



Plenary 1

Assessment in the New Millennium: Malaysian Exams at the International Crossroads

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Abstract

Accountability in assessment is increasingly demanded by all sectors of society because important decisions are being made of our students on the basis of their examination performance. Malaysia practises a centralized education system where common standardized national tests are administered by a central body – the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate, which is a division of the Ministry of Education. However, these standardized tests have begun a metamorphosis towards ‘use-oriented’ testing and consequential validity. In addition to the more conventional types of test items that minimize statistical unreliability, tests today also include portfolios, projects and performance-based measurements to accommodate the view that testing is embedded in educational, social and political contexts. Testing today is beginning to address issues related to the rationale for giving tests and the effects tests have on test takers, education, and society as a whole. The presenter will trace the development of national tests, and the various assessment modes used, with an emphasis on the rigorous procedures employed in developing tests for ensuring greater international recognition.

Summary of the Paper

Education – Direction

Malaysia must seriously enhance the generation and accessibility of information, knowledge and wisdom to everybody. In addition, a nation that is developed on



knowledge, skills and affluence must not neglect aspects of morality and an adherence to the teachings of religion. Education is the nurturing of the total human being. It is a comprehensive nurturing (scheme) that does not leave out nor forget anything (that is part of man) – his body, his intellect and his spirit, his material and spiritual life and his every earthly activity.

Mission

Our mission is to develop a world class quality education system which will realize the full potential of the individual and fulfill the aspirations of the nation.

The quest for nation building is evident in the many changes and reforms made in Malaysian education system, right from the pre-independence to the post-independence era, from the 20th to the 21st century, from the Razak Report to the Cabinet Committee Report, and from the Education Enactment 1961 to the Education Act 1996. Policies have been planned, reviewed and reformed with the commitment to make our education system, one which will equip our young with the necessary skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that would do our country proud.

Concern

The academic performance in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination, particularly of the rural students, remains a major concern. The overall failure rates at the national level were 33.9 per cent and 32.9 per cent in 1993 and 1995 respectively. Of the total failure in 1995, 58.3 per cent were rural students. An analysis of the academic achievement by subjects showed that more than half of the rural students failed in English and 38.5 per cent in Mathematics. Among the rural students who sat for pure science subjects, only 3.5 to 5.1 per cent of them managed to obtain excellent grades as compared with 9 to 12 per cent for the urban students. Is such achievement linked to assessment?

Assessment and Education

Assessment is seen 'as a device for raising standards, measuring deviation or abnormality, and securing equitable treatment.' (Gillian Sutherland, 1996).

Assessment influences learning in four main ways (Broadfoot, 1996):

- Assessment provides motivation to learn.
- Assessment helps students (and teachers) decide what to learn.
- Assessment helps students learn how to learn.
- Assessment helps students learn to judge the effectiveness of their learning.

Assessment – direction

Assessment is now at the following crossroads:

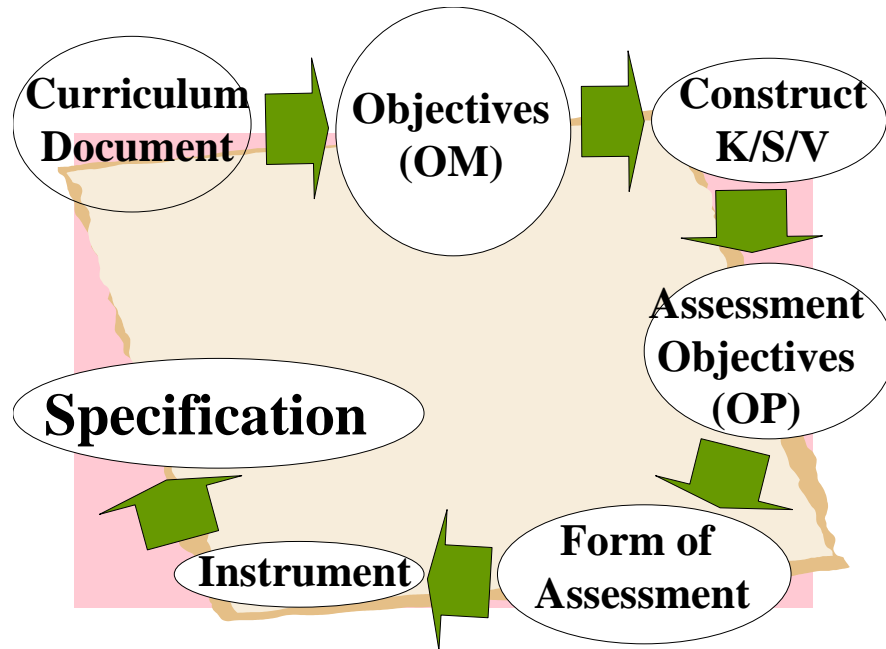
- Assessment or education
- Of learning or for learning
- Linear or modular
- Norm-referenced or criterion-referenced
- Centralized or school-based
- Topic-based or construct-based
- For knowledge or for qualification

The assessment framework

The framework involves the 3 processes of designing, developing and evaluating tests.

Designing

In designing a test, test setters have to refer to the various stages illustrated in the diagram below.



Developing

In test development, test setters need to consider

- Item type
- Item classification
- Construct
- Topic
- Level of difficulty

Evaluating

In evaluation of tests, a nine-point system is recommended comprising the 3 aspects of conformity, accuracy and suitability.

Conformity to:

- curriculum
- opportunity to learn

- specification

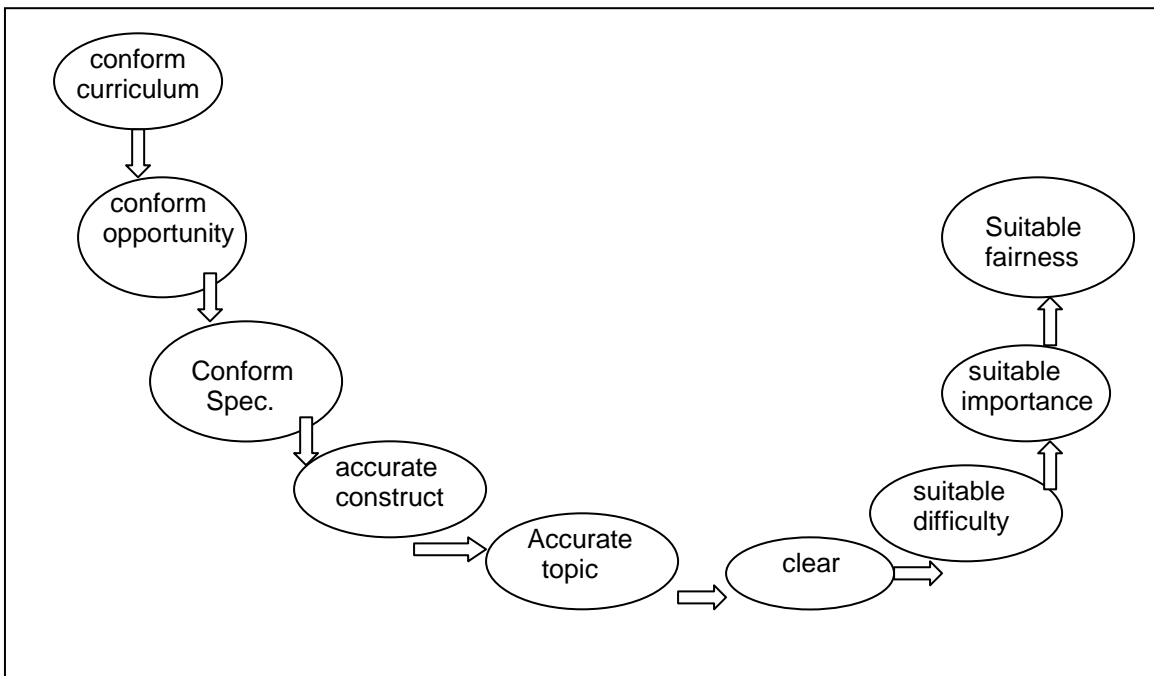
Accuracy in:

- construct
- topic
- clarity (readability)

Suitability in terms of:

- levels of difficulty
- importance
- fairness (not bias)

All items evaluated can either be accepted, rejected or keep in view (KIV) as illustrated in the diagram below.



Issues and concerns raised

1. How successful is our examination system moving towards Criterion Reference Test (CRT)?

The success level varies and it depends on subjects. CRT is difficult to implement for general and non-technical subjects as teachers have found out that CRT is more suitable for technical subjects. However, the examination syndicate is trying hard to introduce CRT to all subjects.

2. What is the difference between general and basic education?

Basic education focuses on numeracy, literacy and skills while general education involves problem-solving, integration of skills and the moving away from learning the subject per se. For example, the learning of certain constructs through Maths.

3. When was *'The Assessment Framework'* designed? Is it disseminated to all school teachers?

'The Assessment Framework' was designed in 1994. Last year, we organised a regional dissemination of *the Framework* involving five regions and teachers were represented too. This year, 600 teachers will be inducted. Universities will be inducted to *the Framework* too.

4. Do teachers encounter problems with *The Framework*? How do you overcome the problems?

New teachers are exposed and inducted to *The Framework*. Generally, these teachers understood *The Framework* theoretically but not in practice.

5. What are the expectations of the stakeholders?

The Framework provides a common premise or language for all stakeholders to talk and discuss assessment matters.