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## **Malaysian Teachers' Perception of the Implementation of Oral Test in Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) and Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) Examination**

**Gregory Evan Anak Nanson**

Student, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

**Porshothman A/L Elenggoven**

Student, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

**Daljit Singh A/L Gurbaksh Singh**

Student, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

**Wan Aizat Bin Wan Hashmi**

Student, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

### **Abstract**

*Just recently, the Malaysian government attempted to replace the current public examinations, thus proposed to implement school-based assessment in public schools. However, little is known about the concerns of teachers who would directly be involved in the implementation system and what they may be facing as school-based assessment has yet to be in full swing. This paper highlights the findings from an interview on 5 English teachers who are currently serving in Malaysian public schools. The items in the interview elicited information on the stages of concerns from the respondents' point of view regarding theoretical constructs of the oral examination assessment and its innovation. The constructs are; Management, Organization-Implementation, Formatting, Indifference and Prioritization. The categories for the questions were built based on these identified constructs. The findings indicated that the respondents were highly concerned about the highlighted issue and their worries were multi-dimensional regardless of their experience in the education system. The results shown are not only apprising to the Malaysian English teachers themselves, but also to professional development trainers. This is for them to continue to monitor teachers' concerns throughout the process of educational change such as the school-based assessment. Therefore, informed decisions could be made while planning for in-service teacher training on school-based assessment. Future works are recommended on expanding similar research on other educational innovations.*

### **1. Introduction**

Hassan & Selamat (2002) (cited in Zaitun, Arshad, Mazanah & Malachi, 2011) investigated that teaching and testing in schools and national examinations are mainly focused on reading and writing skills while listening and speaking are not given much attention in classroom. Speaking is the learners' weakest skill. In relation to that, the Ministry of Education implemented The Malaysian School Based Oral Assessment (SBOA) in 2002. This is the first step where the formative language assessment was introduced in ESL classroom. The aim this mode of assessment is to equip the students with the ability to speak and communicate effectively as to fulfill their educational, occupational and daily needs. (Malaysian Examination Syndicate, 2002). From this aim, the Ministry of Education hopes that students can benefit from oral communication for their self development to well equipped individuals.

This oral examination is taken by lower secondary school students before their Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR). This oral assessment contributes marks to the actual PMR examination and a certificate as well. The oral assessment is taken three times a year and the best mark will be selected for the English PMR examination paper. The oral assessment is divided into five models. In Model One, student is assessed on issues or topics by the teacher in a question and answer session. It will involve two way communications where the teacher assesses the students. In the second Model, students need to give a speech in front to the class. The student presents information, a story or poem to another student based on a given topic or stimulus. This part of the assessment requires the student to memorize a passage. In Model three, students choose a partner and the teacher assesses them. For example, the student presents information from a picture or by giving descriptions. In the next model, the student chooses a partner and the teacher acts as a prompter. The students are required to ask and give opinions on certain topics or issues. The final section of the English oral assessment requires the students to interact in a group and answer questions spontaneously. The group should consist of three to four members. The PMR English oral assessment is based on teacher evaluation. In a study, Hamzah and Paramasivan (2009) found that the PMR English oral assessment was not implemented according to guidelines and objectives provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicates (2002 & 2003). In some schools the oral assessment was carried out for the sake of fulfilling the administrative directives. In line with the Malaysian Ministry of Education's plan to move away from

examination focused education, the ministry made some changes in oral assessment to promote communication and creative skills among the students.

In June 2014, the Minister of Education announced that the new Form Three Assessment (PT3) will replace the centralized Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) format. (*The News Straits Times*, June 15, 2014). Teacher assesses and score the assessment based on standardized guidelines prepared by the Education Ministry's Examination Syndicate. There are two assessors for this PT3 oral test – the subject teacher of the candidate and other English teacher from the same school. The PT3 oral test is divided into two sections. Section A is reading aloud and section B is spoken interaction. In section A, the student will be given a text and allowed to read it silently in a quarantine room before read aloud in front of the assessors. Meanwhile the section B of PT3 oral test requires student to answer questions asked by assessors spontaneously. The students evaluated based on bands, from Band one which indicates poor performance, to an excellent band of six. Therefore, this present study seeks to identify the perception of Malaysian English teachers' on the implementation of oral test in Form Three Assessment (PT3) and Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR). It is hoped that when the perception is identified, Examination Syndicate can modify the current oral test to more effective assessment in English language learning.

The aim of this study is to address the following objectives which are to identify the perception of Malaysian English teachers' on the implementation of oral test in Form Three Assessment (PT3) and to identify the perception of Malaysian English teachers' on the implementation of oral test in Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR).

The study aims to address the following question:

1. What are the teachers' perception towards Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) and Form Three Assessment (PT3) oral test?
2. What are the teachers' perception towards the format of Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) and Form Three Assessment (PT3) oral test?

This study will provide Examination Syndicate and teachers with some suggestions for assessment of English oral test and giving adequate and appropriate support in understanding, assessing, and developing students' communicative and creative skills. In addition, the findings from this study will contribute to the current oral test assessment of ESL secondary schools. Ministry of Education and teacher training institutions will benefit from these results in preparing future teachers to assess their students.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Saylor-Loof & Calman (2003, p. 2), oral tests are used to test speaking and traditionally are focusing solely on linguistic proficiency. Although the focus is on linguistic proficiency, oral test also comprises of testing on conversational skills and strategies, as well as para- and extra-linguistic features of the target language. Its purposes can be served into measuring language proficiency; to assess achievement of the objectives of a course of study; to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses; to identify what they do and do not know; and to assist in the placement of learners' within the teaching program (Hughes, 2003). The most common type of oral test is the interview test. In the interview test, students are being evaluated by conversing with an interviewer. In the interview, the performance of students in speaking will be evaluated and sometime there will be an assessor who is not taking part in the interview but will be assessing students' performance in speaking the target language (Saylor-Loof & Calman, 2003). Based on the definition from Malaysian Examination Board, PMR or Malaysian Lower Secondary Assessment is a nationalized examination administered centrally with course work assessment being evaluated by the school itself. Before the implementation of PT3 (Form Three Evaluation) in 2014, this examination is commonly taken by Form Three students and in accordance with Malaysian Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM) (<http://pmr.edu.tripod.com/apaitupmr.htm>, 2003). The two major language subjects in PMR are Malay Language or *Bahasa Melayu* and English Language. For English Language, the written examination comes in two papers. In Paper One, students are being directed to answer 40 questions of multiple choices format in one hour time. The Second Paper is an essay questions paper which requires students to answer it in one hour and thirty minutes period. In Paper 2, students are also being directed to answer literature question based on the book being studied in school such as 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde', 'The Phantom of Opera' or 'Robinson Crusoe' (<http://study.advertising.com.my/all-about-pmr-exam/>). Based on an interview conducted by Rosyahaida Abdullah (2014) with Malaysian Examination Board Operating Chief for Primary and Lower Secondary Sector, the interviewee did mentioned that PT3 is a component under School-Based Assessment (SBA) which is a reformation or improvement from the previous PMR. The main difference between PMR and PT3 is highly in oral test in which the main aim is not only to make students excel in written skill but also in speaking or communicative skill (Abdullah, 2014). With regard to oral test in PMR, it is highly in accordance with the principle of Malaysian School-Based Oral Assessment in which there are five models in it. The five models are as the following:

- 1) Student – teacher: Students are given a visual stimulus and are required to answer questions posed by the teacher;
- 2) Student – Listener: Students presents information, story or poem to another student based on topic given or stimulus;
- 3) Student-Prompter: Student chooses a partner and teacher assesses students;
- 4) Pair-work: Student chooses a partner and the teacher acts as a prompter;
- 5) Group work: Students are put into groups of 3 or 4. Students choose their own group members. Teacher assesses the students.

By July 2014, Form Three students in Malaysian secondary school will be tested via PT3 which replaces the PMR examination. Students will also be assessed via written and oral test for Malay Language and English Language subject (Choo, 2014). Since PT3 is a new thing and started by this year, not so much literature can be reviewed here. Further discussion on this topic will be explained later based on the outcome of this research.

### 3. Methodology

Interviews often yield a great amount of useful information for the researcher. Silverman as cited in Leedy & Ormrod (2013), stated that the researcher can ask questions related to any of the following: facts (e.g., biographical information), people's beliefs and perspectives about the facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviours, standard of behaviours (i.e., what people think *should* be done in certain situations), and conscious reasons for actions or feelings (e.g., why people think that engaging in a particular behaviour is desirable or undesirable).

Structure of an interview in a qualitative study is rarely rigid as compared to interviews conducted in a quantitative study. It is either open-ended or semi-structured, in the latter case revolving around a few central questions. Of course unstructured interviews are more flexible and more likely to yield more information that the researcher hadn't planned to ask for. Despite the positive outcomes, the primary disadvantage is that the researcher obtains different information from different people thus making it nearly impossible to compare the responses of various interviewees.

In this research, the researchers are going to implement a focus group interview where several participants are simultaneously converging in a meaningful discussion. To handle or conduct a focus group, the researcher will gather several people (usually no more than 10 or 12) to discuss for one (1) to two (2) hours on a particular issue or points regarding the research which the researchers have come up with. A moderator, who is part of researcher, introduces the topic or issue to be discussed. Apart from that, the moderator's task is also to make sure that no one dominates the discussions and keeps all of them focused on the topic. According to Creswell & Neuman as cited in Leedy & Ormrod (2013), focus groups are especially useful when time is limited, group members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with one another, and the group interaction might be more informative than individually conducted interviews.

#### 3.1. Research Procedure

This research will be done based on a qualitative method which involves a focus group interview with respondents (teachers) from a particular school in *Pahang*. The interviews will be done based on a focus group interview with five (5) teacher respondents from *SMK Sungai Ruan, Raub, Pahang*. The interview consists of ten (10) questions which will be highlighted to the respondents. Next, they will have to argue on the matter, discuss as well as look for appropriate solutions and finally produce an outcome for each question. The interview will be done for at least one and a half hours. For this focused group interview, there are not many materials or resources to be used. The researcher will act as the moderator in the focus group interview to ensure that respondents are on the right track and do not stray from the arising matter. Once the interview session is completed, any sort of responses from respondents will be collected. Based on the outcome, an analysis will be done to collect the data in order to yield conclusions that promote better understanding of the phenomenon.

### 4. Findings and Discussions

From the analysis of data obtained from the interview session conducted with the respondents, it is possible to deduce and conclude that *PentaksiranTingkatan3* (PT3) oral test can be conducted efficiently in the school under study. Moreover, there seemed to be different perceptions on the degree of understanding between the respondents being interviewed. It is well mentioned from the data derived that *PentaksiranTingkatan3* (PT3) oral test is integrated with various language skills as compared to the *PenilaianMenengahRendah* (PMR) examination. It provides good grounding of the language skills, hence developing and improving their command in English language.

Since Malaysian teachers had been exposed to the usual summative testing by the central examination syndicate of the Ministry of Education for a long time, the introduction of the school-based *PentaksiranTingkatan 3* (PT3) oral test was something new. According to Tan Sri Dr Murad Mohammad Nor (as quoted by Hamzah and Sinnasamy, 2009, p. 14), teachers are the most important part in the implementation of any plan. No matter how good the plan is, it will be of no use if the teachers do not carry it out well. Aside from that, Weir (1994) mentioned that serious changes in teachers' insight of their role in relation to their students and their classroom practice plays a vital role in the implementation of formative assessment such as the school-based assessment. Therefore, the implementation of *PentaksiranTingkatan 3* (PT3) oral test leads to heavier work load as compared to the previous *PenilaianMenengahRendah* (PMR) examination because there are many documents to complete; yet, it leads this matter to time constraint as well. As claimed by Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009) who quoted Weir (1994), there seems to be negativity towards the school-based assessment by teachers because it was imposed on them in such a hurry and the presence of time-constraint. This matter involves a lot of new guidelines and demonstrations for a teacher to design the task well. Hall and Hord (2001, p. 7), concurred that leaders of organizational change need to plan proper ways to foresee and facilitate change at the individual level in an attempt or monitor changes. Clear sense of direction, purpose, proper task design, scoring methods, freedom from bias, and effective use of assessment would enable teachers to carry out efficient and effective school-based OEA (Stiggins, 2004). Apart from that, the weaker students might find it difficult performing in the assessment because it involves higher order thinking skills. Students are required to generate own ideas in explaining things better because it does not involve any visual aids as a reference.

### 5. Conclusion

*PentaksiranTingkatan3* (PT3) oral test is a new venture in the Malaysian school system. Therefore, teachers should be given proper guidelines, sufficient time as well as organized planning methods to conduct this oral test systematically in secondary schools all over Malaysia. Through well-designed professional development, teachers will be more willing to take up the challenge and become a more school-based assessment literate and feel a stronger sense of efficacy and ownership for the new modes of assessment. In addition, the Ministry of Education would also need to focus on the selection, recruitment and the

professional development of teachers to ensure that all the structures and plans of the ministry can be carried out according to the desired manner.

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