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Teacher-led  
Learning Circles  
for Formative Assessment

# Teacher-Led Learning Circles for Formative Assessment: FINAL REPORT MALAYSIA



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# FINAL REPORT MALAYSIA

**Teacher-Led Learning Circles for  
Formative Assessment Project**

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## Part 1 – Country Profile

### National Context

Education in Malaysia has gone through various changes and development. It is hoped that the narratives in this section could provide an overview and a clear understanding on how the education system and its development have come to place. Though the focus of this research is on primary education, it is indeed necessary to expose the readers to the general context of education in Malaysia, its system and matters arising from the system in practice towards meeting the current needs and economic development demands. The historical narrative for this purpose starts from the post-colonial era onwards (1955-present).

Moving from the colonial education system towards the national education system, education in Malaysia has gone through various reformations where the very first reformation began in 1955 through 1961 (Sufean, 2002). This reformation initiative had introduced several education innovations which were based on policies described in several important education documents and reports such as the Razak Report (1956), the Rahman Talib Report (1960), and Education Act (1961), etc. Innovations were in the forms of (but not limited to) policies, school curriculum and syllabi, pedagogical and assessment approaches, and practices.

### National Education Philosophy of Malaysia & Malaysia School Education System

The following is the standard statement of Education Philosophy which could be found in the Curriculum Blueprint:

*Pendidikan di Malaysia adalah suatu usaha berterusan ke arah memperkembangkan lagi potensi individu secara menyeluruh dan bersepadu untuk melahirkan insan yang seimbang dan harmonis dari segi intelek, rohani, emosi dan jasmani; berdasarkan kepercayaan dan kepatuhan kepada Tuhan. Usaha ini adalah bagi melahirkan warganegara Malaysia yang berilmu pengetahuan, berketerampilan, berakhlak mulia, bertanggungjawab dan berkeupayaan mencapai kesejahteraan diri serta memberi sumbangan terhadap keharmonian dan kemakmuran keluarga, masyarakat dan negara.*

Education in Malaysia is a continuous effort towards further developing individual potential comprehensively and integrated towards balanced and harmonious individuals in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical; based on beliefs and faith in God. This effort is to produce Malaysian citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and good moral conduct, responsibility and capability of achieving personal well-being and ability to contribute to the harmony and prosperity of the family, society and country.

Malaysian school education system is divided into two levels, they are the primary school level and the secondary level. Based on the Education Act 1966 and the Circular Letter on Professional Practice No. 14/2002 (*Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas Bil. 14/2002*), primary education is compulsory. The primary school education system is further divided into two phases with Phase 1 starts with Year 1 through Year 3 and Phase 2 starts with Year 4 through Year 6. Year 1 begins at the age of 7 years old. As for the secondary school, it is sub-divided into two levels which are the lower secondary level (Form 1 through Form 3; equivalent to Year 11 through Year 13 to some countries) and the upper secondary level (Form 4 and Form 5; age range between 16 and 17 years old). Since this project focuses on the primary school level, an elaboration on the primary school system and structure is necessary to give readers a context on primary education in Malaysia.

## Primary School Education

Malaysia primary education is unique due to our demographical stance where Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society. Just before Malaysia, then was The Federation of Malaya or *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*, achieved its independence from the British Rule, the Razak Report (1956) was written, which aimed at re-developing the education system; with the main intention of bringing the nation together through one standardized national education system. The Razak Report also known as Education Committee report was an output of negotiation between the Barnes Report (1950) and Fenn-Wu Report (1951), when the Education Ordinance (1952) failed to offer the desired changes; i.e. making “Malay language as the national language whilst preserving the languages and cultures of other domiciled races of the Federation of Malaya” (Adris et al, 2001, p. 7).

Malaysia is made-up of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic groups that profess different religions or beliefs (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity) that the government of Malaysia always takes into consideration prior to developing any policies (Mior Jamaluddin, 2011). The Razak Report is evidence of successful negotiation between the leaders representing the different ethnic communities of Malaysian society. This report was then reviewed on its implementation by a reviewing committee. The review report called the Rahman Talib Report (also known as the Education Review Committee Report, 1960) “confirmed the soundness of the education policy laid in the Razak Report” (Adris et al., 2001, p. 8).

Upon Independence, the founded government at the time saw the pressing need to establish a national language, for language is seen as a symbol of identity and allegiance (Jamian et al, 2022; Mohd et al., 2022; Sung, 2022; Hasim, 2004). Hence choosing a single national language – the Malay language - was crucial for fostering national integration. At the time, establishing the Malay language for national identity and integration among Malaysians was best accomplished through education (Hasim, 2004; Ongkili, 1985). Nevertheless, it is stipulated in the Federal Constitution that no individual shall be forbidden or impeded (other than for official purposes) from using, teaching, or learning any other languages (International Labour Organization, 2006). Acknowledging the use of other languages or mother tongues of other ethnicities in Malaysia, the Education Review Committee report (1960) as cited in Hasim and Barnard (2018, p. 30) stated that:

The educational policy of the Federation is to establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, with the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of peoples other than Malays living in the country (Rahman Talib Report, 1960, p. 5).

Both the Razak Report and the Rahman Talib Report then served as the basis for Malaysia Education Act 1961.

The National Education Philosophy (NEP) indicated the needs of:

on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large. (Source: <https://www.moe.gov.my/en/dasarmenu/falsafah-pendidikan-kebangsaan>; MoE, 2019).

The above proclamation has indicated the importance of being universal, tolerance, and united through holistic development of individuals with emphasis on knowledge, good character building and conduct. These elements become the basic construct of Malaysia's education curriculum. According to Sufean (2004), the national education policy took into account the aspects of multi-ethnicity, culture, religion, and geographical background of the population; hence the policy is widely accepted. To add, the tolerance given on the language policy has also played a role in the success of promoting one standard education system. Adhering to what stipulated in the Rahman Talib Report and the NEP and acknowledging the needs of learning and maintaining mother tongues of other races namely the Chinese and Indians, two types of primary schools are established (Adris et al., 2001; Hussin, 2002). They are the National Primary School (*Sekolah Kebangsaan, SK*) and the National Type Primary School (*Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan, SJK*), known as vernacular schools.

Both types of schools, the National and the National Type, are following the same primary education system and using the same national standard curriculum and syllabus. The difference is only in the medium of instruction whereby the medium for the National Primary School is the Malay language or *Bahasa Melayu* (BM). Whereas the medium of instruction for the National Type (Chinese) Primary School (SJKC) is Mandarin and Tamil language for the National Type (Tamil) Primary School (SJKT); with BM and English language as compulsory subjects to learn among other subjects offered at the primary level.

For the primary education system, as previously mentioned, the enrolment age is 7 years old and starts from Year 1 till Year 6. A total of six years of primary level of schooling is set as a compulsory education before pupils go into the secondary level of education. Table 1 below presents the age according to year and education phases:



**Table 1. Information related to phases of primary education, year, and enrolment age**

Phase	Year	Age
1	1	7
	2	8
	3	9
2	4	10
	5	11
	6	12

Based on the statistics shared on the Ministry of Education website (<https://www.moe.gov.my/statistik-menu/statistik-bilangan-sekolah-murid-guru>; accessed January 4th, 2023) and MOE EMIS Data (January, 2023), the total number of primary school pupils enrolment is 2,741,837 with 236,993 total number of teachers. All in all, there are 7,702 primary schools in Malaysia. Primary schools in Malaysia are divided into three main categories: *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (SK; National Primary School), *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina* (SJKC; National-Typed Chinese Primary School), *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil* (SJKT; National-Typed Tamil School). Table 2 presents the number of schools and students according to zones (regions) and states:

**Table 2. Number of schools according to zone and states**

Zone	State	Number of Primary Schools			Total
		SK	SJKC	SJKT	
North (1,457)	Perlis	8	10	1	69
	Kedah	393	89	60	542
	Perak	527	185	134	846
	Pulau Pinang	148	90	28	266
South	Johor	608	217	71	896
	Melaka	144	65	21	230
	Negeri Sembilan	208	82	61	351
East	Kelantan	400	15	1	416
	Terengganu	340	10	-	350
	Pahang	425	76	37	538

Central	WP Kuala Lumpur	128	42	15	185
	WP Putrajaya	16	-	-	16
	Selangor	444	115	100	659
Borneo	Sabah	999	85	-	1084
	Sarawak	1032	222	-	1254
Total		5870	1303	529	7702

(Source: MOE EMIS Data, January 2023)

## Reformations in the National Curriculum for Primary School

The National Curriculum contains curricular and co-curricular programmes that entail knowledge, skills, norms, values, elements of cultures and beliefs to assist holistic development of pupils in several aspects of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). The aim is also to inculcate high moral values and to disseminate knowledge (Ministry of Education, 2017). Education Act 1996 under section 17 and 18 indicated that all government schools are compulsory to use the national curriculum (Hussin, 2002). Since post-independence, the primary education curriculum has gone through several curriculum reformations. The reformations “have always been characterized by the government’s efforts to adapt education to national development needs” (Ahmad, 1994).

### **3M/ 3R**

It started with the 3M Curriculum that focused on the three basic skills Membaca, Menulis, Mengira (or 3R - Read, wRite, aRithmetic) as part of the recommendations in the Cabinet Committee Report on Review of Education Policies Implementation 1979 (known as Mahathir Report, 1979), where the committee was chaired by Dr Mahathir Mohamad (former Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister at the time). The 3M/3R was an extension from the pre-independence school curriculum (prior to 1957) that aimed at providing basic knowledge and skills to the students. In this curriculum, students had to sit for a National Standard Assessment at the end of Year 5. This National Standard Examination is called Penilaian Darjah Lima (Standard Five Examination); which started in 1967. I need to point out that pupils were evaluated at Year 5 instead of their final primary year (Year 6), to identify the knowledge mastery level among the pupils and to address any learning concerns identified during the final year of schooling. The 3M Curriculum was then reviewed and transformed into Integrated Primary School Curriculum (KBSR).

### **KBSR**

KBSR or known as Integrated Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah) was introduced in 1983 with an aim to promote a child-centred curriculum (Azizah, 1988) and to strengthen the acquisition of reading, writing, and arithmetic skills at Phase 1 of primary education (Year 1 through Year 3). In Phase 2 (Year 4 through Year 6), the focus of the curriculum was to reinforce and to give emphasis towards “building a strong foundation in

content and basic sciences” (Adris et al, 2001, p. 27). Besides, the Among the objectives of this curriculum focus on: the mastery of Malay and English language skills (that includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills), the mastery of learning and thinking skills as to develop and improve intellectual capacities, the teaching of values to develop quality individuals, instilling patriotism and positive attitudes, as well as the strengthening of fundamentals of beliefs and practice of moral values (Adris et al, 2001; Ahmad, 1994). These components are taught across curriculum or subjects. According to Ahmad (1994, p. 463), this curriculum was developed to adapt to:

the changing needs of the nation, specifically adapting the syllabus, that is the content of subjects to be taught, to fulfil the development needs of the country. The main objective of education was still national unity, but changes during this time have also shifted the emphasis from national unity to national unity and human resource development for a developing nation.

In this curriculum, students had to take a National Standard Examination at the end of their Year 6 term. This examination is called Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah or widely known as UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test); which started in 1988.

### **KSSR**

In 2011, KSSR or known as Standard Primary School Curriculum (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah) was introduced and is still serving as a point of reference at present. The KSSR syllabus is a form of transformation of curriculum that subsequently phased out the KBSR curriculum. The aim of introducing KSSR is to promote holistic approach and to reorganize KBSR. In other words, KBSR is adapted into KSSR (an improved version of KBSR) where in KSSR the curriculum is divided into three (3) modules: Core Module, Thematic Module, and Elective Module. The following Table 3 presents the subjects clustered under each module.

**Table 3. Subjects listed for each module**

Module	Subject
Core	Malay Language
	English Language
	Islamic/Moral Education
	Mathematics
	Physical & Health Education

Thematic	Science & Technology
	History
	Visual Arts
	Musics
Elective	Arabic Language
	Chinese Language
	Tamil Language
	Kadazandusun Language
	Semai Language
	Iban Language

In KSSR, the 3M approach has now extended to 4M which have an additional element of *menaakul* or 'evaluation' at Phase 1 (Year 1 - Year 3) of primary education. Along this, students are expected to develop a mastery in the basic knowledge of Information, Science & Technology (ICT), to focus on the development of socio-emotional, spiritual, physical, cognitive, attitude and values. In Phase 2 (Year 4 – Year 6), the emphasis is on the strengthening and the application of 4M. In the KSSR curriculum, there is an obvious shift on the assessment approach where classroom-based and school-based assessment take place over the national standard examination. Thus, the UPSR national exam was put to a stop in 2022.

## The role of Education Stakeholders

Various stakeholders at the national, regional (state), and district levels play significant roles concerning education delivery and quality. At the national level, the stakeholders involve the Ministry of Education (MoE) that oversees the planning, development and implementation of education policies and initiatives for the country that aligns with the national education philosophy and goals. Its responsibility also is seen in the budget allocation for education programmes and infrastructure. Under the Ministry of Education, there are several government departments such as Malaysia Examination Syndicate (MES), Curriculum Development Division (BPK), Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD), and a few others.

Following the next level of stakeholders are the regional (state) and the district where they will be the middle layers of transmitting the input from MoE to the schools. They are the linkage between policymakers and schools where they will plan and conduct the necessary actions to impart the information from MoE. State Education Departments (SEDs) primarily coordinate and oversee the implementation of national education programmes, projects, and activities, while also offering feedback to the MoE for overall planning purposes (Bush et al., 2019). Further comprehensive groundwork efforts are undertaken at the district level, with a specific emphasis on fostering connections between schools and State

Education Departments (SEDs), through the coordination and monitoring of grassroots-level implementation of programmes. The district levels are empowered to carry out tasks and responsibilities, including decision-making and effective planning in collaboration with schools (Hamzah & Abd. Rani, 2022).

The final and most significant stakeholder is the school, where principals and headteachers bear the responsibility of providing professional and administrative leadership (Bush et al., 2019). In the recent Malaysian Blueprint, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has aimed to cultivate 'high-performing school leaders in every school' (MEB 2013, E-20) as part of its education transformation agenda (Bush et al., 2018). Recognising the pivotal role of school leaders, the MoE emphasises their importance in shaping school outcomes in alignment with targeted policies. At this level, the implementation or any changes in education will reach its final implementer: the teachers. Therefore, schools must play a major role as learning organisations that foster a shared vision. To realise this vision, school leaders must not only fulfil monitoring roles but also ensure effective policy execution by teachers and serve as advocates for the grassroots-level.

## Highlights on National School Education Assessment

National education assessment, in the past, was too exam-oriented where the focus was on the summative evaluation (Singh et al, 2022; Hasim, 2014). The emphasis on summative evaluation and examination-oriented instruction has resulted in cultures of teaching to the test (Hamp-Lyons, 2003) and rote-learning (Singh et al, 2022). These cultures have gradually developed too teacher-centred role which reduces learner autonomy. In addition, it promotes learners to become passive recipients and consequently limits students' willingness to explore and think outside the box. There were instances where students achieved excellent results for their exam, but those results did not indicate that they have acquired the knowledge where they could either unable to apply the knowledge or they did not remember what they have learnt because some students learnt just for the exams (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011).

According to Yaacob et al (2005, p. 18),

Malaysia intends to transform its educational system, moving away from memory-based learning designed for the average student to an education that stimulates thinking, creativity, and caring in all students, caters to individual abilities and learning styles, and is based on more equitable access.

Hence, in 2007, the MoE and the Malaysia Examination Syndicate (MES), had conducted an educational assessment forum on 'humanising assessment', with an aim to look at assessment (as cited in Hasim, 2014):

as an integral part of the curriculum and fulfilling multiple purposes: fostering learning, improving teaching, providing valid information about what has been done or achieved, and enabling pupils and others to make sensible and rational choices about courses, careers, and others. (Malaysia Examination Syndicate, 2007)

## School-Based Assessment

In 2011, school-based assessment (SBA) known as Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah (PBS) was introduced at the primary schools and lower secondary schools, to introduce a holistic form of assessment. SBA is divided into two components which are the academic component and the non-academic component. For the academic component, two types of assessments are outlined:

1. School Assessment (*Pentaksiran Sekolah; PS*)
2. Central Assessment (*Pentaksiran Pusat; PP*)

Similarly, two types of assessments are outlined for the non-academic component:

3. Physical Activities, Sports, and Co-Curricular Assessment (*Pentaksiran Aktiviti Jasmani, Sukan dan Kokurikulum; PAJSK*); and
4. Psychometric Assessment (*Pentaksiran Psikometrik; PPSi*)

Altogether, there are four types of assessments listed under the SBA system (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2019; SP Lembaga Peperiksaan Bil. 1/2014).

### **School Assessment/ Classroom-based Assessment**

School Assessment was renamed to classroom-based assessment (CBA) in 2016 or widely known as Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah (PBD) which involves both formative and summative assessment (SPI KPM Bil. 3/2023). The CBA is carried out by teachers as part of the teaching and learning process in schools that focus on 'assessment as learning', 'assessment for learning', and 'assessment of learning'. Based on the Circular letter from the Examination Board regarding SBA improvements (No. 1/2014), various assessment methods could be used for assessment purposes including observation, written assignment, project work, presentation, demonstration, field study or case study. These assessments could be carried out continuously or can be conducted monthly, at the end of a term or at the end of a year (SP Lembaga Peperiksaan Bil. 1/2014).

### **Central Assessment**

Central assessment is a standardized assessment instruments set by the Examination Board of the Ministry of Education. For this assessment, schools must administer and mark using the standard instrument and marking guide prepared by the Examination Board within the time frame given and based on the given performance standard (SPI KPM Bil. 3/2023).

### **Physical Activities, Sports, and Co-Curricular Assessment (PAJSK)**

PAJSK is an assessment is divided into three components which are the national physical fitness standards, the co-curricular activities, and the extracurricular activities (SPI KPM Bil. 3/2023). These assessments are carried out by the schools to measure students' ability and performance on students' participation in physical education, health education, sports and co- and extra-curricular activities.

### **Psychometric Assessment (*Pentaksiran Psikometrik; PPSi*)**

PPSi assessment aims at measuring students' natural ability, critical thinking ability, problem-solving ability, interest, aptitude, attitude and personality. There are four components in Psychometric Assessment, which are general aptitude test, specific aptitude test, personality traits, and career interest. The objective of this PPSi is to identify traits that could be further developed through in- and out-of-classroom learning activities (SPI KPM Bil. 3/2023).

## **Issues related to SBA**

The advent of school-based/classroom-based assessment demonstrates a paradigm shift away from just about cognitive learning, towards a more humanistic and holistic approach. Nevertheless, the shift has triggered several issues related to knowledge and practice that have been the topic of discussions among the public. According to Hasim (2022) among the issues raised were on: parents' readiness to accept the change in the assessment system as for parents, they feel that students are more motivated to learn when the examination system is in place. This also indicates that the stakeholders namely the parents do not really understand the concept of SBA/CBA. As for teachers' readiness were in terms of knowledge and practice whereby some teachers do not understand the processes of SBA/CBA (Rasul, 2013). Understanding about the practice of SBA/CBA is necessary for teachers to be able to manage the assessment. Teachers would find managing the SBA/CBA as taxing and overburden especially when they carry other responsibilities in schools. Hasim as reported by Menon (2022) asserts that in order,

for classroom assessments to be effectively implemented, the school system and current practices must change – reduce the number of students to 30 per class, relook [at] teachers' timetables and teaching hours, and stop unnecessary programmes or competitions between schools during teaching hours.

In a study conducted by Talib et al (2014), many Malaysian teachers did not have adequate knowledge regarding assessment. Similarly, Hasim et al (2018), findings revealed that "teachers are somewhat confused of the two forms of assessment – formative and summative" (p. 162). Hence to overcome this problem, professional training on assessment (SBA/CBA that administers both formative and summative assessment) must be offered to all teachers in Malaysia.

## **Pre-Service Teacher Training Programmes**

The training programmes for the pre-service teachers are catered by different institutions depending on the types of education service level: early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education. At present, the training of pre-service teachers for early childhood education and secondary school level are provided by the local universities that offer education programmes. Meanwhile, the training of the primary education pre-service teachers are handled by the Malaysia Institute of Teacher Education (*Institut Pendidikan Guru Malaysia, IPGM*). Having said this, the institutions that offer teacher training courses would design and tailor their courses as required by the Ministry of Education (MOE), enabling the pre-service teachers to teach according to the current school syllabus as set by the MOE.

To ensure the training does match with what is needed, the teacher educators at the local higher learning institutions/universities or the Malaysia Institute of Teacher Education are continuously informed, exposed and involved with any changes that the MOE has made or plans to make. At the same time all institutions and teacher educators are to keep up with any transformations required. Having said this, all teacher training programmes developed by each institution will need to be assessed by and get accreditation from the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, the MQA; to ensure that education programmes being offered are following the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) to ensure that the programmes are current, relevant, dynamic, and in line with the national and international higher education system (<https://www.mqa.gov.my/pv4/mqf.cfm>, accessed 13th Jan 2023).

During the pre-service teachers' training semesters, the trainees or education undergraduates will be exposed to both theories and practices where they are expected to apply their knowledge through micro and macro/simulated teaching activities along with school orientation programme and practicum. The courses are packaged to include subjects related to pedagogy, educational psychology, classroom management, action research, material and syllabus design, reflective practice, and assessment and evaluation in the classrooms. Just like any other undergraduate courses, the content of each subject is designed to give them basic knowledge and experience before these trainee teachers could graduate and apply their knowledge, as novice in-service teachers. It is expected that these novice teachers will further develop their knowledge through their everyday teaching experience, exposure to the school environment, and in-service training opportunities (for professional development) provided by the MOE.

## Professional learning context and professional development for in-service teachers

For the Education Service Officers (ESO) and in-service teachers, continuous training is provided in various related areas of education. This is stipulated in the Teacher Professional Development Master Plan (Pelan Induk Pembangunan Profesionalisme Keguruan) known as PIPPK, as an initiative to develop professionalism and to strengthen knowledge among the education service officers or teachers at all levels. This initiative was established to enable teachers to continuously plan and enhance their career development. Several forms of training and activities are required for the teachers to fulfil every year, they are:

- LADAP (*Latihan Dalam Perkhidmatan/ In-service Training*)
- Action Research (*Kajian Tindakan*)
- Developmental Programme

The Circular issued by the MoE dated 1 April 2022 (SPI April 2022) indicates that:

- the number of days for training is 5 days a year;
- newly appointed education officer that has reported duty before 1 November needs to fulfil 5 days of course(s);
- those reported duty after 1 November need to fulfil a minimum of 2 days of course;



- staff who has just transferred to MoE needs to complete 5 days of training;
- all MoE staff are required to carry out/ attend at least one (1) course, through online platform;
- all departments and the state education office are required to identify and conduct one course through a complete module of competency building programme (PPK).

In the MoE Service Circular No. 1, 2024 regarding Human Resource Training Policy, it is stipulated that “all education officers have to be competent in their relevant areas to ensure they could deliver their duties professionally, efficiently, and effectively” (p. 6). This indicates that the MoE acknowledges the importance of in-service training for education officers or teachers.

## Formative Assessment Research Review

In Malaysian classrooms, formative assessment (FA) has become integrated into classroom-based assessments (Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah - PBD), alongside the traditional summative assessment (SA) gradually since 2012. It is a reform to shift from exam-oriented system to holistic learning outcomes for the students. FA was defined by Black (1998, p.8) as,

all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they [the students] are engaged.

It is further enhanced in the following definition by Black and William (2009, p. 9) that FA refers to,

the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited.

It can be seen from both definitions that FA emphasises on the use of evidence in learning to inform future learning through the ongoing evaluation within daily lessons which allows students to progress steadily compared. Importantly, FA does not solely hold teachers accountable for learning outcomes which is the added value from previous teacher-centred classrooms. Instead, it involves students in the assessment process, promoting autonomy and assessment as learning, which aligns with the OECD’s vision of developing ‘learning-to-learn’ skills (OECD, 2008) that refers to a set of cognitive and metacognitive abilities that enable individuals to effectively manage their own learning processes. Meanwhile, in terms of preparing students for 21st century learning, FA fosters collaboration between students and teachers and enhances communication skills through increased students’ engagement in the classrooms (Black & Wiliam, 2010).

The implementation of FA in Malaysia undoubtedly faces challenges as it needs to break away from the common norms of teaching for exams after many years. These challenges may stem from teachers’ perceptions, abilities, and other external factors that arise along the way. Study by Malik et al. (2021) showed that teachers do have the ability to conduct

FA but facing a challenge with time adequacy. For teachers, the workload of implementing FA has increased where it was seen to require more time for class preparation (Ahmad & Mahamod, 2016). Teachers were found to face time constraints due to their hectic nature of work added with the instrument preparation to implement FA. What entails in the extra work is for teachers to be prepared in their lesson plan that precisely aligns with the learning outcomes and the teaching materials for their lessons that cater to students at different levels (Mansor et al., 2019). Moreover, a study shows that teachers and students were not ready to accept FA due to the lesson being no longer intense for exam preparation which affects students' motivation to take the lesson seriously (Mansor et al., 2019).

The challenges of FA implementation in Malaysian classrooms as mentioned before will eventually lead to the need for extra professional training (Hasim et al, 2018, Mansor et al., 2019). Despite the familiarity that most teachers have acquired after years of FA implementation, they must not rely solely on their initial training. Granting teachers autonomy to explore the most effective methods for delivering FA to their students is crucial at this juncture. Individually and collectively, teachers need to find innovative ways to integrate FA into their classrooms. Therefore, to progress successfully, it is imperative for teachers to receive ongoing continuous professional development opportunities, facilitated by stakeholders, as they are the ones who are responsible for implementing it with the students.

## Part 2 – Country findings

In this part, an elaboration pertaining to the project that looks into teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices of formative assessment through Teacher-Led Learning Circles (TLLC) is presented.

### National Approach to Teacher-led Learning Circles

A mixed-method research design was employed to gain insights on how teachers develop their skills and practices of formative assessment within their classrooms in which both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. The context of the project is primary school level involving three types of government-funded primary schools: 1) National Primary School (SK), 2) National-Type (Chinese) Primary School (SJKC), and 3) National-Type (Tamil) School (SJKT).

### Project Participants

There were two groups of participants. The first group of project participants were six (6) members of the Malaysia National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) representatives who took up the role as the learning circle facilitators. The facilitators are in-service experienced teachers who are also active members of NUTP. Two facilitators were paired to facilitate and monitor each TLLC group. The selection of these facilitators was based on the recommendations of the NUTP higher committee.

The second group of participants were thirty (30) in-service experienced teachers who came from three different types of schools. These teacher participants were approached and selected by the Malaysia National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) representatives. For this project, the teacher participants were grouped into three (3) Teacher-Led Learning Circles based on their school types. The distribution of the teachers according to school types and learning circle is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Number of teacher participants according to school type and learning circle group**

School Types	Number of Teacher Participants	Teacher-Led Learning Circle Groups
National Primary School (SK)	10	A
National-Type (Chinese) Primary School (SJKC)	10	B
National-Type (Tamil) Primary School (SJKT)	10	C
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>3</b>

These teacher participants were coming from the northern region, central region, and eastern region of Malaysia which involve those who are teaching in the urban and rural areas.

## Role of Researcher

The country researcher carried multiple roles. Apart from collecting data, the role of the researcher involved training the TLLC facilitators and teacher participants at the early stage of the learning circles. Hence the role of the researcher was as a trainer where knowledge and input on the types of assessment as well as the constructs of formative assessment were given through specific TLLC facilitators' training sessions and during the workshops or learning events with the teacher participants. The researcher played a role of an insider and an outsider in carrying out this research to gain deeper insights and to reduce bias in reporting. Thus, the role of researcher, in this case, was as both participant and non-participant observer. As participant observer, the researcher played an active role and participated in the discussion between participants. While as a non-participant observer, the researcher played a passive role that typically adopts a more detached and non-intrusive approach to the observation process whereby the aim was to ensure that the data collection through observation is "to be detached and unobtrusive" (Coulter, 1990, p. 7).

## Research Objectives & Research Questions

Among the research objectives outlined for this project are:

- to identify promising teacher-led formative assessment practices; and
- to explore professional learning and teacher leadership processes that support teachers' formative assessment practices.

Based on these research objectives, the following research questions (main and sub-questions) were developed:

1. In the Teacher-led Learning Circles, what promising teacher-led formative assessment practices were identified?
  - a) *What teacher-led formative assessment practices were used, and how were they implemented?*
  - b) *How did technology support the implementation of formative assessment practices?*
  - c) *Which teacher-led formative assessment practices provided effective feedback to students?*
  - d) *What benefits from using formative assessment were identified for teachers' practices?*
  - e) *What benefits from using formative assessment were identified for students' learning?*
2. In the Teacher-led Learning Circles, what professional learning and teacher leadership processes supported teachers' formative assessment practices?
  - a) *How were teachers supported in understanding, developing, and using formative assessment practices?*
  - b) *What helped or hindered effective use of formative assessment practices?*

## Data Collection & Procedures

Data were collected in various forms including:

- Surveys (on teachers' beliefs about formative assessment and Pre & Post-Survey)
  - A total of 30 teacher participants were targeted to participate in the surveys.
- Observations
  - Involved learning circles, learning events, tutorial sessions, and workshop sessions observations. For this purpose, the researcher identified three teachers (one for each type of school) who seemed to have made impressive progress in their FA practices. Table 2 below presents the list of teachers selected for promising FA practices.

**Table 2. Selected teachers for promising FA Practices**

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	School Type
Fizz	SK
Hammy	SK
Juraya	SJKC
Laiyi	SJKC
Herman	SJKT
Keenan	SJKT

- Document Analysis
  - Relevant documents were selected, and these documents were referring to the teacher participants TLLC project output throughout the project durations.
- Focus Group Discussion
  - Focus group discussions were conducted with both the facilitators and the teacher participants in two separate sessions to gather overall feedback on the programme.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. In terms of data collection procedures, data were collected in stages: pre-, while, and post- project. This was made as such to see changes in beliefs and development in practice of FA.

## Promising Teacher-led Formative Assessment Practices

In this section, research findings are shared and elaborated through evidence gathered throughout the TLLC project. For the TLLC project in Malaysia, several promising practices of FA were identified.

### Approach & Strategies

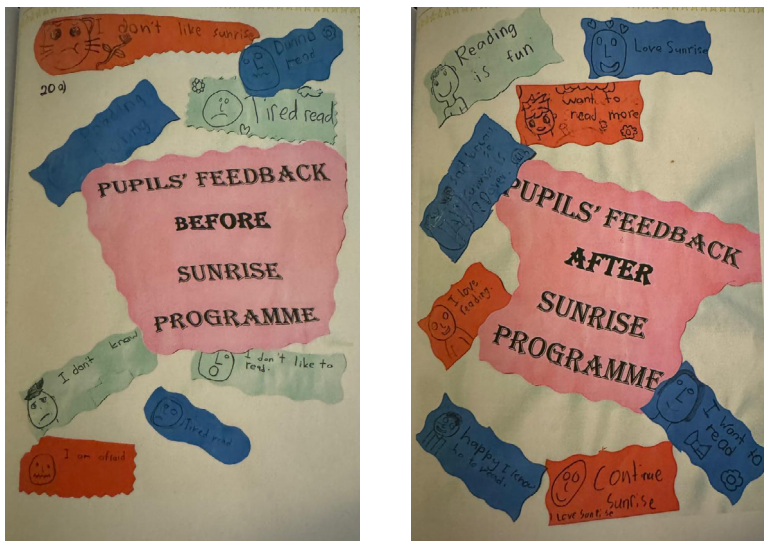
It was observed in the TLLC programme that teacher participants were able to adopt and adapt relevant and suitable approaches that could cater to the needs of their learners. The selected approaches for FA seemed to emphasize on active learning and student engagement. Teachers utilized these methods to gauge student understanding and provide immediate feedback, which helped to ensure that learning outcomes were achieved and at the same time helped in guiding teachers' future instruction. The approaches used also seemed to allow personalized learning and differentiated instruction to cater to diverse student needs, ensuring that each student receives the appropriate level of support and challenge. These were observed through several FA projects developed by the teacher participants.

The first evidence is the 'Sunrise' project that was developed by teacher Fizz (not her real name) to assess students' reading ability through a whole-word recognition approach. According to Koon, the aim of the project was,

to guide the ESL students who are weak in reading with specific objectives developed to enable students to read basic words, simple sentences, and to develop interest in reading among the students. (Int/Koon)

Among the techniques used were 'questioning' techniques, quizzes, and classroom discussions. The whole-word approach as a FA was observed to be a promising approach where the teacher indicated that her "pupils showed improvement in their reading...[as well as] showed a change in the level of confidence among her pupils' for reading in class". Not only that, the pupils also "showed interest in joining the class." The positive outcomes of this approach could be seen through the feedback received from the pupils (before and after) regarding reading as presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Pupils' Feedback on the Sunrise Project for Assessing Reading**



For assessment monitoring, the teacher used a read aloud strategy. This was carried out in focusing at word level first, then followed by phrases and subsequently the sentence level (see Figure 2 as an example). This practice is found to be successful for Fizz's group of learners in which through reading aloud, the teacher could immediately identify and give feedback to the learners. Feedback was received from either the teacher or by the peers in the classroom. This immediate feedback received allowed "[pupils to] learn from their mistakes." Besides, getting pupils to work in groups and to be evaluated by their peers encourages collaborative learning that promotes communication and enhances critical thinking. Figure 3 presents the peer-reading assessment record practice.

**Figure 2. Word Level Activity & Peer Reading**



Figure 3. Sample of Peer Reading Assessment Record

**PEER-READING ASSESSMENT**

PUPIL'S NAME: Nur Qaica Amani Binti Azmi CLASS: 4 Dinamik

NAME	CLASS	OBSERVATION CHECKLIST
1. Raygal	4D	★ ★ ★
2. Adam	4D	★ ★
3. Hanis	4D	★ ★

WEAK	★
AVERAGE	★ ★ ★
GOOD	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
EXCELLENT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**PEER-READING ASSESSMENT**

PUPIL'S NAME: Nur Najla' Naziqah Binti Mohd Farizy CLASS: 4 Dinamik

NAME	CLASS	OBSERVATION CHECKLIST
1. Alif	4D	★ ★ ★
2. Insan	4D	★ ★
3. Haja	4D	★

WEAK	★
AVERAGE	★ ★ ★
GOOD	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
EXCELLENT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In the case of peer reading assessment, teacher Fizz used the number of 'stars' as indicator for reading achievement and as evaluation system. This strategy is found to be simple and user-friendly. The evaluation system is suitable for 10-year-old groups of learners. Besides, the system is easy to comprehend by the pupils.

Another promising FA practice is a project that used Exit Ticket as an assessment approach. A number of teacher participants used this approach in their classroom-based assessment as part of the FA approach. Juraya whose project also focused on reading skills but for Malay language subject among Primary 1 pupils indicated that 17% of her pupils struggled with reading, where they achieved only Band 1 and Band 2 out of 6 bands to benchmark the reading performance (Band 1 being the lowest in the scale). According to Juraya,

Over the years of teaching, [she] I still find that students are not motivated to learn Malay language...because they find it difficult as they are not using it in their daily lives. Some of them are good at writing but still prefer to respond to oral questions with Chinese language [mother tongue]...most of them still have a low understanding of the Malay language. (Reflective Statement/Juraya)

So, with the input from the TLLC, she adopted several strategies for practising FA in her classroom and felt that Exit Ticket was prominent in helping her at assessing pupils' understanding of her teaching and achieving the lesson learning outcomes. She believes that the exit ticket can help students and to her,



The exit ticket approach for assessment is a quick and effective formative assessment technique used by teachers to gauge student understanding at the end of a lesson. At the conclusion of a class, pupils were given a brief task or question related to the day's lesson, which they must complete and submit before leaving the classroom. In this case, since the pupils were in Primary 1 (7-year old), Juraya created a simple checklist for the pupils to indicate words they read for the day. This approach also allows pupils to carry out self-assessment. As simple as this, FA could provide immediate feedback to the teacher about each student's grasp and list of the words learned. It also provides information on the extent pupils have done their own reading. This information allows teachers to adjust or plan for future instruction to address any learning gaps. Figure 4 is an example of the Exit Ticket.

**Figure 4. Example of Exit Ticket with Word List for the Day**



Juraya also believes in peer learning support, hence in her assessment approach, she includes pair work (Think-Pair-Share) and the element of peer feedback as promising approach where she indicated that,

This strategy helps me to create a democratic environment in teaching. Besides, it allows me to be clear on my assessment. By this strategy, students will feel appreciated from the authority given to them. They are taught to assess something based on quality but not by favour.

Besides the use of class poll in evaluating the pupils reflected her beliefs about peer learning support. In this case, Juraya created a simple and easy to understand rubric or checklist for peer assessment.

Figure 5. Example of Class Poll Rubric/Checklist

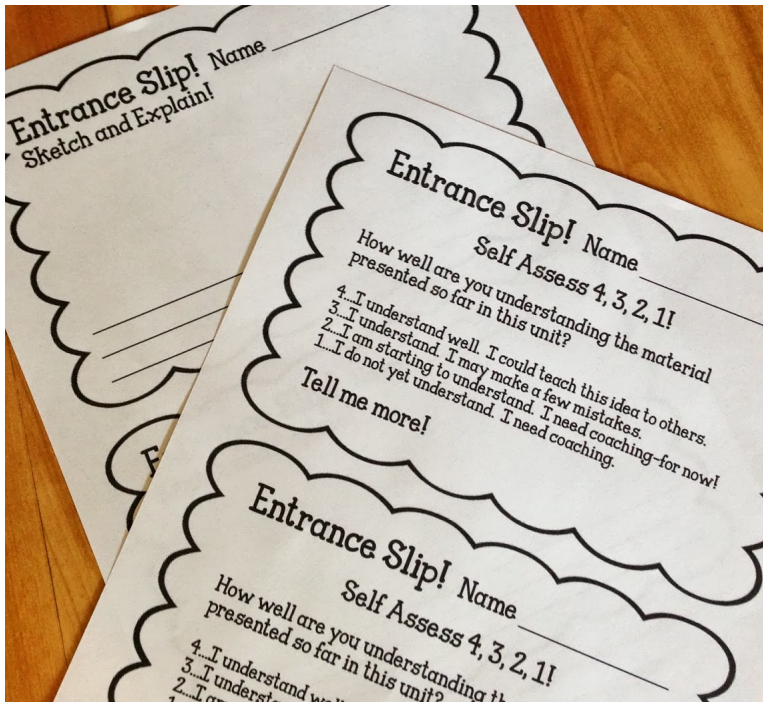


Herman, on the other hand, did not just apply the Exit Ticket but he has adopted and adapted the approach of the Entrance Ticket before he started his writing lesson to assess his pupil's prior knowledge. According to Herman,

by identifying the pupils' actual problems, I was able to overcome the obstacle and achieve my goal of improving my pupils' writing skills.

This approach is important for Herman because previously he has identified that his pupils were struggling with writing skills where they found it to be challenging and thus affects their interest and confidence to write. Therefore, he needs to find ways that could help him continuously track his students current writing performance and writing abilities which can be done through entrance tickets. Through the entrance ticket approach, Herman could get the ideas of his pupils' writing skills and performance in certain writing areas. Without gathering his pupils' current prior knowledge, Herman would not be able to pitch on his pupils' current needs.

Figure 6. Sample of Entrance Ticket

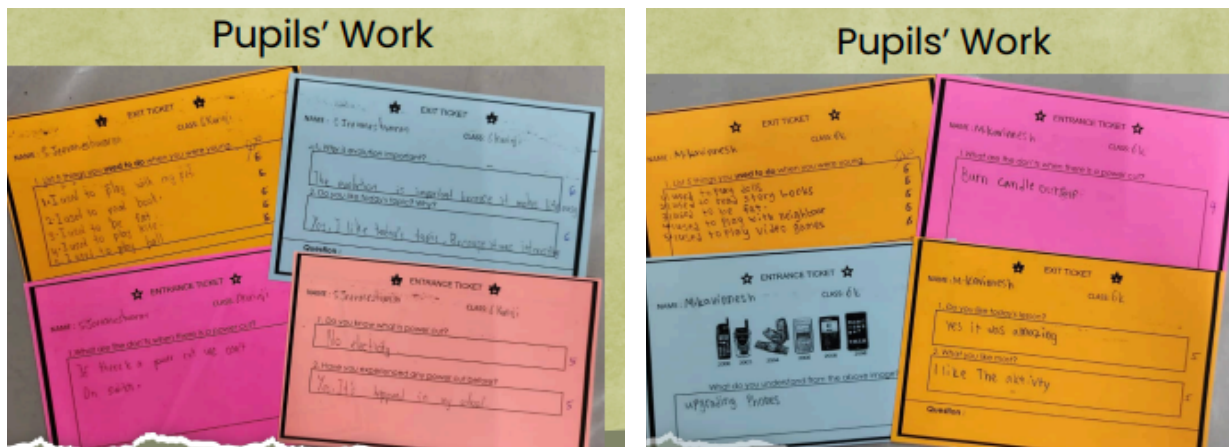


Objectively, pupils should acquire additional input to enhance their understanding during the lesson. Thus, just like Juraya, as a follow-up Herman has used the exit ticket but the main purpose was to complement the Entrance Ticket where it would give opportunity to the pupils to express their thoughts about the lesson. The information from the Exit Ticket is valuable for Herman to decide on diverse strategies for the next lesson where he can formulate his lesson through the feedback given. In practice, pupils in Herman's class would fill the entrance and exit slip forms which the former was filled during the beginning of the lesson and the latter towards the end of the lesson.

Figure 7. Example of Entrance and Exit Ticket Forms



**Figure 8. Example of Pupils' Feedback Written on Entrance and Exit Slip Forms**



The impact from these approaches, according to Herman, have benefitted his pupils by increasing their interest in writing and improving their metacognitive abilities, which are essential for progress in writing. They were found to be engaged in the thought process of writing through the constructive feedback given which helps them to decide on the next step to improve in their writing. Their confidence also has shown improvement compared to previously which later impacts their motivation in learning writing. It can be concluded that entrance and exit tickets approaches have helped Herman to assess his students continuously and help them progress accordingly as each lesson will give Herman input on the area of his pupils that need help the most.

All in all, implementing formative assessment practices such as exit tickets, read-alouds, and oral presentations can significantly enhance student learning and engagement. Exit tickets provide a quick and effective way to gauge students' understanding at the end of a lesson, offering immediate feedback that helps teachers adjust subsequent instruction to address any learning gaps. Read-alouds not only improve listening and comprehension skills but also encourage students to think critically and engage with the material in a more interactive manner. To add, oral presentations cultivate essential classroom communication skills between students and teachers, as well as among students. It also could help to deepen students' mastery of the subject matter through discussion and explanation with peers. Incorporating effective questioning techniques during instruction could stimulate deeper cognitive processes that could also prompt students to think more critically and engage in meaningful classroom discussions. Besides, the use of teacher and peer feedback in FA practice could allow students to refine their work. This collaborative approach to feedback helps in creating a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and motivated to improve. Self- and peer-assessment practices were identified as important elements of FA that could empower students by fostering metacognitive skills, encouraging them to reflect on their own learning, promote self-learning, and identify areas for improvement. Collectively, these formative assessment practices create a dynamic and responsive educational environment. They support continuous improvement, helping students build confidence and achieve greater academic success. By integrating these strategies, educators can better meet the diverse needs of their students, promoting a more inclusive and effective learning experience.

## Technology and Formative Assessment

In many ways, technology could support teachers in managing formative assessments through various tools and methods. In this TLLC project, teacher participants were observed to utilize and integrate technology into their FA practices in various ways ranging from task designing, record keeping, and reporting purposes. No technology is obsolete and there is no one best tool for assessment implementations. It all depends on the teachers' ability and needs to fulfil the assessment objectives and administration.

Keenan, for example, in teaching and assessing English to lower primary pupils has made full use of Canva app as a technological tool to promote literacy among his pupils specifically in evaluating students' writing and developing writing tasks. Canva was the chosen tool as it is efficient in helping him to engage his pupils in learning English through readily available templates. The integration of this app as part of the learning and assessment process assisted interactions between teacher and pupils. According to Keenan, it was rather convenient to use Canva because of the ready-made template provided. He added,

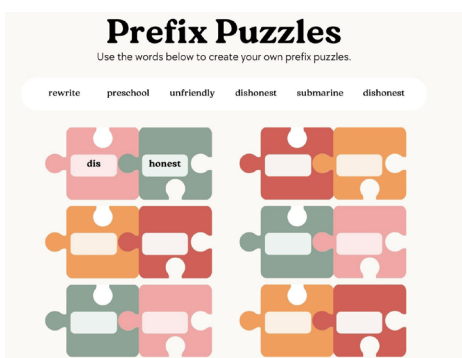
I am able to find materials related to the lesson and if I wish to re-edit with readymade templates also possible in Canva. I will create engaging lessons with catchy graphics to cater my students using Canva for Education.

Canva has enabled Keenan to modify and edit the materials to suit his pupils' needs and has apparently benefited his pupils. Students were found to be able to create their own worksheets, posters and invitations using the editable templates. See Figure 9 and Figure 10.

**Figure 9. Student used Canva to Create Gratitude Cards**



**Figure 10. Assessment Task developed using Canva**



In alignment with language skill, one of his projects involved creating gratitude cards, which embedded writing skills as pupils composed thank you messages. Instead of using pen and paper, Canva has managed to engage his students more effectively in the activities. From the classroom observation, it was apparent that students were motivated to learn and to participate in the activity related to Canva.

**Figure 11. Pupils' participation in Learning English using Canva**



Apart from delivering lessons and designing assessment tasks, technology was also integrated in FA practice for recording and reporting. In assessing the learners, teachers need to track the performance and progress of the students where they can leverage the technology to ease the process. For Fizz, Microsoft Docs and Excel helped her to create tables as a way to manage her pupils' performance and achievement data effectively. For instance, she created a table for teacher's evaluations to record pupils' performance according to content and learning standards. This systematic approach is crucial as teachers often need to track numerous students per class. Besides, keeping track of each pupil's progress is required in FA practice to monitor learning development in pupils.

**Figure 12. Example of Teacher Fizz's Evaluation Form using Microsoft Docs**

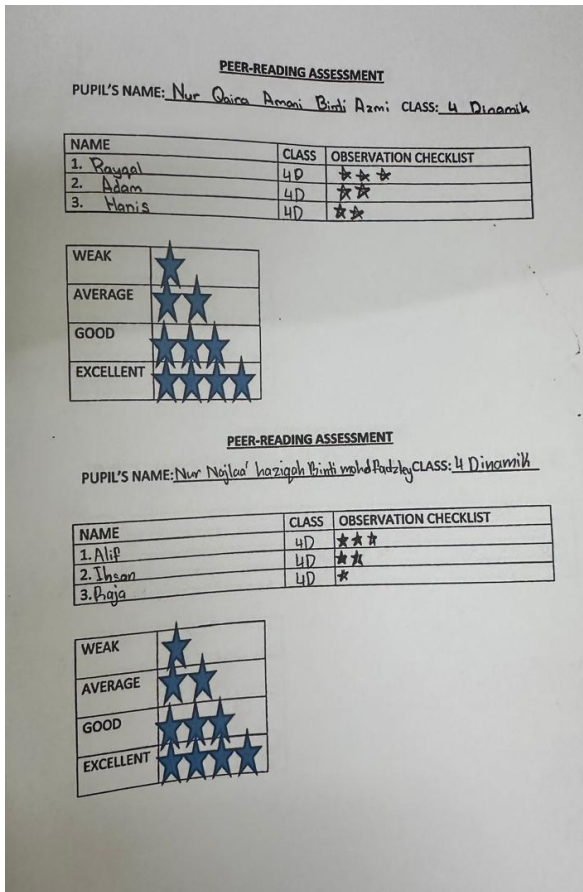
TEACHER'S NAME: LIM FICE KUN

1st NOVEMBER 2022

PUPIL'S NAME	CONTENT STANDARD 3.2	PERFORMANCE LEVEL		
		LEARNING STANDARD 3.2.1	LEARNING STANDARD 3.2.2	LEARNING STANDARD 3.2.3
1. NURLINA	✓	2	2	2
2. M. KHALID	✓	2	2	2
3. AHMAD DARWISZ	✓	2	2	1
4. ATHMAR	✓	3	3	2
5. FATIROL	✓	3	3	3
6. IHSAN	✓	2	2	3
7. M.NAUFAL	✓	3	2	2
8. M.ALIF HAIKAL	✓	2	2	3
9. M. RAYQAL	✓	2	2	2
10. RAJA NURHASYA	✓	2	2	2
11. NOR AMIRUL	✓	2	2	1
12. NURHANIS	✓	2	2	1

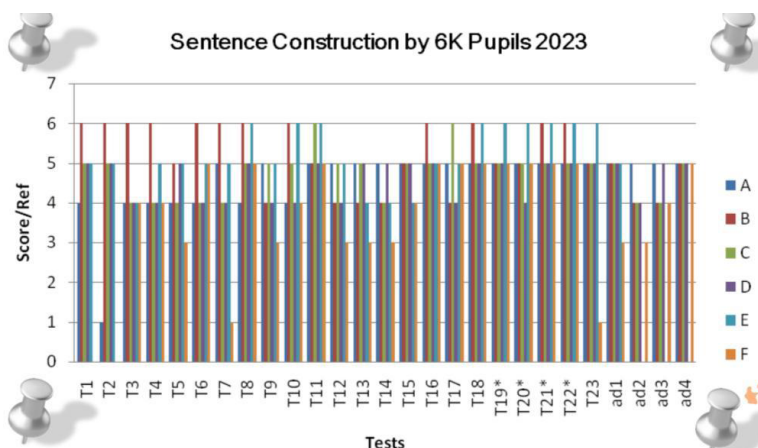
Besides, Fizz also used Microsoft Words to create tables for her pupils to do their peer-reading assessment. Having a proper table for students to record their friends is important for structured and recognised record-keeping, especially with young students.

**Figure 12. Example of Teacher Fizz's Peer-Reading Assessment**



Furthermore, Herman also used Microsoft Words and Excel to document his students' performance. It helped him to track which students have progressed and who needs more guidance. Documenting students' progress in an organised manner is important for clear presentation to both students and administration.

**Figure 13. Example of Teacher Herman's reporting using Excel**



From the evidence given, it is noticeable that technology plays a significant role in supporting teachers with formative assessment. In the Teacher-Led Learning Circles (TLLC) project, it could be seen that teachers effectively integrated technology for either task design, record-keeping, analysis and reporting. For instance, Keenan used the Canva app to enhance literacy among lower primary pupils by integrating writing tasks with Canva app. Canva's templates allowed him to create not only the FA tasks but also engaging lessons, which significantly improved student participation and interaction. At the same time, his pupils created worksheets and gratitude cards, which enhanced their writing skills. Additionally, teachers like Fizz and Herman utilized Microsoft Docs and Excel to manage and track student performance data. Fizz created tables for teacher evaluations and peer-reading assessment form, while Herman documented student progress to identify those needing more support. These technological tools obviously facilitated a more efficient and organized approach to FA that consequently benefited both teachers and students.

## Effective FA Feedback

Formative feedback is a critical component of effective teaching and learning, characterized by several key elements that enhance its impact on student growth. First, it should be timely, provided soon after the task is completed, to ensure that the feedback is relevant and can be acted upon immediately (Mbuva, 2023). Second, formative feedback needs to be specific, addressing aspects of the student's work, highlighting strengths, and pinpointing areas for improvement (Mbuva, 2023; Shute, 2007). Third, it must be actionable, offering clear guidance on how to improve and what steps to take next. This should provide extra information (feed forward) that may help towards improvement. Additionally, formative feedback should be constructive and supportive, aimed at encouraging and motivating students rather than simply criticizing (Mbuva, 2023). It should also be ongoing, forming part of a continuous dialogue between teacher and student and between students. The nature of FA feedback should encourage self-reflection and self-regulation (Mohammadi et al., 2023). By incorporating these elements, FA feedback can effectively guide students toward achieving their learning goals and foster a deeper understanding of the material (Shute, 2007).

The teachers' participants have been seen to practice several elements of effective formative feedback. Among the participants, Herman has used the entrance and exit ticket to check on his pupils' prior and current understanding to dictate his next move in the lessons. By using entrance and exit ticket approaches, Herman was able to give timely feedback to his students, which could address any learning issues immediately. Pupils can receive the response based on the feedback they give to their teachers and carry out the next move.

Furthermore, formative feedback does not necessarily come from the teachers themselves. It can be a collaborative process between pupils. The feedback exchange between pupils when they evaluate each other's work is called peer feedback. Peer feedback encourages pupils to be critical of one's work and promotes autonomy in learning. According to Laiyi, everyone is responsible and should provide support in promoting FA. She adds,

...students learn best when they are happy and confident in their learning environment...they need to have support from teachers as well as their parents in learning and doing homework. Besides, they also need encouragement from their classmates and friends.



Teacher Fizz has used peer assessment during reading activities where the pupils assessed their peers by giving the stars. During the activity, pupils assessed their peers by doing observations on their friends' readings and filling out the forms. This peer assessment task is particularly doable for young pupils as the forms they have to fill are simple and straightforward. It is important when assessing using peer assessment that pupils know what to evaluate on their peers and teachers have provided clear explanations on what to assess beforehand.

**Figure 14. Example of Peer-Reading Assessment Activity in Class**



## Benefits of Formative Assessment

### FA & Teachers' Practices

Several benefits identified from the teachers' personal reflections and interviews. Findings indicated that teachers have over time improved the knowledge about formative assessment and consequently improved their practice. With the development in understanding of FA through a series of events and workshops, the teachers agreed that the teacher-led learning circles on formative assessment have benefited them in terms of identifying students' learning weaknesses, gathering information about students' prior knowledge, and engaging students. Firstly, the teacher participants agreed that formative assessment has helped them to identify students' weakness and inform them on the areas that need more guidance and attention. For example, teacher Fizz has identified from her observation in class as follows:

I have observed that few of my pupils are slow in reading, and they reluctantly want to improve themselves. They used to read softly and did not show any interest to learn.

As follow-up action to curb the problem, Fizz has come out with the SUNRISE Programme where pupils who have trouble in reading would receive extra focus from their teachers outside the lesson.

Besides, Herman used entrance and exit tickets to diagnose students' prior knowledge and current understanding of the lesson. He is convinced that these approaches have a positive impact on his students and plans to continue using them in the classroom. According to Herman,

Being used (entrance and exit ticket) to enhance pupils' writing ability and to change their mindset that English is not as hard as they think.

Secondly, the benefit of formative assessment is teachers could engage pupils in the lesson through activities conducted. For instance, teacher Juraya did assessment strategies in her classroom to encourage her pupils' engagement. She claimed as below,

From the assessment strategy, I was able to assess students in groups easily without having to do it one by one. Besides, this strategy also helped me to encourage students' engagement in class by designing activities which involved group work.

Herman also used assessment strategies like entrance and exit tickets to gauge his students' attention to writing. By knowing what to assist in terms of his students' weaknesses in writing, Herman can plan activities tailored to their needs which will engage them to learn.

Furthermore, through formative assessment, it can promote reflective teaching among teachers. For instance, Laiyi in her reflection, stated on what should be done in order for her students to achieve the target. She stated,

to be proficient in the subject, I think students should be able to master the 26 letters as basic and able to spell the 'suku kata' [syllable] in Bahasa Melayu.  
(Reflective Statement/Laiyi)

Besides, Vicky (not a real name) did his reflection based on his classroom observation to identify his pupils' learning progress. He mentioned that,

Direct observation can be applied at any point of the lesson. This gives me the opportunity to know the pupils actual knowledge when applied during pre lesson, how much they have learnt (during) and the areas that need more attention  
(Reflective Statement/Vicky)

When teachers engage in active reflective thinking, they become more aware of the entire pupils' learning process. This awareness helps them to strategize steps for the next lesson and to determine the most effective feedback to provide to pupils. Moreover, by being reflective in teaching, it will also help teachers to become more aware of strategies that may or may not work for their students so that they can plan for improvisation. This awareness can guide teachers to be selective on the activities chosen for their pupils and minimise the chance from conducting activities that are ineffective as different pupils may respond to different activities differently.

Overall, the teachers' reflections and interviews highlighted several benefits of formative assessment (FA) practices. Over time, through various workshops and events, teachers have improved their knowledge and application of FA, enhanced their ability to identify students' learning weaknesses, gather students' prior knowledge, and promote student engagements.

## FA & Students' Learning

Based on the promising Teacher-led Formative Assessment Practices, pupils have been found to benefit from these practices. The benefits include personalised learning, increased motivation, better understanding and improved learning outcomes and enhanced self-and peer-assessment skills. Formative assessment emphasises on individual pupils' progress according to individual capabilities. It involves ongoing assessment techniques that help teachers understand each pupil's unique strengths and areas for improvement, allowing for personalised instruction and support tailored to individual learning needs. Fizz has realised the benefit of formative assessment in relation to personalised learning and increased her pupils' motivation. She asserted,

My students' understanding has deepened on the skills that have been taught. Also I saw them learn from their mistakes and do corrections. It helps them to improve.

Fizz also believed that by identifying pupils' weaknesses and providing feedback to her pupils, she can help her pupils to improve learning individually. Also, it helps to close the gap between where her pupils' current performances are and their learning goals.

Besides, FA increased student motivation to learn. From another teacher participant response (Vicky), it is noted that FA in the form of collaborative approach helped students to develop a safe environment for learning that motivates students to participate in the classroom. He claimed,

I also believe students learn best via collaborative learning. By working together in small group sizes, they will be able to trust one another and speak the language freely.

Similarly, Laiyi mentioned that,

Students have the sense of collaboration and helping out their peers...[giving] encouragement...improves self-confidence...be motivated.

To add, FA also helped students in developing their understanding of the lesson. By identifying students' needs through FA, teachers could tailor their instructions. Based on the data gathered from FA practice, teachers can adjust their teaching strategies and materials to better support student learning in reading skills. This personalized approach can help students make significant progress in their reading abilities where according to Laiyi useful FA approach such as Dice Reading that she used for her class have made "students to read correctly...by recalling words that teacher used...[and] be more independent to read in the class."

Herman, through his FA practice with his pupils, highlighted at the beginning of the project that 80% of his pupils “have difficulty to construct grammatical sentences”. Based on this problem, he developed an achievable objective that was “making students write simple sentences” and witnessed progress not only in writing improvement but also in learning motivation (Portfolio/ Herman).

From these findings, it is evident that FA practice has significantly benefited pupils by promoting personalized learning, increasing motivation, enhancing understanding, and improving learning outcomes and self- and peer-assessment skills. By emphasizing individual capabilities and providing continuous feedback, FA helps to close the gap between current performance and learning goals. Additionally, it creates a supportive learning environment that encourages collaboration, boosts confidence, and fosters a deeper understanding among students.

## Professional Learning Processes to Support Teachers’ Formative Assessment Practices

Effective professional learning processes are essential to support teachers in planning, preparing, executing, refining and enhancing their formative assessment practices. Support for teachers in terms of knowledge building about FA and sharing of good practices will ensure that the teachers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to not only foster student success but to develop informed practice of teaching and assessing the students’ learning. Besides, continuous support from the school leaders, school administrators, and colleagues will keep motivating teachers to explore ways to improve and share FA practices. This is very apparent in the TLLC project findings.

Through the TLLC project, teacher participants are supported in terms of building knowledge and changing the teachers’ perspectives of FA. It is acknowledged that knowledge development is a fundamental aspect of professional learning that equips teachers with the necessary understanding and skills to implement effective formative assessment practices. The workshops, network events, and tutorials conducted manage to give an impact on the teachers’ knowledge. Juraya mentioned that from the TLLC project she learnt that,

formative assessment can be done anytime, anywhere, and in any form...I appreciate all the sharing from the teachers on how they did their formative assessment.

According to Keenan, the TLLC as a Professional Learning Platform provided him with “opportunity to...generate ideas and gain knowledge”.

The sharing sessions are crucial in that they create opportunities in fostering a collaborative professional learning environment and promote peer-to-peer learning and support, allowing teachers to learn from each other’s successes and mistakes. This was acknowledged by a teacher participant named Laiyi who added that the sessions helped her “understand clearer about the assessment.” While Juraya added that through the learning circles, she “was able to identify weaknesses of [her] strategy through feedback from other teachers and was able to work on improvement.”

**Figure 15. TLLC Online Tutorial Session**



Collaborative dialogue and resource sharing sessions were part of the professional learning support for teachers to improve their FA practice. This was apparent not only within the groups of the learning circles but between the groups. The collaborative dialogue and resource sharing session were present at the inter and intra circles. The network event that took place in Korea allowed impactful dialogue and sharing sessions between the groups of FA practitioners from Malaysia and Korea. Laiyi indicated that she valued most of the sharing from her peers on the network event that took place in Korea where she learnt about,

Korean teachers' teaching and learning environment, similarities and differences in the FA strategies such as think-pair-share, traffic lights, entrance and exit tickets...focusing on students' growth in multiple aspects.

**Figure 16. Network event for Malaysia-South Korea teacher participants**



Through the TLLC activities such as gallery walk, teacher participants gain insights on how other teachers plan and develop linkage between teaching and assessment. They also were able to adopt and adapt strategies to suit their groups of learners. Fizz asserts that from TLLC

sessions her FA understanding, and improved practice were supported through peer support, continuous reflection on own practice and by doing self-evaluation. To her, peer support,

...brings people together with shared experiences to support each other, helps identify areas of potential growth and encourages positive behavior, exposes people to different perspectives, genuinely cares and listens, provides in-depth information, and connects people to resources.

Another supportive professional learning provided during TLLC was the consultation or peer-coaching activity with colleagues outside the learning circles. A number of teacher participants find that the consultation or peer-coaching helps them to gather feedback and share their initiative on FA in view that the knowledge and promising practice of FA could be spread to a wider circle. The following responses from the teacher participants became evidence that the consultation and peer-coaching (working with more experienced teachers, especially) help in their FA practice:

...colleagues [support] classroom practice...[help] personal capacity enhancement (Portfolio/Herman)

Fortunately, I have a few experienced teachers and experts in Malay language... other teachers are also supportive and willing to do extra to ensure the students learn and become more proficient in this language... (Portfolio/Juraya)

According to Herman, other teachers' opinions would help at evaluating and informing if his FA practice is effective. From the responses, we could conclude that working collaboratively with peers and getting peer-checks promote a positive way towards improving one's own practice.

**Figure 17. Consultation and Peer-Coaching**



Finally, the tools prepared for the teacher participants also helped teacher participants to be objective, creative and critical in practising FA.

## Barriers to Teachers' Use of Formative Assessment

The aim of FA is to improve learning and at the same time the information from FA could help teachers at improving their instruction. However, in the real practice of FA, there are challenges that teachers have to face.

One of the primary challenges in the practice of formative assessment in Malaysia is the lack of clear and consistent policy guidelines. Although formative assessment is recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing student learning, there is often insufficient direction from educational authorities on its implementation. This lack of policy clarity can lead to varied interpretations and inconsistent practices across schools. Besides, due to lack of training and unclear directions for FA implementation, teachers were not sure of the difference between teaching and assessing the learners. Although the Professional Learning Circles (PLC) are practiced in Malaysia, there is no fixed area of focus to be emphasized. Professional development opportunities focusing specifically on formative assessment strategies are often limited, leaving teachers to rely on their own understanding of what classroom-based assessment is. Due to lack of understanding about FA, many teachers feel that classroom-based assessment particularly the FA is burdensome with a lot of work to be done on top of their existing workload. According to the TLLC's facilitators,

workload at their schools were the reasons participants missed some of the workshops and tutorials conducted by facilitator... I had to deal with different emotions, both my own and those of the participants. Sometimes, I was frustrated, when participants did not hand in their tasks on time after a few reminders (Reflection/Faci/Rosy).

Sometimes I need to remind them on their tasks to complete because they also have their own duties and responsibilities towards their job scope. In addition, participant also involved in so many things at school which they cannot escape from that (Reflection/Faci/ Nori).

Implementing formative assessment effectively involves continuous monitoring of student progress, providing timely feedback, and adjusting instruction based on assessment results. This process can be time-consuming and adds to the already heavy workload of teachers. The requirement to balance these tasks with other responsibilities, such as lesson planning, grading, and administrative duties, can lead to burnout and reduced effectiveness. Teachers may find it challenging to allocate sufficient time and energy to conduct thorough formative assessments, thereby limiting their potential benefits for student learning.

There would also be resistance to change from teachers who are accustomed to conventional teaching and assessment styles. This resistance is compounded by the fact that formative assessment requires a shift from teacher-centred instruction to a more student-centred approach, which can be challenging to adopt without adequate support and resources. Also, the resistance from parents and the demand from the education district office for school to achieve certain standards have also put pressure on the teachers which somehow affected on how students are evaluated.

To add, support for teachers in implementing formative assessment is another critical challenge. Effective formative assessment requires not only ongoing professional development, access to resources, but also a supportive school environment. However, many teachers reported poor support from colleagues, school administrators and parents. As mentioned by teacher Laiyi that,

I need the support of the students' parents as well as my school administrators and also my colleagues in giving ideas and support (Reflective Statement/Laiyi)

Similarly, Juraya expressed,

I really need the assistance from my colleagues and the school administration to help me bring out change and improvement in my school (Reflective Statement/Juraya)

Without strong support structures, teachers can feel isolated and overwhelmed by the demands of incorporating formative assessments into their classrooms. While formative assessment holds great promise for improving educational outcomes in Malaysia, several challenges impede its effective practice.

## Summary of Findings

The FA practices from the TLLC project share several key features that enhance student learning and teaching practice. These practices involve clear learning objectives and success criteria that are communicated to students, ensuring they understand what is expected of them. Developing from the learning objectives, teachers formulated their assessment objectives to ensure what was assessed fit and relevant to the teaching and learning objectives. Assessment approaches such as presentations, quizzes, exit and entrance tickets, and peer assessments were used to help teachers in gauging their students' understanding and in monitoring their learning progress. Real-time feedback and specific feedback are provided to help students in acquiring and understanding the knowledge or the input given by the teachers. Besides, the feedback helped teachers and students to identify their strengths and areas needing improvement for teaching and learning. Additionally, effective practices incorporate student self-assessment and reflection, encouraging students to take an active role in their learning process. Differentiation is another crucial feature, where assessments are tailored to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of students.

## Next Steps for Teacher-Led Learning Circles

To improve formative assessment (FA) practices, a multifaceted approach is necessary, beginning with comprehensive training and resources for teachers. Offering initial and ongoing training on effective FA strategies and tools ensures that teachers are well-equipped to implement these practices effectively. Such training should cover diverse FA techniques, data analysis methods, and the integration of technology to streamline the process.

Creating opportunities for teachers to share best practices and collaborate on assessment techniques is also crucial. Establishing professional learning communities and regular workshops can facilitate the exchange of ideas and strategies, fostering a collaborative environment where teachers learn from each other's successes and challenges.



Another key step is to get parents to be involved to create a supportive environment. Engaging Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in FA activities can build a broader support network for students, ensuring that parents are informed and involved in their children's learning processes. This collaborative approach helps in creating a conducive environment for formative assessments to thrive. As mentioned by teacher participants, Laiyi and Juraya, that:

I really need the assistance from my colleagues and the school administration to help me bring out change and improvement in my school (Reflective Statement/Juraya)

I need the support of the students' parents as well as my school administrators and also my colleagues in giving ideas and support (Reflective Statement/Laiyi)

This technological support in terms of infrastructure and also digital literacy training can help teachers to utilize for FA practice purposes. It may help teachers at planning and organizing their assessment practice. According to Rosy, one of the TLLC facilitators, to ensure that the practice of FA is successful, there needs to be,

a formative assessment module with a clear concept map [that] can guide teachers in understanding and implementing FA practices. This module should outline the principles of formative assessment, provide practical examples, and offer step-by-step guidance on how to integrate FA into daily teaching routines. By mapping out the FA process, teachers can have a visual and structured approach to follow, making it easier to adopt and sustain these practices. (Interview/Rosy).

In summary, to promote effective formative assessment practices, comprehensive training, collaboration among teachers, engagement with parents, utilization of technology for efficient data management, and providing clear FA instructional modules are required. These initiatives, collectively, will contribute to a more effective and supportive formative assessment environment, and consequently help in promoting learning development among students. outcomes.

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