TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING (AfL)

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Teachers’ Perceptions of Assessment for Learning (AfL)

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Learning Sciences)

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The dissertation entitled **Teachers' Perceptions of Assessment for Learning (AfL)** was prepared by Ko Ai Boi and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Learning Sciences).

It is hereby confirm that the student has done all necessary amendments for examination and acceptance.

(Associate Professor Dr. Hasbee Hj Usop)

Date: 05 June 2015

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A
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AfL: Assessment for Learning
- AIM: Agensi Inovasi Malaysia
- AoL: Assessment of Learning
- CPD: Continuous Professional Development
- EFL: English as a Foreign Language
- EPRD: Educational Planning and Policy Research Division
- GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education
- IB: International Baccalaureate
- KMOFAP: King’s, Medway, Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project
- MOE: Ministry of Education
- MYP: Middle Years Program
- PISA: Program for International Students Assessment
- PPP: Public – Private Partnership
- SPSS: Statistical Packages for Social Studies
- TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
ABSTRACT

Teachers' Perceptions of Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is a worldwide initiative which is promoted to improve student learning. AfL refers to the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning. As AfL is a relatively new pedagogical approach in Malaysia, this study aimed to investigated the secondary school teachers' perceptions of Assessment for Learning (AfL). The influence of demographic factors such as gender and teaching experiences on teachers' perceptions were also investigated. The research design used in the study was a Cross-Sectional Survey with descriptive and parametric statistical analyses. The samples in this study consisted of 96 teachers in three Malaysian Government secondary school in Sarawak, who had been trained with the AfL strategies. Independent t-test and one-way ANOVA test were used to determine the differences in teachers' perceptions of AfL based on gender and teaching experiences. The findings of this study showed that the teachers generally had positive perceptions of AfL. The study also found that there were no differences in teachers' perception based on gender and teaching experiences. The findings of these results provide insights into enhancing teachers' perceptions of AfL and their AfL practices in classroom.

Keywords: Assessment for Learning (AfL), perceptions, teacher
ABSTRAK

Persepsi Guru terhadap Penilaian untuk Pembelajaran (AFL)

Penilaian untuk Pembelajaran (AFL) merupakan inisiatif di seluruh dunia yang dipromosikan untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran pelajar. AFL merujuk kepada proses mencari dan mentafsir bukti yang akan digunakan oleh pelajar dan guru-guru mereka bagi tujuan membuat keputusan di mana pelajar dalam pembelajaran mereka. Disebabkan AFL adalah pendekatan pedagogi yang agak baru di Malaysia, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi guru-guru sekolah menengah mengenai Penilaian untuk Pembelajaran (AFL). Pengaruh faktor-faktor demografi seperti jantina dan pengalaman mengajar terhadap persepsi guru turut dikaji. Rekabentuk kajian yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah Survei Keratan Rentas dengan analisis statistik deskriptif dan parameter. Sampel dalam kajian ini terdiri daripada 96 guru dari tiga sekolah menengah Kerajaan Malaysia di Sarawak, yang telah dilatih dengan strategi AFL. Ujian-t tidak bersandar dan ujian satu-hala ANOVA digunakan untuk menentukan perbezaan dalam persepsi guru terhadap AFL berdasarkan jantina dan pengalaman mengajar. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru secara umumnya mempunyai persepsi yang positif AFL. Kajian ini juga mendapati tidak terdapat perbezaan dalam persepsi guru berdasarkan jantina dan pengalaman mengajar. Hasil keputusan ini dapat menyumbangkan maklumat yang untuk meningkatkan persepsi guru terhadap AFL dan amalan AFL mereka di dalam kelas.

Kata kekunci: Penilaian untuk Pembelajaran (AFL), Persepsi, Guru
1.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into nine main sections. Section 1.1 discusses the background of the study. Section 1.2 provides the problem statement of this study. Section 1.3 lists the research objectives of the study. Section 1.4 provides the research questions of the study. This is followed by Section 1.5 which discusses the research hypotheses of the study. The next section, Section 1.6 gives an overall view of the research through the research framework of the study. Section 1.7 provides the conceptual and operational definitions of the relevant terms used in this study. Section 1.8 discusses the significance and the importance of the study. This is then followed by Section 1.9, which lists the limitations of this study. Lastly, Section 1.10 summarizes the chapter.
1.1 Background of the Study

‘Assessment of learning’ (AoL) is the most common type of assessment which utilizes grades or symbols to present students’ learning to the public (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, 2006). Problem with AoL arises when the test scores are expected to go up without any improvements in students learning (Stiggins, 2002). To alleviate the problems related to AoL, ‘Assessment for Learning’ (AfL) has been highlighted and promoted in the education reforms of many countries such as the Hong Kong, Singapore, United States of America and United Kingdom in recent decades (So & Lee, 2011; Song & Koh, 2012; Stiggins, 2002; William, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004;).

AfL is an everyday process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners, teachers and peers to enhance ongoing learning (Valentina, 2009). AfL can be used to promote learning by providing students with the opportunity to assess their own work and learning progress based on feedback to various kinds of information such as dialogue, demonstration and observation.

In addition, AfL is also a day-to-day pedagogical approach which is imperative in bringing about students’ mastery of 21st century competencies and lifelong learning. According to Song and Koh (2012), AfL in the classroom practices enables a shift in focus from rote learning of core subjects to the mastery of higher order thinking skills which is crucial for 21st century skills, knowledge and competencies.
In Malaysia, the Malaysian government has introduced the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Ministry of Education, 2012) to transform the education system. This is in part due to the declining Malaysian students’ performance in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) assessments. The Malaysian Education Blueprint has given emphasis on developing students’ higher order thinking skills, which is crucial for Malaysia to become a competent developed nation in the 21st century (Ministry of Education, 2012). In addressing this need, the Ministry of Education has also called for greater Public – Private Partnership (PPP) in the education sector as an effort to transform the education system (www.khazanah.com.my/docs/10Dec2010_TrustSchool_statement.pdf, 2010).

As part of the PPP initiatives, Yayasan Amir started implementing the Trust School model in 2011 (www.khazanah.com.my/docs/10Dec2010_TrustSchool_statement.pdf, 2010), while Agensi Inovasi Malaysia (AIM) adopted and implemented the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program (MYP) (IB program to be carried out in 10 schools, 2013) to ten Malaysian government schools in the year 2013.

These projects intend to explore new pedagogical approaches to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025. Thus, both the Trust School model and the IB Middle Years Program implement AfL as one of its teaching strategies (LeadEd, 2011; http://www.ibo.org/contentassets/2470e1b3d2dc4b8281649bc45b52a00f/approachesolearningeng.pdf, 2012).
A study conducted by William, Lee, Harrison, and Black (2004) showed that an improvement in the grade per student per subject of approximately one-half for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades when teachers made time to develop AfL strategies. Therefore, it would appear that AfL improves students’ achievement in standardized testing (Collins, 2012; Glasson, 2008; Growing Success, 2010; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).

Besides contributing towards improvement in students’ performance, the use of AfL also narrows the achievement gap between low and high performers. Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) citing evidences from past studies state that AfL via sound classroom assessment processes produces significant academic improvement in school and reduces score gaps, especially among low performers. Hence, this seems to imply that in classroom practising AfL, teachers improve in their teaching and reduce achievement score gaps among students.

Furthermore, AfL also motivates and improves students’ behavior in learning. Ross, Siegenthaler, and Tronson (2006) discovered that students showed a strong motivational impetus to learning after this assessment practices in Biology 1. In addition, students who are motivated do not usually present their teachers with challenging behavior (Wolstenholme, n.d). Hence, motivation in learning can be developed and behavior will improve through developing AfL practices.
Besides the impact of AfL on the students, AfL also impacts on teachers. AfL improves teachers' professionalism and teaching practices (Flórez & Sammons, 2013). Teachers change their role in the classroom interaction, from a content deliverer to a moderator and facilitator of learning. All the King’s, Medway, Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP) teachers reported that they think of their teaching in terms of facilitating students’ learning rather than covering the curriculum at all cost (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003).

However, AfL as a pedagogical approach is relatively new to Malaysian teachers. Teachers’ perceptions should be considered to implement a new pedagogical approach successfully in Malaysia classrooms. Nasri, Roslan, Sekuan, Bakar, and Puthe (2010) stated that teachers’ perception should be taken in consideration before incorporating any alternative assessment. Teachers will support the assessment and ensure the alternative assessment succeeded in reality when they have positive perceptions on alternative assessment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

AfL is a worldwide education initiative, which has increasingly become a topic of discussion in recent years (Ross, Siegenthaler, & Tronson, 2006; So & Lee, 2011; Song & Koh, 2012; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005; William et. al., 2004; Wolstenholme, n.d). The literature on AfL generally focuses on its advantages and the impact it has on student outcomes (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005; William et al., 2004) but do not explore in-depth on teachers’ perceptions
about Afl practices. Teacher is the key in any educational reform (Flórez & Sammons, 2013). Moreover, what teachers teach and why they teach it are affected by teachers’ beliefs and perceptions (Pajares, 1992). Therefore, teachers’ perception should be taken into consideration when attempting to implement a new pedagogical approach in education.

AFL is a fairly new innovation pedagogical approach in the Malaysian educational system; and there is a lack of empirical studies that focuses on investigating teachers’ perceptions on AFL at Malaysian secondary schools. Hence, this study aimed to investigate teachers’ perceptions on the ten identified principles of AFL and also looked at differences on their perceptions based on gender and teaching experiences; and determined the principles of AFL which teachers might have difficulties with.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main research objective of this study was to investigate secondary school teachers’ perceptions of the AFL pedagogical approach. Specifically, this study looked at the following research objectives:

RO1 – To ascertain teachers’ perceptions on the principles of AFL.

RO2 – To determine differences in teachers’ perceptions on the principles of AFL based on gender.

RO3 – To determine differences in teachers’ perceptions on the principles of AFL based on teaching experiences.
1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated in this study based on the research objectives stated previously:

RO1 – What were the teachers' perceptions on the principles of AfL?

RO2 – Were there any differences in teachers' perceptions on the principles of AfL based on gender?

RO3 – Were there any differences in teachers' perceptions on the principles of AfL based on teaching experiences?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the following were the research hypotheses of the study:

H01 – There were no differences in teachers' perceptions on the principles of AfL based on gender.

H02 – There were no differences in teachers' perceptions on the principles of AfL based on teaching experiences.
1.6 Research Framework

Figure 1.1 shows the research framework of this study outlining the main independent and dependent variables.

![Research Framework Diagram]

Figure 1.1 Research Framework

1.7 Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, some of the specific terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1.7.1 Assessment for Learning (AFL)

Conceptual Definition

AFL has been defined as “part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (Valentina, 2009, p.2).
Operational Definition

In this study, AiL referred to the “usually informal, embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning, and conducted by different teachers as part of their own diverse and individual teaching styles” (Black et al., 2003, p.2). AiL principles investigated in this study were AiL is part of effective planning, AiL is central to classroom practice, AiL promotes understanding of goals and criteria, AiL is sensitive and constructive, AiL fosters motivation, AiL learning’ recognizes the full range of achievement of all learners, AiL focuses on how students learn, AiL helps learners know how to improve, AiL develops the capacity for self-assessment and AiL is a key professional skill (Broadfoot, Daugherty, Gardner, Harlen, James & Stobart, 2002).

1.7.2 Perception

Conceptual Definition

Perception has been defined by Fowler and Fowler (1964) as the action by which the mind refers its sensations to external object as cause.

Operational Definition

In this study, perception is referred to as a belief that one has as a result of how one understands something (Lea et al., 2014, p. 588), indicating teachers’ belief about AiL and AiL practices.
1.7.3 Teacher

**Conceptual Definition**
Teacher has been defined by Lea et al. (2014) as a person whose job is to teach, especially in school.

**Operational Definition**
In this study, a teacher was a person who worked under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) and teaches in a Malaysian Government secondary school.

1.8 Significance of the Study

Research investigating secondary school teachers’ perceptions of AfL is still lacking in Malaysia. Therefore, the findings of this study would uncover specific teachers’ perceptions of the AfL pedagogical approach.

Besides, the findings of this study could also inform the school leaders and policy makers on the need to focus on these perceptions in the intellectual work of change in teachers’ classroom assessment practices.

Moreover, the findings of the study could also be used as references for future researchers who would like to conduct further investigations on teachers’ perceptions of AfL. It would
provide a basis for understanding of how teacher perceived AfL, a new innovative pedagogical approach in their teaching practices.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The respondents in this study were secondary school teachers from two Trust schools and a secondary school implementing IB MYP program and the teachers had been trained with the AfL pedagogical approach. Therefore, the results of the study might not be representative of the entire population of teachers in government and other types of schools in the country.

Furthermore, the research was conducted in only three secondary schools, SM Sains Kuching, SMK Seri Setia and SMK Sungai Tapang. SM Sains Kuching and SMK Seri Setia were the pioneer secondary schools in Sarawak under the Trust School program since 2010; whereas SMK Sungai Tapang was the pioneer secondary school in Sarawak under IB MYP programs since 2013. The result of the study might not be representative of the entire population of schools in the country.

Moreover, these three secondary schools were urban schools in Kuching and Kota Samarahan districts of Sarawak. Thus, the results of the study might not accurately reflect the existing teacher and students contexts of other schools in Malaysia.
Besides, the demographic variables studied in this study were also limited to gender and teaching experiences. Other factors such as subject taught and academic background which might also have an impact on secondary school teachers' perceptions of AfL were not considered in this study. Also, there were limitations in the ratio of male to female teachers in this study. There were more female compared to male teachers for this study. The bias in genders might have an impact on the research findings.

In addition, this study only used questionnaires to collect the required data. Other sources of data such as observations and interviews which were excluded in this study might be able to provide additional data which could give better understanding of the problems investigated in this study.

1.10 Summary

This chapter discussed the background of the study, problem statement of the study, research objectives, research questions, research hypotheses and research framework of the study. It concluded with the significance and limitations of the study and defined the conceptual and operational definitions of important terms used in the study. The next chapter discusses the literature review and past research relevant to the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into six main sections. Section 2.1 gives a brief definition about assessment. Section 2.2 discusses ‘assessment for learning’ including the definitions and the principles. The next section, Section 2.3 covers the advantages of ‘assessment for learning’. Section 2.4 provides the disadvantages of ‘assessment for learning’, followed by Section 2.5 discusses on the challenges of ‘assessment for learning’ to teachers. Section 2.6 discusses on the teachers’ perceptions of ‘assessment for learning’. The following section, Section 2.7 provides the teachers’ perceptions of ‘assessment for learning’ based on demographic variables such as gender and teaching experiences. Lastly, Section 2.6 summarizes the literature review and how it contributed to the study.