

Reintroducing the Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) and the Form Three Assessment (PT3): Issues and Challenges of Classroom Assessment

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Abstract

The transformation of the education system involves improving the quality of education, increasing access to education, and raising awareness about the importance of education. Generally, primary and secondary school education is the foundation and initial step for every student before successfully progressing to higher levels of education. This foundation is crucial to produce a new generation balanced in various aspects such as intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, and personality, and possesses creative, critical thinking and is competitive. The announcement by the Ministry of Education Malaysia to abolish the Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) and the Form Three Assessment (PT3) has elicited various responses among educators and parents. These responses range from full support to concerns about how the implementation of learning will change. While some support the abolition, others criticize it, believing that the move will affect the quality of education in Malaysia. Several factors lead to the pressure from certain parties to reintroduce the UPSR and PT3 to ensure the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, such as demands from parents, a high and dense syllabus, classroom student density, and the readiness of Classroom Assessment (PBD) implementation at the school level. In conclusion, any changes that policymakers wish to implement in the field of education must thoroughly examine and study the impact and challenges to ensure the enhancement of the country's education quality.

Keywords: Reintroducing the Primary School Evaluation Test, Form Three Assessment, Classroom Assessment

Introduction

The Malaysian Education Development Policy aims to achieve five main outcomes: (1) moderation, (2) quality, (3) equity, (4) unity, and (5) efficiency (Sarudin et al., 2019). These goals are intended to enhance Malaysia's educational performance to a level comparable to high-performing education systems in developed countries. This aligns with the aspirations outlined in the National Dialogue, with a commitment to achieve better outcomes. In addition to these main outcomes, the policy also embodies the vision of the National Education Philosophy, emphasizing the importance of balanced education for every student. This includes the development of knowledge, thinking skills, leadership abilities, language proficiency, ethics, spirituality, and a strong sense of national identity to prepare students to succeed in a challenging global environment (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This national education policy is also dynamic, urging the educational assessment system to evolve in line with current situations and needs. This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when Datuk Dr. Radzi Jidin, the then Minister of Education, decided to abolish the Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) and Form Three Assessment (PT3). In its place, the Classroom Assessment (PBD) system was enhanced to measure student achievement levels (Sulaiman & Yunus, 2021). This was done to reduce the academic burden on students and teachers and provide a fairer opportunity for all students to realize their potential.

Senior Lecturer of the Center for Educational Studies and Community Wellbeing at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Ahmad (2022), believes that the hasty abolition of UPSR and PT3, replaced by the full implementation of a less efficient PBD system, has become a significant issue in the national education system in Malaysia. According to him, the abolition of the UPSR examination at the primary school level and PT3 at the secondary school level has significantly affected students' academic focus and caused concerns among parents about encouraging and motivating their children's learning. Moreover, the readiness and competency of teachers in terms of knowledge and skills to fully implement PBD also become factors in this issue (Radi, 2022). This statement is supported by a study from Faudzi & Ahmad (2022), which found that teachers have a low level of readiness to implement PBD for the History subject in schools during teaching and learning sessions. The authors argue that the approach required for examination preparation versus ongoing assessment during teaching and learning differs, causing confusion and a lack of skills among teachers in adapting to the new teaching methods required to fully implement PBD (Faudzi & Ahmad, 2022).

The implementation of PBD is more challenging with a large number of students in a class, where teachers need to follow the dense content format of the Primary School Standard Curriculum and the Secondary School Standard Curriculum. From the aspect of teachers' evaluation and assessment through PBD, teachers are said to have less autonomy to make professional judgments. According to Deci & Ryan (2008), autonomy is a crucial factor for teachers in carrying out their duties. Teacher autonomy helps showcase the best school practices, increases commitment, and job satisfaction, reduces disciplinary issues and teacher absenteeism, and adds to the enjoyment and satisfaction of work (Deci & Ryan, 2008). PBD, previously known as 'School-Based Assessment', started in 2011, before its name was changed in 2016 (Ambotang et al., 2021). The improvements to PBD are evident, taking into account the aspects of cognitive (intellectual) assessment, affective (emotional and spiritual), and psychomotor (physical), in line with the objectives of the National Education Philosophy (Omar 2019). This assessment includes four components: (1) 'Central Assessment', (2) Physical

Activity Assessment, (3) Sports & Co-curricular, and (4) Psychometric Assessment (Manap et al., 2020).

Assessment

Assessment is an essential process in the education system to assist teachers in evaluating student performance by collecting, interpreting, and using information. It helps teachers make sound educational decisions and identify students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas of learning that need improvement. By utilizing assessment, teachers can provide more accurate and high-quality guidance to help students achieve their potential (McMillan, 2011). Assessment is a means to evaluate and measure a student's progress in achieving curriculum objectives. It involves gathering data about students' performance, abilities, and development, which assists teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning, besides identifying students' needs and providing appropriate support.

Classroom Assessment (PBD)

The Classroom Assessment (PBD) was established by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) in line with the changes in the National Education Assessment System. PBD is an assessment method that is authentic and holistic, focusing more on students' development and learning rather than being exam-oriented. PBD also serves as one of the methods for assessing the overall development of students, ensuring fair learning opportunities for all students (Jamil et al., 2018). The concept of PBD is a continuous process involving teachers, students, parents, and schools to gather, analyze, and reflect on information about students' development, progress, abilities, and mastery of the desired curriculum objectives. Teachers can use PBD to detect students' prior knowledge, monitor their overall progress, identify strengths and weaknesses in learning, determine the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods, plan, modify, and improve teaching and learning strategies, and undertake appropriate follow-up actions (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019).

Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)

Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) was introduced in 1988 and is a mandatory examination for all Year 6 students in primary schools in Malaysia. The purpose of the UPSR is to measure the academic achievement level of students and assist them in preparing for higher levels of education. The UPSR is a test to assess the achievement level of primary school students in mastering basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic (also known as the 3M) (Sulaiman, 2022). Additionally, UPSR results are also used as one of the factors in placing students into secondary schools and specific stream classes such as science and technical streams in secondary schools. Although the UPSR is used to assess students' proficiency levels, it is also used to evaluate the progress of schools, measure the efficiency of teachers, and assess the academic performance of schools.

Form Three Assessment (PT3)

The Form Three Assessment (PT3) is a national examination for students in Malaysia at the end of their third year of secondary schooling. Its main objective is to evaluate students' academic performance and measure their achievement against the national education standards (Noh & Matore, 2020). The PT3 in Malaysia is administered by the Ministry of

Education Malaysia and is mandatory for all students in both government and private secondary schools. PT3 is conducted in two phases: 'School-Based Assessment' and 'Central Assessment'. The School-Based Assessment is a continuous assessment carried out by teachers throughout the academic year, while the Central Assessment is a written examination managed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia at the end of the academic year. The results of both the School-Based Assessment and Central Assessment are combined to determine the final PT3 grades of the students (Hussin, 2019; Sabbir, 2019). The PT3 assessment is a crucial evaluation tool for students, as it determines their eligibility to continue their education and establishes their admission into upper secondary school, which is Form Four. The assessment results also serve as a benchmark for schools to evaluate their academic performance and make improvements in their teaching and learning processes (Examination Board, 2020; Noh & Matore, 2020).

Factors Justifying the Reintroduction of UPSR and PT3

Education is a primary factor capable of significantly impacting an individual's selfdevelopment and offering opportunities for future planning. The Classroom-Based Assessment (PBD) system, introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, represents a new assessment format for primary and secondary schools. It replaces the exam-oriented learning system. The Ministry also expressed its primary intention to strengthen the implementation of PBD after the announcement of the abolition of the UPSR and PT3 examinations to measure student achievement starting in 2020 by the Senior Education Minister, Datuk Radzi Jidin, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that struck the world at that time (Sulaiman & Yunus, 2021). However, throughout the implementation of PBD, several factors emerged that prompted various parties to urge the Ministry to reintroduce the UPSR and PT3 examinations to address those issues.

Pressure Factors From Parents

The factor urging the return of UPSR and PT3 continues to be a hot topic in the country's education system, stirring emotions among various parties, especially parents who are concerned about the academic direction of their children, which seems to lack clear objectives compared to when UPSR and PT3 existed. Due to these concerns, parents have requested the Ministry of Education (KPM) to consider reactivating UPSR and PT3 (Hakim & Nizam, 2022; Said, 2022). This issue was raised following the change in our country's government and the appointment of the new Malaysian Minister of Education, the Honorable Fadhlina Binti Sidek. According to Minister of Education Fadhlina Sidek, the decision to reintroduce UPSR and PT3 would be considered after the conclusion of the 'final wave' of the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025, expected to end in 2025, based on the presentation of that report. This is because a decision cannot be made in the near term, and she asks parents to give space to the PBD system, which assesses the potential of students holistically and not just based on academic results. This sentiment is also supported by a handful of parents who believe that UPSR and PT3 are no longer relevant instruments for assessing student performance (Awang, 2022).

Factors of High and Dense Syllabus Level

Furthermore, there exists a factor concerning the dense and high level of syllabus in schools. According to Datuk Dr. Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki, students and educators dealing with a high curriculum syllabus are a source of problems for students, teachers, and parents (Arifin, 2022). Today's syllabus is said to still follow an exam-based format since 2017 and is not aligned with the more holistic and continuous practices of PBD (Sadiq, 2023). This issue is also linked to the failure in implementing PBD in schools when teachers face challenges regarding the limited time available to execute it. Abdullah (2019) opined that teachers in Malaysia find it challenging to manage assessments, as stated in the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document. Even though teachers have tried to follow the syllabus through the format of the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document at the Primary School Standard Curriculum and Secondary School Standard Curriculum levels, it causes problems in implementing a 21st-century concept teaching system due to time constraints in meeting the syllabus requirements (Abdullah, 2019). This issue has also been raised by educators who view today's syllabus as being self-indulgent and not aligning with the ideal age level of students in schools (Arifin, 2022). This factor is also concerning when teachers must teach subjects outside their specialization due to another issue, which is the shortage of teachers in some schools. According to Hafizati & Suziyani (2021), various parties will start pointing fingers at nonspecialized teachers because they do not have a comprehensive foundation of knowledge in their teaching field.

Factor of High Student Density in Classes

Among the factors that further highlight this issue is when the ministry is still unable to find a solution concerning the problem of a dense and non-ideal number of students in a classroom (Hafidah, 2022). The reality in schools today is that they have to accommodate a large number of students, causing schools to fail in reducing the number of students per classroom. On average, both primary and secondary day schools have to place between 35 to 45 students in a classroom, which is deemed a failure to meet the ideal number of 20 to 25 students. This ideal number is one of the main prerequisites for the implementation of PBD. This causes concern among parents about the PBD assessment. According to Datuk Anuar Ahmad, the failure in implementing PBD should not be blamed on the teachers' inadequacies. However, it is due to the failure of the ministry itself in not preparing adequately before abolishing UPSR and PT3. As a result, teachers find it challenging to manage classroom situations and the discipline of students if the number is too high, causing disruptions to teaching and learning sessions (Said, 2022).

Factor of Readiness for PBD Implementation at the Ministry Level

Next, the national education system, which is perceived to be still unprepared for the change to implement PBD fully, leads many to believe that the abolition of UPSR and PT3 was a decision made hastily without thorough preparation. Issues like the challenging and elevated syllabus have still not been resolved to date. To implement PBD, schools are still facing the factor of a high number of students in a classroom. This indicates that PBD was fully rolled out before its proper time, even though many countries have moved forward using such methods (Asrol, 2022). However, it cannot be denied that other advanced nations are still sticking to exam systems, such as China and Singapore. These countries perform far better overall, as

seen in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, where they ranked among the top in the world (Coughlan, 2019). This shows that these nations have not adopted the PBD assessment system like in Malaysia because they are not yet ready and are still facing issues with a high number of students in classrooms

Factor of Teacher's Readiness and Competence to Implement PBD at School Level

Experienced and highly skilled teachers in their field are essential for equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and understanding required to succeed in education. Quality teachers can benefit by delivering high-quality instruction and achieving students' potential more effectively (Akhmarudi et al., 2020). There are several challenges in implementing PBD in schools that are often raised. Among them is the aspect of teacher's readiness and competence to implement it. The factor of teacher readiness in implementing PBD indicates that teachers are still confused and unprepared to provide detailed feedback to students on their 'Mastery Level.' This makes it challenging for students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and further complicates the process of improvement and guidance (Khamis & Selamat, 2019).

Similarly, the factor of teachers lacking competence in terms of knowledge and skills in implementing PBD has a negative impact on student outcomes. According to a study by Yeh & Khairani (2018), the researchers emphasized the importance of teachers possessing sound knowledge and skills in carrying out PBD. They stated that assessing teachers should have the right skills and knowledge to achieve the desired outcomes (Yeh & Khairani 2018). Therefore, teachers must ensure they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to assess correctly and achieve the desired results. This issue was confirmed in a study conducted by Faudzi & Ahmad (2022), which found that the competence of History teachers in implementing PBD in teaching and learning was at a moderate level in terms of knowledge.

Furthermore, the study also found that teachers face a lack of knowledge in selecting and producing PBD instruments to match the skill level to be assessed with the correct methods and instruments (Abdullah, 2019)

Factor of Teacher Integrity in Assessing Through PBD

The factor of teachers being unable to assess transparently also results in the outcome of the PBD implementation being deemed without the expected value and quality. Is the 'Mastery Level' or 'TP' an average of skills assessed fairly and comprehensively? Is their judgment accurate regarding the mastery of each student for the subjects taught? Doubts related to this have also become an issue for teachers in implementing PBD (Adnan, 2022). Professional judgment is crucial in curriculum development to ensure that it encompasses all the necessary aspects to achieve the desired goals. Teachers also run the risk of being biased and "playing favorites" when assessing students' achievement levels. This was proven in a study by researchers Ali & Veloo (2017) that found injustice in assessing and measuring the 'Mastery Level' of students through PBD. Reporting on PBD is essential to ensure trust and confidence from parents in the education system. It is vital to ensure that students receive quality instruction and accurate assessment. This factor proves that parents have validity issues and doubts (Salleh et al., 2019).

Suggestions for Improvement

The abolition of UPSR and PT3 is a significant step taken by the Ministry of Education (KPM) to enhance the country's education system. Although many benefits can be derived from this abolition, the Ministry continues to be urged by various parties to reinstate the previously abolished UPSR and PT3. This highlights the importance of the Ministry to ensure that every effort meets the people's needs and expectations.

Ministry of Education Malaysia

KPM (Ministry of Education) needs to conduct a comprehensive and thorough study related to the impact of the abolition of UPSR and PT3. This research is necessary to measure the extent to which the abolition has benefited students and schools, as well as identify any arising problems. KPM must clearly and precisely explain the objectives and benefits of abolishing UPSR and PT3. This can be accomplished by providing information and educational materials for parents, teachers, and students. Additionally, KPM should be ready to listen to and evaluate the opinions and feedback from stakeholders, ensuring that any effort towards change is based on current needs and is aligned with current circumstances. Every change to be implemented should be carefully considered by examining its effects from various angles. The process of framing and organizing the learning and teaching system in schools to meet set standards should also be executed more effectively. Resources and assistance to schools, teachers, and students are essential for quality learning. For instance, addressing the high content of the school syllabus is necessary to prevent student dropout. KPM is also responsible for providing school infrastructure facilities to accommodate a large capacity of students if they wish to continue implementing PBD (School-Based Assessment). It is crucial to ensure a conducive and comfortable environment for teachers and students to facilitate the learning process, especially the implementation of PBD effectively.

Teacher

The competency of teachers in implementing PBD (School-Based Assessment) can be enhanced through the provision of incentives to teachers. Teachers should be rewarded for their efforts in implementing PBD with full commitment. This aligns with the view that rewards are one of the ways to enhance teachers' work motivation (Dudung, 2018). Teachers will be more enthusiastic when their efforts are valued and will experience job satisfaction when implementing PBD. Therefore, this passion and motivation indirectly can enhance their competency. According to Omar (2021), a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management, Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Malaya, suggested that offering incentives to teachers provides an opportunity to equip Malaysian students with the latest and most engaging teaching and facilitation methods, helping them compete and make a name on the international stage. This ensures that Malaysian students have access to the knowledge and skills needed to succeed globally.

School management, especially principals/headmasters, should protect the teachers' instructional time, which is the teaching and learning period. Surveys have shown that teaching and learning time is affected due to programs conducted concurrently. Therefore, principals/headmasters should ensure that non-teaching and learning programs are planned focusly and according to the calendar without affecting classroom teaching and learning time. Principals/headmasters should organize school activities systematically to prevent any

disruption to the teaching and learning process (Drahman & Alias, 2020). Their responsibility to safeguard instructional time is by encouraging teachers to fully utilize teaching time and limit disruptions from other activities (Aziz et al., 2015). Fully utilized teaching and learning time allows PBD to be conducted within its period, preventing time-constraint issues. Furthermore, having assistant teachers to collaborate in implementing PBD based on evaluations and assessments can overcome issues of bias and inequality in professional judgment regarding students' mastery levels. An analysis of teacher training needs should also be referred to, and the usage of this analysis can be promoted as a channel for teachers to list training needs related to PBD implementation. When PBD-related training exists on the teacher training needs analysis for a school or educational institution, the principal/headmaster should take the initiative to assist teachers in resolving arising issues. Filling in the teacher training needs analysis consistently will also empower the use of the Training Management System, which includes professional learning community activities. This aligns with the Malaysian Teacher Standards (SGM) in the National Education Policy, emphasizing training, assessment, and facilities so that teachers achieve the desired competency levels (Abdul Muttalip et al., 2021).

Lastly, reducing the administrative burden on teachers, such as preparing record files, reports, and manual analyses, deprives them of sufficient time to prepare teaching and learning materials smoothly and with quality. Even if UPSR and PT3 were reinstated, tasks like preparing question sets, and supervising exams should not fully involve school teachers. KPM (Ministry of Education) should also be more responsive and considerate in addressing the issue of a shortage of teachers in specific fields to address the issue of non-option teachers forced to teach specific subjects. To mitigate dropouts, this is crucial to ensure students' success in all subjects.

School

Schools should hold clear explanations and discussion sessions about the reasons for abolishing UPSR and PT3 with parents and teachers. Schools must understand that the primary purpose of abolishing these exams is to reduce pressure on students and give them the opportunity to focus their learning on more essential topics. Schools also need to assure them that even though these exams are no longer held, students can still gain the necessary experiences and skills through other activities such as projects, charitable work, and social skills. It is crucial to ensure that all teachers understand the changes in the teaching and learning system after the abolition of UPSR and PT3. Teachers should strive to adjust their teaching to meet the needs of students and ensure that they acquire a sufficient understanding of important topics. In addition, schools should provide adequate alternatives for parents and students to measure their academic performance. This can be done through alternative assessment systems such as homework, projects, and school tests. Schools should determine a fair and objective grading scale and standard to ensure that students can compare their performance with that of other students. Furthermore, schools need to ensure that students clearly understand the reasons why UPSR and PT3 were abolished and how this can provide them with advantages and opportunities to grow in various fields. Besides, schools should educate and guide students on future planning and emphasize the importance of social skills and careers besides academic performance. Schools and teachers should also undergo sufficient training and experience through extracurricular activities such as projects, work

visits, and volunteer activities. This helps to boost students' confidence and develop their skills in multiple areas.

Amalan

Instructional Leadership practices can help principals improve the effectiveness of quality teaching and facilitation processes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In this context, supervisory and assessment activities are the tasks of leaders to ensure consistency between school objectives and classroom practices. PBD (School-Based Assessment) is an assessment conducted by teachers as an indication of student development in classroom teaching and learning sessions. Therefore, the implementation of PBD by teachers should also be emphasized as an essential aspect evaluated regarding the effectiveness of teaching and facilitation. Continuous supervision and monitoring by school administrators of PBD's implementation in teaching and facilitation by teachers are crucial. This perspective aligns with the opinion of Ibrahim et al (2015) which states that supervision and assessment of teachers are vital.

Moreover, principals/headmasters should provide advisory and guidance services to teachers concerning the implementation of PBD. Individual or group advisory services can be based on the findings from supervision and monitoring, so improvements, especially in the PBD's implementation by teachers, can be made. Consequently, the teachers' competency will indirectly be enhanced. Student feedback can also be used for more targeted improvements towards PBD's implementation. Adding a feedback element in supervision or monitoring can serve as data to identify suitable interventions to enhance teacher competency. This suggestion aligns with the opinion stating that the availability of feedback resources is deemed essential and valuable to facilitate teaching sessions (Sufi et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The abolition of UPSR and PT3 exams and the issue of reinstating these exams in Malaysia have become a heated and controversial topic among parents, teachers, schools, students, and stakeholders due to the advantages and disadvantages of both. From a positive perspective, the abolition of the UPSR and PT3 exams is seen to benefit students as it provides a less stressful and burdensome learning environment and allows them to expand their creativity and produce various innovations. Conversely, reinstating the UPSR and PT3 exams is also viewed as beneficial for the development of the Malaysian education system because it provides a structured and consistent approach to student assessment. However, reinstating the UPSR and PT3 will pose various challenges, such as a lack of resources for adequate teacher training and the potential for cheating. However, the PBD system implemented by KPM to provide a fairer and more holistic assessment for each student also faces several issues related to the level of readiness and competency of teachers to implement PBD effectively. Solutions and suggestions should focus on providing sufficient resources to students and teachers to ensure fairness and accuracy in assessment and promote the importance of learning and creativity among students. Good and realistic proposals should be offered and implemented to ensure that the education system in Malaysia evolves and meets current and future needs. In conclusion, KPM, the Malaysian Examinations Board (LPM), teachers, schools, parents, students, and stakeholders need to cooperate and discuss openly and honestly to find the best and most suitable solution to address this issue. If all parties work together and

understand that this issue is crucial not only for the present but also for the future of the nation's education, then we can effectively address the demand to reinstate the UPSR and PT3 and benefit all parties involved.

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