL teachers emphasis on measuring how well students perform in relation to specified criteria rather than measuring the success of performance. This indicates that they adopt formative students-centred approach and a criterion-referenced approach rather than norm-referenced approach.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

If the classroom assessment is the real focus of assessment reform in English language centres in the Malaysian primary school context, EL teachers should be more empowered in their role as the assessors of students. Their knowledge about what, how, when to assess should be developed through long profession development courses; one-shot workshops or seminars would not be enough to improve instructors' assessment literacy. Instead, supporting EL teachers by providing them with materials and other resources to practically encourage them to apply assessment for learning is the way to go.

The current study only investigated the EL teachers' practices based on self-reports, their actual practices, however, might be different. Thus, future studies of assessment practices should include classroom observations and examination of documents related to evaluation and assessment.

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