

Bridging Policy and Practices: ESL Teachers' Implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment in Malaysian Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

While extensive research has examined the effective implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA), limited insight exists regarding its application within English as a Second Language (ESL) primary education in Malaysia. Specifically, little is known about how assessment policies are interpreted and enacted by teachers in everyday classroom contexts. This study explores how ESL teachers implement CBA and examines the extent to which their assessment practices align with national policy requirements. A qualitative research design was adopted, employing data triangulation through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to ensure credibility and depth of understanding. Nine ESL teachers from two public primary schools in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, were purposefully selected, all of whom taught Year 6 students. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in teachers' assessment practices. Findings indicate that teachers made commendable efforts to implement CBA by incorporating a range of assessment strategies, such as worksheets, oral questioning, project work, and informal classroom activities. However, several discrepancies between policy intentions and classroom practices were observed. These included limited communication of explicit learning objectives, inconsistent use of formative feedback, and the rigid application of standardized rubrics. Additionally, teachers continued to rely heavily on students' grades and numerical scores to determine mastery levels, reflecting a persistent exam-oriented assessment culture. By highlighting gaps between policy and practice, this study provides valuable insights into the practical realities of CBA implementation in Malaysian ESL classrooms and offers implications for refining assessment guidelines and professional development initiatives to better support effective CBA practices.

Keywords: Assessment policy implementation, classroom-based assessment, English as a second language, teacher assessment practices

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's education system has historically been defined by an exam-oriented culture, where high-stakes assessments have dominated educational priorities. This reliance on high-stakes testing has sparked debate among scholars, who argue that it limits teachers' ability to fully support young learners' development and potential

(Chin et al., 2019; Azli & Akmar, 2020). In response, the Malaysian government abolished the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)* in 2021 as part of broader reforms aimed at fostering a more holistic and formative assessment culture through Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA). In primary ESL education, CBA supports a more meaningful evaluation process, complemented by the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which provides internationally recognized benchmarks for assessing language proficiency (Sidhu et al., 2018). Given that Malaysia's educational reforms have been largely top-down, primary school teachers are now expected to adapt to the evolving assessment landscape. They are expected to take active roles in CBA phases, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and reporting, while ensuring compliance with policy directives (Mohd Isa et al., 2020). The effective adaptation to such reforms requires educators to develop a deep understanding of policy shifts to implement effective practices (Taneri, 2016).

Despite these intentions, challenges remain in translating policy into practice as many teachers continue to use traditional summative methods. Studies (Arumugham, 2020; Yeh, 2021; Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024) indicate that primary school teachers face obstacles such as limited assessment literacy, inadequate training, and time constraints, which hinder the adoption of CBA. Panadero et al. (2019) highlight teachers' reliance in transitioning into CBA as there is persistence of old habits where numerical scores remain the primary measure of student achievement. Additionally, the abrupt discontinuation of UPSR and the rapid rollout of CBA have led to concerns about inadequate planning, contributing to uncertainty and resistance among teachers (Marnizam & Ali, 2021). Insufficient training further exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult for educators to internalize and effectively implement the new policy (Karim & Mashudi, 2025; Pei et al., 2025; Parameswaran et al., 2025).

While CBA is widely recognized as integral to language learning, research on its implementation within Malaysia's primary ESL context remains limited (Liu & Xu, 2017). Previous studies primarily focus on secondary education (Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024; Abd Razak et al., 2024) and higher learning institutions (Hashim et al., 2021). However, little is known about how primary school teachers apply CBA and whether their practices align with policy expectations (Mat Yusof et al., 2025). Examining this alignment is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of assessment reforms in primary classrooms and guiding future policy improvements. Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What strategies do Malaysia's primary school ESL teachers employ in implementing classroom-based assessment?
2. How do their assessment practices align with policy mandates?

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) in Primary Education

Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) informs both teacher decision-making and student learning (Black, 2015; Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Zhao et al., 2016). It requires teachers to engage in a collaborative, reflective data-collection process to assess learning progress and make informed instructional decisions. Leong (2014) and Harlen (2012) emphasize that classroom assessment should integrate both formative and summative components, viewing the process as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. The formative component is grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which advocates scaffolding strategies to support cognitive advancement for both teachers and students (Black, 2015; Pattalitan Jr., 2016). Classroom assessment is curriculum-integrated and ongoing, embedded within daily instructional practices (Tee & Ahmed, 2014). In contrast, summative assessment functions as an accountability mechanism, typically administered at the conclusion of a unit, term, or academic year to evaluate student achievement and guide grading processes (Pattalitan Jr., 2016). Contemporary educational frameworks categorize assessment into three key types:

1. Assessment of Learning – typically summative, where teachers evaluate students' achievement of specific learning outcomes based on collected evidence. This informs instructional planning and future programming.
2. Assessment for Learning – occurs when teachers use feedback derived from observations, questioning, and informal tasks to provide students with targeted guidance, helping them improve their performance and deepen understanding.
3. Assessment as Learning – positions students as active agents in their learning journey, where they reflect on their progress, set goals, and self-monitor their learning strategies and outcomes.

The Implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment

According to the Curriculum Development Division (2017), implementing CBA requires teachers to carry out a series of interconnected tasks: planning, constructing assessment items, administering assessments, monitoring student progress, recording outcomes, and reporting results. These responsibilities must be seamlessly integrated into daily teaching and learning processes to ensure effectiveness. Educators are expected to tailor their strategies to both subject matter requirements and students' proficiency levels (Mohamad Marzaini, 2025). The flow of CBA implementation can be summarized as follows:

1. **Planning the instruction and assessment.**
Teachers begin by defining clear learning objectives aligned with the curriculum standards. They must select assessment types that suit the objectives, student proficiency, and classroom context.
2. **Implementing classroom instruction and executing the assessment.**
Teachers integrate assessment activities into lessons using oral, written, and observational methods. These continuous assessments are embedded within instructional activities and are designed to monitor learning as it unfolds.
3. **Conducting assessment intervention.**
Teachers evaluate student performance using rubrics or descriptive indicators of learning. Based on the outcomes, they provide timely feedback and plan targeted interventions, either immediate or strategic, to address students' developmental needs.
4. **Grading the students' mastery level.**
Teachers assess and record students' proficiency levels, which are categorized according to specific descriptors linked to the curriculum's performance standards.
5. **Reporting students' mastery level.**
Teachers compile and communicate students' progress through periodic reporting. This includes sharing insights on knowledge acquisition, skill mastery, values, attitudes, and overall performance with key stakeholders, particularly parents. Such transparency enables parents to track their children's development and support their learning effectively.

Throughout the process, CBA prioritizes personalized and responsive teaching, enabling educators to identify students who have achieved mastery and those who require additional support. This flexibility ensures that instruction remains inclusive and equitable, acknowledging the diverse cognitive abilities of primary-level learners.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the implementation of CBA among primary school ESL teachers. A case study design (Yin, 2014) was employed to facilitate an in-depth investigation within a defined context. This approach emphasizes the strength of capturing participants' nuanced, multifaceted experiences, which Merriam and Tisdell (2016) believe can help the research delve deeper into the phenomenon under investigation. Rahman (2014) highlighted that this method brings value in exploring the "lived experiences" of individuals in the new reform climate. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A total of nine ESL teachers were selected from two public primary schools located in the northeast district of Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

Participants

As recommended by Creswell (2002), a qualitative sample of 4 to 25 participants is generally adequate for achieving research objectives. The two schools were chosen due to their differing institutional characteristics. School A, designated a High-Performance School, comprised approximately 70 classes, double the number found in School B. At School A, instructional, learning, and assessment practices were conducted rigorously, with regular research discussions organized to promote evidence-based pedagogical improvements.

The participants were also chosen through a criterion-based method. The participants should teach the same grade of Year 6 in primary school, possessing at least a bachelor's degree in ELT (English Language Teaching), a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and formal training in CBA through workshops, district-level initiatives, or professional learning communities (PLCs) at the school level. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure participants' confidentiality. Table 1 below presents the participants' demographic profiles.

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Profiles

Participants	Age (Years)	Gender	Qualification	Experiences in ELT (years)
Teacher 2	28	Female	B.Ed TESL	4
Teacher 3	30	Male	M.Ed TESL	3
Teacher 4	34	Female	B.A Linguistic	10
Teacher 5	29	Female	B.Ed TESL	3
Teacher 6	30	Female	M.Ed TESL	6
Teacher 7	29	Female	B.Ed TESOL	5
Teacher 8	28	Female	B.Ed TESL	4
Teacher 9	29	Male	M.Ed TESL	5

Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations (Appendix1), and document analysis. This approach enables triangulation of data, a technique used to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers’ assessment practices align with policy requirements (Rahman, 2014). Figure 1 below illustrates the triangulation procedures employed in this study.

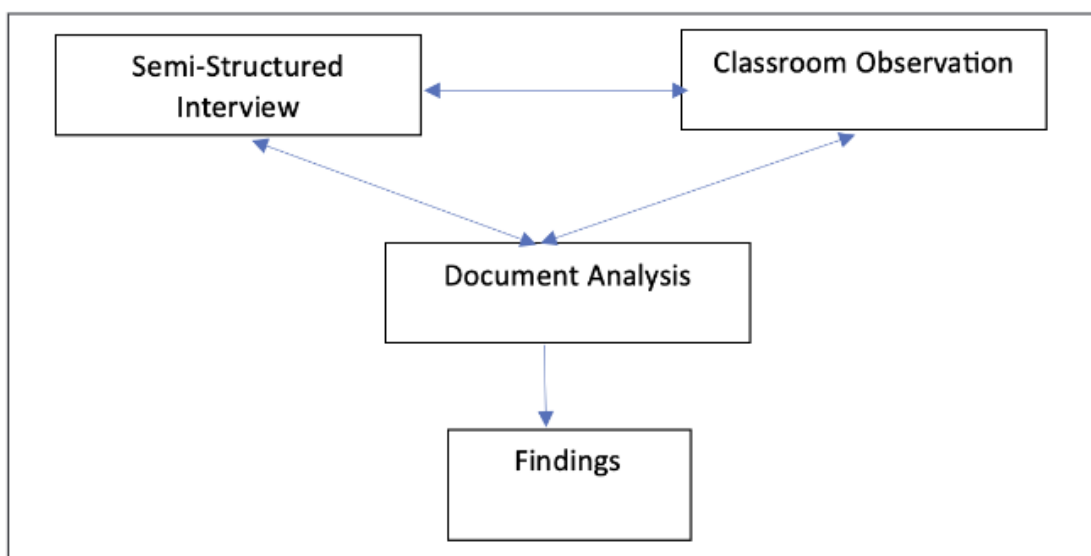


Figure 1: Data Triangulation Procedures

The semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions served as the primary data collection method in this study. Creswell (2002) affirmed that incorporating open-ended questions allows participants to express their thoughts in their own words, leading to rich and meaningful responses. To ensure consistency in data collection, the researchers developed an interview guide based on Patton’s (2015) recommendations. The interview protocol was divided into three sections. Section A covered participants’ personal backgrounds, teaching experiences, and academic qualifications. Section B focused on teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CBA implementation. Section C examined teachers’ practical experiences in implementing CBA in their classrooms. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was audio-recorded for subsequent analysis.

Additionally, classroom observation was conducted to enrich the interview data. Classroom observation provides critical insight into teacher-student interactions, a key aspect of curriculum implementation (Merriam, 1998). Field notes were systematically recorded using a two-column format. The first column (“Description of Event”) contained detailed notes on assessment practices, classroom layout, teacher-student dynamics, and assessment administration methods, while the second column (“Reflection”) documented the researcher’s interpretations and reflections. This approach ensured a thorough, structured account of CBA implementation. To minimize the Hawthorne effect and ensure authentic teacher behavior, researchers adopted a “Complete Observer” role (Baker,

2006). The Hawthorne effect refers to the tendency of participants to modify their behavior simply because they are aware that they are being observed. By maintaining a non-intrusive presence and limiting interaction during classroom observations, the researchers aimed to reduce potential behavioral alterations and capture more natural assessment practices. No video recordings were made, as their omission allowed teachers to demonstrate assessment practices more freely and naturally. Observations primarily focused on teachers’ strategies for assessing the four core language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), highlighting the range of assessment techniques used within the CBA framework.

Document analysis of The Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) and The CBA Guidebook was used to triangulate the findings. A document summary form (Yin, 2014) was used to systematically extract relevant information, with fields for the document title and date, content description, significance to the research, and reflections. The documents were labeled in ascending order (e.g., Document 1/Doc 1) to streamline referencing and ensure consistency throughout the analysis (Merriam, 1998).

Access to the research sites was formally obtained through approval from the Pulau Pinang State Education Department and the respective school principals. Upon receiving institutional permission, the principals assisted in identifying teachers who met the predetermined selection criteria. An invitation letter outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations was then distributed to eligible teachers. Participation was entirely voluntary. All selected participants were required to sign an informed consent form prior to data collection. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and secure data-handling procedures.

Data Analysis

To address the research questions, thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012, p. 237) was used to identify themes and codes representing teachers’ assessment practices. This procedure is elucidated in Figure 2 below.

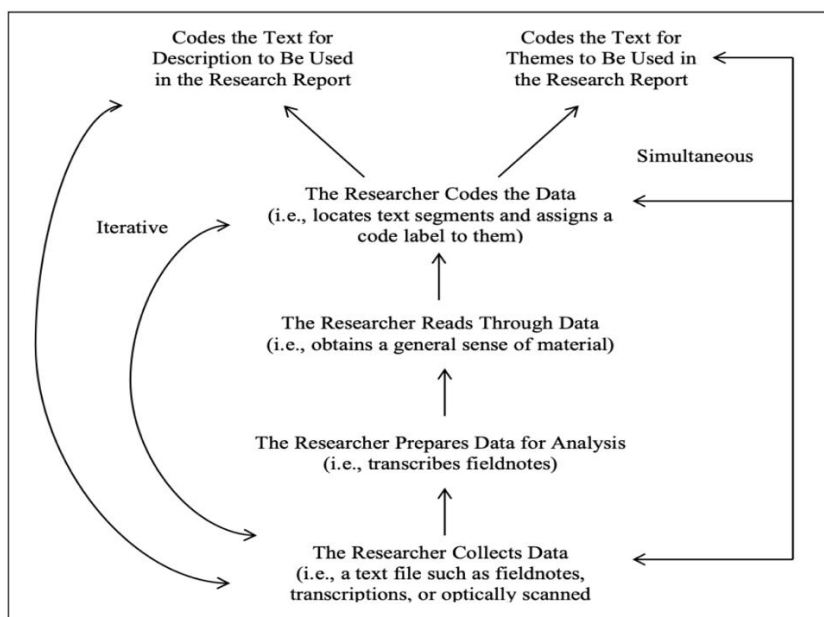


Figure 2: Thematic Analysis Procedures

The qualitative data analysis (QDA) software is known as Atlas.TI-25.0.1 was used to support the storage, retrieval, and coding of qualitative data, facilitating efficient data handling without replacing the researcher's analytical role (Creswell, 2012; Bryman, 2008). A structured digital folder was created for each participant, containing data from interviews, classroom observations, and relevant curriculum excerpts. The analysis began with a case-by-case review of each ESL teacher’s data set. Each dataset underwent the same systematic coding process to ensure consistency and completeness. The coded data were then aligned with the research questions to develop meaningful themes that addressed the study objectives. The findings were subsequently presented as a narrative discussion detailing the analytic journey and culminating in interpretations linked to the existing

literature. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, intercoder reliability (ICR) was established. Cohen’s Kappa Coefficient was used to assess the degree of agreement between coders. The interpretation of the coefficient values followed the agreement threshold outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Cohen’s Kappa Threshold of Agreement

Values	Indication of Agreement
< 0	No agreement
0.01-0.20	Slight agreement
0.21-0.40	Fair agreement
0.41-0.60	Moderate agreement
0.61-0.80	Substantial agreement
0.81-1.00	Perfect agreement

Fifteen codes were independently analyzed by two raters. The initial coding frame was developed by Coder 1, who segmented and labeled the data. Once completed, the coded dataset was saved and passed to Coder 2 as a “clean” file, who then independently applied codes using a comparable coding framework. ICR was operationalized in binary terms: a score of 1 indicated full agreement on a code, while 0 represented disagreement. This nominal transformation facilitated the calculation of Cohen’s Kappa, following the methodological recommendations of O’Connor and Joffe (2020). The coding comparison was analyzed using SPSS, yielding a Cohen’s Kappa score of $K=0.65$ ($p < .05$), as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Cohen’s Kappa Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standardised Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Measure of Kappa Agreement	.663	.136	4.004	.000
N of Valid Cases	35			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

This result reflects substantial agreement, according to the Landis and Koch (1977) interpretative scale, as presented in Table 3 above.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study seeks to explore the strategies that Malaysia’s primary school ESL teachers employ to implement classroom-based assessment and to determine whether their assessment practices align with policy mandates. The data analysis generated three (3) themes with two (2) sub-themes each, as illustrated in Table 4

Table 4: Teachers' Implementation of CBA

Theme	Focus of Theme	Subtheme	Description of Practice
Theme 1: Written Assessment	Use of written tasks to evaluate students' language knowledge and skills	1.1 Assessing through Textbook Chapters	Teachers conduct CBA after completing textbook chapters or parts of chapters to monitor students' understanding and progress in a structured and standardized manner.
		1.2 Task Sheets	Teachers design or adapt worksheets and modules (e.g., CEFR activity books, school-prepared modules, past/trial papers) to assess students' comprehension, writing, and listening, often resembling exam-oriented formats.
Theme 2: Observation- Based Assessment	Gathering evidence of learning through classroom observation and interaction	2.1 Peer Evaluation	Students evaluate peers' presentations and group work while teachers observe interactions and performance, though often without explicit success criteria.
		2.2 Checklists and Rubrics	Teachers use department-prepared or self-designed checklists and rubrics to record students' achievement, mostly standardized across proficiency levels.
Theme 3: Oral Assessment	Assessing students' speaking and verbal understanding	3.1 Oral Presentation	Students present individually or in groups (e.g., picture description, poster presentation), sometimes accompanied by peer feedback.
		3.2 Question and Answer	Teachers ask oral questions during lessons to gauge students' comprehension and speaking ability, either formally or spontaneously.

Theme 1: Written Assessment

A written classroom assessment is an evaluation method that requires students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of a given topic through written responses (Tayyebi, Abbasabady & Abbassian, 2022). This study found that written assessments were conducted based on textbook chapters and task sheets.

Subtheme 1.1: Assessing through the Textbook Chapters.

Teachers commonly use textbooks as both an assessment tool and a resource for evaluating students' knowledge of classroom topics. Teacher 4 adopted a structured strategy by aligning her assessments with textbook chapters, believing this approach allowed her to systematically monitor student progress over time.

"I will conduct the PBD (CBA) once a month, right after I finish each chapter from the textbook..." (T4)

This practice helped her maintain consistency in data collection and track her students' learning development across units. Teacher 2 also emphasized that aligning assessments with the textbook aimed to maintain a standardized approach among teachers within the school. She explained that the panel had decided assessments should be conducted after completing each textbook chapter to ensure consistency and adherence to curriculum guidelines for all educators.

"Okay. I discussed this with the head of the panel. She said that we want to standardize it for all teachers in our school, so she advised us to do it after we finish each chapter in the textbook..." (T2)

Some teachers implement classroom assessment tentatively, aiming to provide ongoing feedback and monitor student progress throughout the learning process. Teacher 5, who advocated for this approach, determined the frequency of assessments based on the progression of textbook chapters. She conducted assessments twice for each topic, once after teaching half of the content and again after completing the full chapter.

"I would conduct the CBA after covering half of the chapter and again upon completing all chapters. Personally, I find it easier to determine whether students can progress from one chapter to the next." (T5)

Although textbooks are commonly used as instructional tools, their usage in Teacher 5's reading class did not align with the principles of the CBA policy. The assessments implemented were predominantly formal and resembled exam-style tasks, administered after lessons. These tasks served more as summative assessments rather than formative ones, with minimal scaffolding or ongoing feedback provided throughout the learning process. As a result, students were often uncertain about the lesson's learning objectives and expectations. This approach contradicts the intent of the CBA Guidebook (2019), which advocates a low-stress, student-centered assessment environment that supports learning through continuous, formative feedback.

"Teachers need to create a fun atmosphere, without pressure and modesty in the classroom environment, so that the interaction between teachers and students, students and students, as well as students and learning materials, can take place in a meaningful situation."
(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p. 39)

Subtheme 1.2: Task Sheets

This study found that teachers used task sheets to administer written assessments. Task sheets provide students with a set of instructions and activities designed to evaluate their understanding of the subject matter (Setiawan et al., 2022). They can be structured to assess a range of skills and knowledge, making them a versatile assessment tool. To develop CBA task sheets, teachers incorporated supporting materials such as workbooks to formulate questions. Teacher 1, for instance, referenced the CEFR activity book when designing assessment tasks to ensure alignment with internationally recognized benchmarks.

"I usually refer to the CEFR activity book and... and some testing to be done..." (T1)

Some teachers used a school-prepared module as an internal resource for conducting assessments. According to Teacher 3 and Teacher 7, their language panels developed this classroom-based module to standardize assessment practices across the school. Teachers were required to evaluate student progress by assigning embedded tasks, thereby making the module a valuable tool for assessing students' mastery levels. This approach highlights how teachers relied on internally developed materials to maintain a structured assessment process.

"Basically...erm...my school provided me with a module. We have our module. As I said just now, my English department prepared it for us..." (T3)

"I also used some of the exercises from the module..." (T7)

While task sheets are commonly used in classroom assessment, current practices do not fully align with policy objectives that advocate for a low-stakes assessment culture. Observations revealed that task sheets closely resembled formal examination instruments, contradicting the intended holistic and formative nature of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA).

"I use the trial or listening papers from other schools to help students become familiar with the current exam format." (T2)

"Sometimes, I give them worksheets and ask them to answer comprehension questions. The comprehension question is like the format of their exam... For writing, I also use a similar approach. I provide students with a mind map, and they have to write an essay based on it. This task is comparable to their Paper 2 exam question." (T9)

This approach complicates alignment with curriculum standards, as it prioritizes task completion and exam preparedness over conceptual understanding and skill development. As a result, the assessments do not accurately measure what should be evaluated, creating a disconnect between assessment strategies and desired educational outcomes. Students classified as "low achievers" often struggle to meet expected learning and assessment goals, reinforcing the need for differentiated assessment approaches. Putra (2023) emphasizes that tailoring strategies to students' diverse academic levels is essential. Differentiation in content, instruction, and assessment ensures that students' individual needs and interests are properly addressed. An analysis of the Scheme of Work (SOW) derived from the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) reinforces the importance of varied assessment tasks during the evaluation process. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot effectively assess students in CBA. Instead, teachers are encouraged to design diverse and flexible language assessments that align with students' needs and abilities. The excerpt below illustrates the recommended approach.

“The same source material and learning objectives can be maintained while adjusting and tailoring tasks to suit students’ varying needs. Although this requires additional preparation from teachers, the adapted tasks can often be reused across multiple classes. Educators may also modify assignments to accommodate differences in proficiency, providing more advanced tasks for stronger learners while offering additional support or simplified activities for those requiring reinforcement. This approach ensures that assessments are both inclusive and responsive to students’ diverse skills and interests.”

(SBELC Scheme of Work, 2019; p. 16)

An observation of Teacher 5’s class revealed critical gaps in the implementation of CBA. According to the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC), teachers are expected to address both the main and complementary skills in their lessons. However, the assessment conducted in this lesson focused exclusively on listening skills, completely overlooking speaking skills, even though it was identified as a complementary skill in the lesson plan, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Lesson: 1		Week: 21	Day: Wednesday	Date: Click or tap to enter a date.
Time: 9.45 am - 10.45 am		Class: 4 Bahagia	Subject: ENGLISH LANGUAGE	
Theme: Health and Environment			Topic: Health	
Language Focus: Words Related to Health				
Skills Main: Listening			Complementary: Listening	
Content Standard: Understand meaning in a variety of familiar contexts			Understand meaning in a variety of familiar contexts	
Learning standard: Understand independently specific information and details in simple longer texts on a range of familiar topics			Understand independently specific information and details in simple longer texts on a range of familiar topics	
Objectives 1) By the end of the lesson most pupils will be able to: understand meaning in variety of familiar contexts 2) By the end of the lesson most pupils will be able to:-				
Success Criteria/ Can do statements 1) Pupils can fill in the 10 blank spaces while listening to the audio				
Teaching aids Textbook, speaker, flashcards, worksheets				
CCE: Information and Communication Technology			HOTS: Analysis	
Differentiation Strategies: Task			21 CL: Pair / Group Discussion	

Figure 3: Teacher 5’s Lesson Plan

This practice contradicts the SBELC Scheme of Work (2019), which clearly requires integrating listening as the main skill and speaking as the complementary skill. Figure 4 below illustrates this requirement as outlined in the Scheme of Work.

WEEK:	CONTENT STANDARD	LEARNING STANDARD	LEARNING OUTLINE	MATERIALS / REFERENCES	CROSS CURRICULAR ELEMENT	DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES	TEACHERS' NOTES / REMARKS
LESSON 98: Listening							
MAIN SKILL(S) FOCUS: Listening							
THEME: Health and Environment							
TOPIC: Health							
LANGUAGE/GRAMMAR FOCUS: Words related to health							
Main Skill Listening 1.1 Understand meaning in a variety of familiar contexts	Main Skills Listening 1.1.2 Understand independently specific information and details in simple longer texts on a range of familiar topics	Pre-Lesson See Teacher's Book. Lesson Delivery See Teacher's Book. Post Lesson See Teacher's Book.	Pulse 2 Unit 9 p.97	Language	Please refer to provided list of differentiation strategies and select appropriate strategy/strategies.		
Complementary Skill Speaking 2.1 Communicate information, ideas, opinions and feelings intelligibly on familiar topics	Complementary Skill Speaking 2.1.2 Ask for and respond appropriately to simple suggestions						

Figure 4: SBELC Scheme of Work

The Scheme of Work (2019, p. 8) also emphasizes the importance of integrating both main and complementary skills to ensure that students are exposed to the full range of learning standards specified in the curriculum. It cautions that failure to do so may limit students' opportunities to develop essential language competencies.

“Learning Standard will appear as the main skill and as a complementary skill. Therefore, teachers must ensure that both the main and complementary skills are covered in each lesson. The complementary skill is not optional and cannot be ignored or dropped from the lesson. Doing this may risk pupils not receiving adequate practice and exposure to all the given Learning Standards within the Curriculum Framework.”

(SBELC Scheme of Work, 2019; p. 8)

Beyond skill misalignment, task sheet implementation was found to deviate from policy requirements. During classroom observation, Teacher 5's assessment method prioritized task completion with minimal scaffolding, limiting the formative aspect of learning. Moreover, marks were compiled immediately upon task completion, with the teacher citing ease of evaluation and direct comparisons with SBELC performance standards as justification for this approach. Despite the CBA framework's intent to move away from an exam-oriented culture, assessment practices still reflected formal testing principles, reinforcing a summative-focused mindset. Similar trends were identified in Yan et al.'s (2021) study in China, where teachers continued to rely on structured testing formats despite CBA directives. Providing students with grades and generic praise, rather than constructive feedback, was noted as inconsistent with the intended goals of classroom assessment. Ultimately, the over-reliance on task sheets in the absence of adequate scaffolding and feedback mechanisms reflects the misunderstanding of CBA principles in classroom instruction. Therefore, it leads to misapplication and an inability to support student learning effectively.

Theme 2: Observation-Based Assessment

Moreover, teachers also used the observation method to gather firsthand insights on students' learning and classroom behavior (Puspita & Suyatno, 2020). This study revealed that the observation was conducted using peer evaluation, a checklist, and rubrics.

Subtheme 2.1: Peer Evaluation

Teachers believed that peer evaluation facilitated the assessment process by fostering collaborative learning and reflection, as students provided feedback on each other's work during classroom activities. Teacher 2 emphasized that group work allowed her to integrate all language skills within a single lesson while enabling students to evaluate their peers' performance.

“I prefer using group work as it engages students in all four language skills of writing, reading, speaking, and listening. They are required to present and listen to their friends' presentations...” (T1)

Observing students as they evaluated their peers helped teachers assess classroom interactions and monitor collaboration. Teacher 4 and Teacher 7 noted that peer questioning was particularly useful for engaging students in critical discussions.

“I ask them to present because it's easier for me to evaluate their performance. Sometimes, I also ask the other students to give feedback on their friends' presentations...” (T4)

“Sometimes, I assign a friend to ask them questions, or they ask each other questions during the activity...” (T7)

Despite its potential benefits, observations of Teacher 4's classroom revealed issues in implementing peer evaluation effectively, as the assessment lacked clearly defined success criteria. Students struggled to identify what constituted quality work, leading them to focus on summative evaluation rather than constructive feedback. During the evaluations, students tended to highlight weaknesses without offering supportive or actionable feedback. This practice conflicted with the guidelines outlined in the CBA Guidebook (2019), which emphasize aligning assessments with curriculum standards to ensure validity, reliability, and fairness in professional judgment.

“Teachers must be aware of the educational goals outlined in the relevant curriculum documents. All subject curricula include information, skills, and values. Teachers must comprehend the purpose of the curriculum framework as well as the Content Standards,

Learning Standards, and Performance Standards of their topics to assess the degree of student mastery.”

(CBA Guidebook, 2019; p. 39)

The findings align with Yan et al.'s (2021) research, which found that teachers' inability to clearly communicate learning objectives led to unsuccessful peer evaluations. To ensure effective implementation, teachers must explicitly define evaluation criteria, guide students in constructive feedback practices, and align assessment strategies with curriculum standards.

Subtheme 2.2: The Checklist and Rubrics.

This study also revealed that checklists and rubrics were extensively used as part of the structured observation method during the classroom assessments. Teacher 1 designed his checklist with specific criteria that students needed to fulfill during the assessment. He expressed that using a checklist helped him track student achievement more effectively, as it provided clear guidance on the aspects to focus.

“I will just check the checklist and identify what they have achieved...” (T1)

Similarly, Teacher 3 utilized a checklist but followed a standardized version issued by his school's English department. He explained that student evaluations were conducted using preset rubrics, ensuring consistency in assessment procedures despite students' diverse proficiency levels.

“...my department prepared some rubrics that are appropriate for speaking tests and all other language assessments. This helps teachers to evaluate the students effectively...” (T3)

While standard rubrics promote fairness, applying them uniformly across diverse proficiency levels may ignore students' individual strengths. This can disadvantage lower-performing learners and misalign assessment goals. Brookhart (2018) advocates flexible rubrics that accommodate diverse abilities, supporting differentiated assessments tailored to students' proficiency levels.

A classroom observation of Teacher 3's speaking assessment demonstrated that standardized rubrics posed difficulties for low-ability students, hindering accurate evaluation of their speaking skills. During the assessment, students struggled to meet the pre-set criteria, suggesting that the rigid evaluation framework did not accurately reflect their abilities. This issue risks distorting assessment objectives, preventing teachers from accurately measuring students' competencies. The practice contradicts the principles outlined in the CBA Guidebook, which advocates for assessing students based on their actual abilities rather than imposing rigid standards.

“The proficiency scales are empirically validated and provide a valid framework that should describe what learners must learn to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they must develop to act effectively.”

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.10)

The excerpt suggests that teachers need to employ differentiation in their assessment practices to better align with students' varying abilities in the classroom. This involves using appropriate rubrics or checklists, providing additional support to students during assessments, or implementing assessment strategies that help students demonstrate their language skills effectively. The use of standardized rubrics can help ensure consistency in assessment, but it is important to consider the individual needs and abilities of the students being assessed (Jonsson & Svinby, 2007). Teachers need to consider their students' specific needs and abilities when selecting assessment tools and strategies. Olson and Krysiak (2021) found that using generic, standardized rubrics by a group of teachers had compromised the execution of classroom assessments. The study found that rubrics should be applied in a way that is sufficiently authentic to students' language knowledge and aligns with their needs and abilities in the classroom.

Theme 3: Oral Assessment

This study also found that teachers incorporated oral assessment methods in their classrooms, primarily through oral presentations and question-and-answer activities.

Subtheme 3.1: Oral Presentation

The oral presentation has become a key method for teachers in assessing students' speaking skills. Students are instructed to compose and deliver responses in response to assigned tasks. For example, Teacher 4 implemented oral presentations as a formal evaluation tool, integrating peer assessment into her approach. Students were required to present a topic, while their peers provided feedback, fostering collaborative learning.

"Usually, I will ask them to present because it is easier for me to evaluate their performance, and sometimes ask the other students to give feedback about their friends' performance..."
(T4)

In another instance, Teacher 1 used picture-description tasks to assess speaking skills. Students were given a scenario or image to describe in pairs, ensuring collaborative engagement within the limited instructional time. Performance was evaluated using rubrics and checklists.

"I give them a situation or maybe a picture and then they would describe the pictures..."
(T1)

Similarly, Teacher 7 employed group work activities in which students completed oral assessments through poster presentations. She encourages peer evaluation to create interactive discussions.

"I asked them to design a poster. After they finish designing and decorating it, I'll have them paste it on the classroom wall. If you pass by some classes and see posters on Manila cards at the back, that's from my class. Then, I'll ask them to present their ideas and answer questions. Sometimes, their friends will ask them questions, and I also assign a friend to ask specific questions..." (T7)

Despite teachers' stated approaches, classroom observations revealed inconsistencies in execution. Teacher 7's speaking lesson lacked explicit learning and assessment objectives, leaving students uncertain about how to complete tasks effectively. Although scaffolding was provided, students struggled to understand the assessment expectations, which affected the validity of the evaluation process. This practice is misaligned with the recommendations in the CBA Guidebook, which emphasizes the importance of teachers articulating explicit learning objectives during assessment.

"Teachers need to determine the learning objectives that students need to achieve and that teachers intend to assess."

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.43)

Similar findings were reported in Al-Seghayer's (2015) study on the implementation of oral assessment in Saudi Arabia. The research found that oral assessments were not effectively integrated into classroom instruction due to unclear guidelines and objectives. Without structured assessment techniques, achieving fair, reliable, and engaging evaluations remains a challenge. To ensure meaningful assessment, teachers must establish clear criteria, scaffold learning effectively, and align oral evaluation methods with instructional objectives.

Subtheme 3.2: Question and Answer

Another strategy teachers employed to conduct oral assessments was the question-and-answer method. They believed that student responses and feedback provided valuable insights into their learning progress and comprehension of the subject matter. For instance, Teacher 8 focused on the quality of student responses, considering them a key determinant of learning achievement.

"I observe whether they can respond to my questions and provide feedback relevant to what was asked. When I ask them to explain something and they're able to do so clearly, it indicates to me that they have understood the success criteria." (T8)

Additionally, Teacher 7 highlighted that the question-and-answer technique could be incorporated informally and spontaneously within classroom instruction. She selected students at random to answer questions, assessing their speaking skills in real time.

"For speaking, I ask them questions, sometimes indirectly. When we begin a new topic, I'll ask related questions and select a few students to respond..." (T7)

Although teachers demonstrated awareness of oral assessment techniques, classroom observations revealed inequities in implementation due to time constraints. Assessment tasks were selectively assigned, resulting in limited opportunities for some students to participate. This selective practice reflected a norm-referenced, one-size-fits-all approach, which contradicted the principles outlined in the CBA Guidebook, which advocates differentiated assessments to ensure equitable opportunities for all learners.

“Teachers need to give fair opportunities and sufficient time for students to demonstrate what they have learned, including diversifying resources, activities, and assessment methods so that students get the space and opportunity to showcase their ability to perform various forms of tasks.”

(CBA Guidebook, 2019; p. 39)

These findings correspond with Andrade et al.'s (2019) study on the implementation of CBA among teachers in the U.S. The research revealed that CBA was widely criticized for limited participation in formative assessments, largely due to resource constraints, costs, and scalability challenges. To ensure equitable assessment, teachers must adopt diverse methods that allow all students to actively participate in oral evaluations, aligning classroom practices with CBA's intended principles of inclusivity and fairness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examined how teachers implemented Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) in Malaysian ESL classrooms, highlighting both effective instructional practices and significant challenges in aligning assessments with policy requirements. The findings present a complex picture of assessment practices, reflecting teachers' ongoing struggle to balance policy mandates with classroom realities. While teachers demonstrated strong instructional planning and pedagogical proficiency, several misalignments emerged between intended policy goals and actual assessment practices. Notably, teachers' approaches to CBA frequently strayed from its formative and developmental objectives. Despite CBA's emphasis on formative assessment, traditional exam-focused methods persisted, leading to an overemphasis on summative outcomes. Assessment tasks often mimicked formal examination formats, limiting opportunities for constructive formative engagement and feedback. As a result, students' learning progress was constrained, with insufficient feedback loops to support deeper understanding. Furthermore, instruments such as checklists and peer evaluations lacked clear and consistent criteria, reducing their effectiveness as formative tools. The absence of structured guidelines hindered teachers' ability to accurately assess student performance. Additionally, oral assessments tended to exclude lower-performing or less confident students, leading to uneven participation and limiting the equitable implementation of CBA. Higher-performing students were given cognitively demanding tasks, while lower-performing students received oversimplified activities that failed to promote intellectual growth. This contradicted the equity principles of CBA and reinforced disparities in student outcomes.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study has several limitations worth noting. Firstly, as it focuses on exploring teachers' assessment practices in CBA using a qualitative approach, it does not assess the efficacy of these methods. Future research could adopt a quantitative approach to evaluate whether grading strategies enhance or hinder knowledge building and to inform classroom instruction. Methods such as quasi-experiments, surveys, or correlational studies could be employed to assess their effectiveness. Additionally, this study primarily examines teachers' perspectives, as they are directly involved in assessment reform. Future research could broaden its scope to include external stakeholders, such as parents and students, to explore how the reform impacts their ability to adapt to the evolving educational landscape. Insights from these groups could provide valuable perspectives on the implementation and effectiveness of CBA in Malaysian ESL classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study underscore several important implications for policy, practice, and professional development related to the implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) in Malaysian ESL classrooms. First, the persistent tendency toward exam-oriented assessment practices suggests a gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. This indicates that current professional development initiatives may not sufficiently address the practical complexities teachers face when enacting CBA, particularly in differentiating assessment to accommodate learners with diverse proficiency levels. Second, the study implies that teachers' assessment literacy remains uneven, especially in areas such as constructing valid assessment tasks, designing performance-based assessments, and using formative data to inform instruction. Without strengthened assessment

literacy, teachers may revert to familiar, traditional testing formats, thereby limiting CBA's formative and learner-centered potential. Third, the limited availability of flexible and user-friendly assessment tools (e.g., adaptable rubrics, checklists, and exemplars) has implications for fairness and inclusivity. Inconsistent or rigid tools may inadvertently disadvantage lower-proficiency learners and undermine the principle of equitable assessment embedded within CBA policy.

At the systemic level, the findings imply that school structures and workloads significantly shape the enactment of CBA. Insufficient time allocation, heavy administrative demands, and prescriptive monitoring mechanisms may constrain teachers' capacity to integrate assessment meaningfully into daily instruction. Consequently, CBA risks being perceived as an additional bureaucratic requirement rather than as an instructional support. Finally, the study suggests that prevailing supervision models, which prioritize compliance and documentation, may discourage innovation and reflective practice. A continued emphasis on accountability over professional growth could limit teachers' willingness to experiment with alternative assessment approaches, thereby slowing the institutionalization of authentic CBA practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on these implications, several actionable recommendations are proposed. First, professional development programs should be redesigned to prioritize hands-on, classroom-embedded training focused on differentiation, formative assessment strategies, and task design. Ongoing coaching, peer mentoring, and professional learning communities (PLCs) can provide sustained support beyond one-off workshops. Second, the Ministry of Education and relevant agencies should develop and disseminate flexible assessment toolkits, including adaptable rubrics, checklists, annotated exemplars, and digital templates. These resources should align with curriculum standards while allowing teachers to customize tools to meet learner needs and classroom contexts. Third, schools should be granted greater structural support, including dedicated time for assessment planning, moderation, and reflection. Reducing administrative burdens and streamlining documentation requirements can enable teachers to focus more on instructional decision-making informed by assessment evidence. Fourth, assessment supervision practices should shift toward a mentoring- and coaching-oriented model. School leaders and instructional coaches should provide constructive feedback, model effective practices, and engage teachers in reflective dialogue about assessment rather than emphasizing compliance alone.

Finally, policymakers should consider integrating teachers' voices into future refinements of CBA policy. Regular feedback mechanisms, pilot initiatives, and practitioner-led research can ensure that policy developments remain responsive to classroom realities. Collectively, these recommendations aim to strengthen the alignment between CBA policy and practice, enhance teachers' assessment literacy, and ultimately promote more equitable, meaningful, and learning-oriented assessment experiences for Malaysian ESL learners.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

AFMM conceptualized and developed the interview protocols, qualitative data collection, and data analysis, and wrote the original draft. SMY conducted the qualitative data collection and verified the research instrument. NMA supervises and proofreads the article, while NFSMF edited and reviewed it.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. All co-authors have reviewed and approved the manuscript's content, with no financial interests to disclose. We attest that this submission represents original work and is not currently under review by any other publication.

DECLARATION OF STATEMENT

The primary author affirms that preliminary research presents an honest, precise, and openly documented overview of the research conducted. There has been no omission of vital research components, and the research adheres faithfully to the original plan.

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APPENDIX 1: Observational Field Notes



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LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION OF TEACHERS IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF CEFR-ALIGNED CLASSROOM BASED ASSESSMENT
IN MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES FOR ESL TEACHERS

Date/Time: _____

Class : 2D _____

Content Standard: 3-1 Understand a variety of texts by using a range of appropriate reading strategies to construct meaning

Learning Standard: 3-1.7 Understand specific details and information in simple longer texts or range of familiar topics

Description of Events	Alignment to CEFR	Reflections
<p>Pre lesson</p> <p>1) teacher shows several pics abt Taman Negara National Park</p> <p>2) students describe the pictures shown by tc.</p> <p>3) tc praises the students "Good job; Excellent!"</p> <p>4) tc distributes worksheet to the students contain passage entitled 'A holiday at Taman Negara National Park'</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher is able to provide good induction stage by providing the pics to ensure stds know how National Park looks like. Praises was given to the students as a reward.
<p>While lesson.</p> <p>1) stds read the passage at their own pace (silent reading)</p> <p>2) tc chooses the stds to read the passage aloud</p> <p>3) constructive feedback was given to the students to pronounce the vocabs correctly (eg: portrayed)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students centered learning constructive feedback, modelling - demonstration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher is able to practice the combination of stds centered to tc centered teaching & learning process.

Description of Events	Alignment to CEFR	Reflections
<p>One std ask abt the meaning of 'duration' in the qs, tc explains the meaning of the vocab.</p> <p>2) Dis cussion. Tc asks the students to write their answers on the board.</p> <p>4) Tc comments on the stds answer, giving suggestions for better answer</p> <p>Post-lesson</p> <p>1) Tc crosses check the answer with the stds</p> <p>2) Tc asks the stds to raise hand based on their scoring out of 10. In this case, teacher use the traffic light</p> <p>3) class end</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written approach. • Employs modelling techniques • observation approach • Traffic light method was used to identify the number of stds who scored in answering the qs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluative feedback