

# Identifying Understanding Expectations of School Administrators Regarding School Assessment

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**Abstract**—This study aims to identify the understanding expectations of school administrators concerning school assessment. The researcher utilized a qualitative descriptive study on 19 administrators from three secondary schools in the North Kinta district. The respondents had been interviewed on their understanding expectations of school assessment using the focus group discussion method. Overall findings showed that the administrators' understanding expectations of school assessment was weak; especially in terms of content focus, articulation across age and grade, transparency and fairness, as well as the pedagogical implications. Findings from interviews indicated that administrators explained their understanding expectations of school assessment from the aspect of school management, and not from the aspect of instructional leadership or specifically as assessment leaders. The study implications from the administrators' understanding expectations may hint at the difficulty of the administrators to function as assessment leaders, in order to reduce their focus as manager, and move towards their primary role in the process of teaching and learning. The administrator, as assessment leaders, would be able to reach assessment goals via collaboration in identifying and listing teacher assessment competencies, how to construct assessment capacity, how to interpret assessment correctly, the use of assessment and how to use assessment information to communicate confidently and effectively to the public.

**Keywords**—Assessment leaders, assessment goals, instructional leadership, understanding expectation of assessment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

EVERY reform and transformation in the field of education places high expectations on administrators as the curriculum leaders. School administrators need to develop a thorough knowledge in the process of guiding teachers in aligning the instructions with the curriculum and assessment.

The administrator is not only involved in conventional administration, which is based on an 'established' system, but also requires detailed understanding regarding assessment and the ability to transfer knowledge into action in line with classroom activities and curriculum. As such, administrators should be more prepared and focused towards instructional administration skills. The support of the administration is very important in ensuring the effectiveness of school-based assessment implementation. Administrators have a duty in

leading teaching staff toward school-based assessment activities that are in line with the nation's education transformation goals. The involvement of the headmaster and administrators in the school's assessment transformation should be based on the 'practise what they preach and believe in' approach, in order to improve school-level assessment. Helping teachers to understand the idea of transformation, as the school and classroom instructional background, is an important task. Teachers are the main envoys or representatives in implementing classroom assessment, while administrators become the agents of change for newly-introduced assessment in schools. Headmasters and administrators alike should display an improved 'model of understanding' and should also become better implementers and planners in assessment. Therefore, in order to ensure a smooth change and transformation, the headmaster and their team of administrators should be continuously involved in the planning and implementation of building relevant instructional administrators. Improved accountability needs in school assessment should be based on an administrator-based instruction, which clearly understands how the assessment is conducted. The question of whether the student can learn more effectively using school assessment should become the main focus of the school and its administrators [1]. The headmaster should lead the process of helping teachers in improving teaching and learning, and also collaboratively improve both to achieve educational targets. The role of administrators as instructional leaders is to help schools maintain their focus as institutions which assist students to learn [2], [3]. The main role is to steer the teacher's teaching from focusing on 'I've taught them but they don't understand' to preparing assessment activities that enable the performance of students to be properly assessed and would function as a reflection of the teaching, as well as providing information on the student's current learning development.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The transformation of education occurs in line with the development of global education. As such, administrator should also be prepared to embrace changes, which involves bottom-up reforms. The role of the administrator should begin with sharing the vision with the community and school in order to achieve learning expectations and excellent results, and then move to the transformation of teacher practices in the classroom. Reference [4] stated that the administrator can also help to bring change in schools or other aspects of education. The administrator's actions can influence teaching and learning and also the school assessment. Transformational

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leadership is a more challenging task for an administrator, as each action would result in a direct and indirect effect towards transformation in the assessment implemented. Therefore, the administrator's understanding and readiness as assessment leaders has a greater connection with accountability, as the information acquired is not only for schools but also for the community and the general public. The administrator should have a good understanding of assessment in order to provide a model of school assessment practice according to the expectations of the Ministry of Education.

#### A. School Administrator as Assessment Leaders

The administrator, with knowledge of assessment, would be able to help teachers in planning their instruction more to focus on student learning [5]. Through assessment leadership, the administrator can build the opportunity to develop towards 'instructional leadership' [6]. Assessment leadership includes basic assessment skills understanding to prepare the administrator (especially the headmaster) to become instructional leaders who are able to evaluate school assessments and be involved in the professional development of the teachers [1]. Assessment leadership not only means knowing what is going on, but also enabling the expected assessment to happen. The administrators should be equipped with assessment literacy to enable them to become more responsible [7]. Reference [8] suggested that assessment leadership will help to decrease the management role and administrators can then move towards the main role in the teaching and learning process. This can be done through collaboration to achieve assessment aims, identify and listing teacher assessment competency, how to build assessment capacity, how to interpret assessment accurately, using assessment and how to communicate using assessment information with confidence [1]. The ability of administrators to combine managing skills and assessment understanding will enable the school community to be involved in effective professional development. The administrator should understand the school assessment accountability target, how the teacher assesses and monitors students' development and how the data acquired is used to adapt the teaching based on the students' needs. The administrators' understanding of assessment will enable them to assist teachers and students in the following aspects:

- i. Understand and communicate with students about the achievement target projected;
- ii. Involve the staff in analyzing assessment data to ascertain whether there is a gap between the achievement and the target projected;
- iii. Evaluate the school process to ensure that teachers understand the target and align their teaching and assessment to achieve the standards projected;
- iv. To structure teaching time to include frequent examination of the students' work in order to provide feedback about the instruction;
- v. Evaluate approaches to teaching and learning to focus on the holistic performance of students.

#### B. School Assessment Understanding Expectations

The assessment understanding expectations can be referred to as what teachers should know about assessment and what they can do with the knowledge. The expectations can be explained in a few ways. Assessment refers to the procedure in a system used by teachers to grade, identify students' needs, motivate and look for weaknesses in the teaching and to improve the teaching to become more effective [9]. Implementing assessment in the classroom is not an easy task, as it involves many activities such as building paper and pencil tests, measuring achievement, grading, interpreting test scores, communicating about assessment results and using the results to make decisions about the teaching and learning process.

Reference [10] explains the attributes shared by expectations and assessment. The same content categories should exist in both expectations and assessment;

- Expectations and assessment should require students to know the information at the same level, be able to transfer/utilize the knowledge in different contexts and have the same information base.
- Expectations and assessment should cover topics and ideas in slightly similar categories.
- Expectations and assessment should be similar in terms of basic concepts and students should know the definitions of the concepts.
- Expectations and assessment should emphasise the content of the topic, related activities and assignments.
- Expectations should cover more than the concepts, procedures and applications in terms of helping to develop attitudes, beliefs, vision, etc.

Reference [10] also listed the assessment criteria congruent with the expectations of following the guidelines below:

- i. Assessments for evaluating students utilize diverse forms of measurement across various domains such as knowledge, character and achievement.
- ii. Rubrics or criteria are used to define the success of the achievement assessment and also for evaluating students' work.
- iii. A fair evaluation is based on continuous assessment.
- iv. The quality of the assessment system can be used to reinforce teaching.

School Assessment Understanding Expectations would refer to the main elements in the assessment system transformation which is a flexible, standards-based, holistic assessment system and forms part of the teaching and learning process [11]. On the other hand, Assessment Practice refers to teacher assessment practice in the classroom. The main elements in the education system must work together in order to drive a process which is heading towards the same direction and an effective assessment system transformation. Educators agree that if the policy elements are unaligned, the system may risk being reduced to smaller fragments with mixed messages and ineffective management [12].

### III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is based on the basic school assessment system, which describes elements in the school-based assessment system and also describes the administrators' understanding as assessment leaders at the school level. As such, the main objective is:

To identify the understanding expectations of school administrators regarding the school assessment.

### IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the understanding expectation of school assessment among school administrators?

### V. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

- 1) This study will be able to identify the understanding expectations of administrators who assume the role of school assessment leaders and are directly involved in the school assessment process and are responsible for ensuring the successful transformation of national assessment.
- 2) This study will provide information for administrators in their effort to become reflection practitioners so that they can implement and manage the school assessment effectively.
- 3) This study will also identify the strengths and weaknesses of aspects of understanding in the school assessment system and holistic evaluation implementation, which in turn would assist the relevant authorities in functioning as school assessment leaders.
- 4) The findings related to administrator understanding can provide guidelines for instructional leaders to shift their focus from management towards transformational and assessment leadership, with the administrator equipped with an accurate understanding of school assessment expectations.

### VI. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

#### A. Assessment Understanding Expectations

Assessment Understanding Expectations comprise the knowledge or understanding that a teacher should have about assessment and what they can do with that knowledge. School Assessment Understanding Expectations would refer to the main elements in the assessment system transformation, which is a flexible, standards-based, holistic assessment system and forms part of the teaching and learning process.

#### B. Assessment Practice

The four main constructs are assessment practice content focus, which contains sub-constructs of aspects of understanding related to school assessment, consistency of extent of knowledge about assessment, knowledge range used in explaining students' achievement, comparison of knowledge structure, balanced representation and consonant difference. The second construct is articulated across age and grade with the sub-construct of the best cognitive evaluated through research and understanding. The third construct is

transparency and fairness with the sub-construct of information transparency. The fourth construct is the pedagogical implication with three sub-constructs which are effective student involvement and classroom practices, effective measurement and the use of technology, materials and equipment.

### VII. RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher would be utilizing a qualitative descriptive study to identify school administrators' understanding of school assessment. One of the main aims of the descriptive study is to describe the situation or event observed.

### VIII. SAMPLE SELECTION

The study population included teachers in the North Kinta district in Perak. The sample focused on three secondary schools in the district which have been randomly chosen for this study. The three schools involved had to undergo a school assessment understanding interview using a Focus group discussion (FGD) method. The interviews were conducted on three separate groups of six or seven administrators. The respondents in the FGD comprised of 19 people and consisted of headmasters, senior assistants and senior subject teachers. The groups were labelled as C, P and S. Each respondent was given a number and group name, e.g. respondent one in group C was labelled as: R1C.

### IX. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The data were acquired via interviews from the FGD. The qualitative data were acquired using the interview method. An interview protocol was developed to gather feedback and perspectives from the selected sample. The semi-structured interview method was employed. All the interviews were recorded and documented in the form of interview transcripts. The qualitative data acquired were analysed using the Theme Categorisation Method. The dialogues from the interviews were transcribed using the relevant target groups. The qualitative data analysis was conducted using the steps below:

- i. Verbatim Transcripts
- ii. Complete Transcripts
- iii. Coding
- iv. Building and Searching Themes

The complete transcripts which were clear and understood by the researchers were linked to four main constructs, which is made up the themes in the study i.e. the assessment practice content focus containing sub-constructs of aspects of understanding related to school assessment, consistency of knowledge depth about assessment, knowledge range used in explaining students' achievement, comparison of knowledge structure, balanced representation and consonant difference. The second construct is articulated across age and grade with the sub-construct of the best cognitive evaluated through research and understanding. The third construct is transparency and fairness with the sub-construct of information transparency. The fourth construct is the pedagogical implication with three sub-constructs, which are

effective student involvement and classroom practices, effective measurement and the use of technology, materials and equipment.

#### X. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study findings could be categorised according to four main themes in the form of responses that meet the criteria in five major constructs related to the assessment:

- **1<sup>st</sup> Construct:** Content Focus
- i) The administrators did not stress that assessment is a process that occurs continuously in the learning process in order to identify the students' learning achievement. The interview findings among the administrators showed that respondent R1P explained assessment from the aspect of the role of the ministry on assessment transformation, and R2S stated that assessment was part of a policy which must be implemented, while R2C explained assessment as a system which was fair to the students. The interview findings showed that the administrators' understanding was from the aspect of school management and they did not elaborate on it from the aspect of instructional leadership, especially as instructional leaders.
- ii) The findings from the administrators' interviews showed that information about students' achievement from the assessment point of view was rather vague. R1S stated that the assessment could be an imprecise task as the teacher had to repeat the test if the students did not reach the required achievement. R4P and R2C mentioned that students' achievement was based on the teachers' full evaluation, as the latter were the ones who really understood the students. R1S and R2S viewed the assessment as containing leaked questions when some students had to return and complete their assignments due to their absence from school. R1S stated that achievement differed according to the subjects, while for R2S, the overall achievement was based on the students' own attitude. R3C found that students were bored, as they were given tests daily, while R6P mentioned that there were no tests held in the school. R2S stated that the assessments given were too general. R2P also mentioned that the administrators had *'set the targets to be achieved and held a meeting with the teachers, so that the latter could assist the students in reaching Band 6 (the highest band)'*. R6C stated that *'Students are very happy and excited, as they can easily achieve Band 6 through classroom-based teaching and learning'*. The analysis from the administrators' interviews indicated that the information on students' overall achievement and activity, as understood by the administrators, was incongruent with the assessment understanding expectations in the classroom. The school assessment, which utilises a formative assessment mechanism, is a reflection of teaching effectiveness; it is also a source of information for students to understand their level of achievement so that they can improve their potential in all domains. The interview data indicated that the administrators did not display an understanding of transformational leadership,

especially as instructional leaders. They did not explain that the overall information of the achievement of the students was based on their own ability in three main domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor). The administrators' understanding of the assessment seemed to focus more on the effects of the students' failure to come to school and the students' attitude towards assessment. They did not emphasize the functions of continuous assessment as a holistic approach to improve students' achievements. The interview data showed that administrators had established some sort of achievement standard which was clearly not aligned with the reference criteria of the assessment aims as determined in the curriculum. While it is true that the performance of a student should be based on standardized criteria, their achievement should never be based on a standard determined by the administrators.

- iii) The findings from the interview showed that the assessment implemented could be considered superficial, as the content of the subjects was not taught in detail. Respondent R5C explained teaching after the implementation of school-based assessment as *'There are many teachers who teach wider topics, but not with any in-depth understanding'*. R1C found that the assessment was not consistent. R1S stated that *'exemplary is when our students can become an example or role model for others.'* R3P assessed exemplary performance based on exemplary behavior, while R2P assessed it using observation of output.

R2C, R4C, R4P, R6P stated that no instruments had been constructed to measure the achievement of students who were well-mannered and exemplary in behaviour. R6P used measuring instruments at home to assess behavioural achievement. R2S stated that *'Exemplary in Band 6 is when he is efficient and can teach others. But most students depend only on teachers for their assignments.'* R3C mentioned that he/she did not pay much attention to the assessment of behavioural achievement as they had to fill in marks online.

The analysis of findings showed that the school assessment implemented resulted in the students not fully mastering the content of a subject. There is no specific instrument to assess students good and exemplary behaviour. Some teachers use the remarks made by parent's on a student's notebook as an indicator of that student's behavioural achievement. The findings indicated that the assignments had been adapted from workshops or textbooks. R4P, R1C stated that the assignments had been purchased from what was available in the market. R2P and R5C mentioned that the assignments did not take into consideration ideas from other fields and only focused on the subject syllabus. R5C stated that *'many teachers who were involved in PBS used the PBS book, so I feel that teaching has been tied to the book. The PBS book is sold by outside parties'*.

The analysis of the interview data showed that the teachers possibly did not create their own assignments. As such, the fit between assignment difficulty level and assignment complexity could not be accurately explained.

iv) Interview data from the administrators indicated that particular tasks had not been constructed to measure a student's highest standard performance. R3C stated that the students have to perform a lot of tasks to achieve the highest standard performance. However, they have a limited time to complete the tasks. R2S mentioned that the benchmark of the standard performance was different according to certain topics. R4S commented that output of visual and art subjects such as painting or other output that could be assessed for highest bands. Analysis from the interview data showed that there was a lot of evidence used and each one only measured a limited performance. Only subjects that were assessed using portfolio managed to combine most of the performance standards based on one task. As such, it can be inferred that the administrators had low competency in creating tasks that accurately matched the school's assessment needs, as well as be able to provide opportunities to students to achieve their highest potential in a particular assessment.

v) Findings from the interview indicated that students were not given the chance to criticise their own work. R2S stated that *'the students from the lower classes, do not even know which band we give them and they do not care about it sometimes, while the A-grade students (better students) remark on the grades they get from teachers'*. R3S, R6P and R3C stated that the students did not have critical skills. R4S and R6P informed that only a few particular subjects enabled the students to criticise their own work.

Data analysis also showed that the lack of opportunities available to students to use constructive self-criticism for the purpose of improving their achievements. This lack of evaluation and self-criticism makes it difficult for students to become reflective learners.

- **Construct 2:** Articulation across age and grade

i) R1C explained the readiness to assess was rather low as it depended on materials from outside; R2P stated that *'Most teachers had other things to attend to, and many of them used materials available in the market, using shortcuts.'*

The findings revealed that the assessment tasks were not constructed based on the knowledge of the subject content by the students. Assessment practices in the classroom did not emphasise gradual task complexity in line with cognitive ability of the students.

- **Construct 3:** Transparency and Fairness

i) The findings indicated that the administrators gave appropriate opportunities for students to exploit their abilities. R6P stated that *'The students already know the band for the task, which means that if they can't achieve, we will inform their mistakes and ask them to repeat until they complete it successfully'*. However, R1C stated that it was difficult to identify fair assessment as it mainly involves emotions. R5S informed that he/she did not test and evaluate using the overall evidence as there was not enough time, while R4S said that the assessment was unfair to the more active students as it was difficult to

differentiate the marks according to the bands. On the other hand, R2S stated that teachers had a right to ascertain the level of the students. R4P said that *'the English and Bahasa Melayu (teachers) helped a lot in terms of assignment construction with the students'*. R5S stated that *'the knowledge of the output quality was not that good, to earn a Band 5 was really impressive'*. R4C and R3C informed that *'By looking at their books, I can know which the students achieve certain band.'*

The analysis of the interviews indicated that the students were given reasonable opportunities to display their abilities; however, the administrators discovered that students were easily satisfied after obtaining a certain band and that they lacked initiative to improve. The administrators shared limited information of a student's performance from time to time using the test books.

- **Construct 4:** Pedagogical Implications

i) The findings from the interviews indicated that student achievement influenced a teacher's instruction and learning methodology, based on statements from respondents R4P and R2P: *'the teachers had a lot of the evidence to complete, so they did not think about other things which had to be settled'*. Respondent R4P informed that teachers had attended workshops on instrument building, while R4S stated that instruments like checklists and evidence observation were utilised. R6P said that the students had less pressure as there were no exams, *'With no formal test, students were more relaxed.'* The findings showed that the teachers did not take into account the technological readiness of students in completing assignments; this was discovered from the interview with R1C: *'We only used the work books'* while R2S explained that *'the book with the guidelines of the output expected.'*

The analysis of the interviews indicated that the administrators' pedagogical transformation seemed to head towards completing a lot of evidence. The teachers prepared the instruments for teaching using the skills they acquired during the workshops. However, the technology inherent while completing the tasks by the administrators only involved the use of work books.

## XI. DISCUSSION

A few issues were ascertained as a result of the interviews with the 19 administrators from the three schools in the North Kinta district in Perak. The data analysis showed the administrators' understanding of instructional leadership, especially as assessment leaders. However, during the interviews, the administrators continually referred to the teachers' understanding and not their own understanding.

This research is in line with the effectiveness of school assessment in providing information on the achievement of students in a holistic manner. If the administrators did not understand the content focus of the school assessment well, there was a possibility that the teachers would be without their reference point; from the aspect of school assessment management hierarchy, the administrators via their instructional leadership should also function as assessment

leaders.

School assessments using formative and summative assessments may provide information for the purpose of the effectiveness of teaching. While information about the students may be used to help the in understanding their achievements and improve their potential in all domains [13]. When the administrators failed to display an understanding of the school assessment, their role as transformational leaders becomes less effective. Assessment leaders need to show a model of implementation or assessment practice according to the school assessment expectations already stated by the Ministry of Education. The administrators need to assist in finding other means of improving the teachers' creativity in creating assignments which are not only attractive but also effective in order to improve the students' performance. Problems such as students not interested in coming to school, showing half-hearted effort in completing the evidence as well as teachers' failure in producing instruments to measure the affective and psychomotor skills should be overcome to ensure successful assessment transformation. The administrators' roles include suggesting the model of implementation in their capacity as instructional leaders as well as giving support to the teachers at school so that the assessment can be implemented properly. It is thus unfortunate if administrators as assessment leaders seemed confused and failed to give support to the teaching staff as the former themselves did not fully comprehend the assessment system. As the administrators did not seem to fully realise that school assessments were formative assessments, thus there is a need to deal with the issue of achievement standards which were not in line with the aim of criteria referenced assessment. The students' achievement should be based on standard criteria; however, the achievement should never be determined by the administrators at a certain standard. In this type of situation, the school assessment system as a source of student development information would be misunderstood by some as a student grading process.

School assessments are formative assessments which should encourage students to criticise their own work for the purpose of improving or upgrading themselves [12]. The administrators' perception of the students' lack of criticising skills should be remedied by giving the students exposure on activities which stress on critical skills and evaluating activities or end products on a continuous basis. These activities should be introduced at school level in order to produce reflective learner as well as reflective teachers.

The administrators' statement that the teachers depended on outside materials like School Based Assessment books (PBS books) indicate that there is a lack of expert guidance in producing competent teachers capable of creating their own assessments. The assessment practice in the classroom does not seem to stress on gradual task complexity in line with students' cognitive knowledge in the subjects. This should be avoided as a few possible effects from this include the disappointment of students who thought that they have achieved the stated learning outcomes as well as the lackadaisical attitude of some students as they have failed to

understand the tasks given. The administrators, as assessment leaders, should be more proactive in understanding the suitability of the assessment tasks, so that the tasks can be used to accurately describe a student's real potential. The assessment criteria should not remain a mystery to students and they should be periodically exposed to their level of achievement. Fair and transparent practice in the assessment process should be conducted by the administrators and the school to improve the integrity of the stated assessment information. These include the right for students to acquire information about their achievement level, the right for students to access information on their task achievement during the overall learning process and the right for students to know the achievement criteria each time the assessment is conducted.

The administrators, as assessment leaders, should demonstrate an understanding of the approaches, methods, teaching and learning strategies in-line with the assessment tasks given to students. Administrators can become more effective instructors or advisors if they understand the overall function of instructional leadership. The administrator should ensure the alignment of assessment tasks with the learning outcomes to assess a student's true performance.

## XII. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

An administrator with a clear understanding of the school's assessment expectations would act as a role model of an effective school administrator. Confusion regarding assessments among school administrators has resulted in their failure to provide the right support or assistance to enable transformation in assessment to be implemented successfully. As such, school administrators should head every transformation and engage transformational leadership by functioning as assessment leaders to offer encouragement and act as role models to implement assessment based on their detailed understanding. These administrators should move away from traditional instruction methods towards instructional leadership, so that each educational reform can be implemented at schools based on understanding and not only on rules.

## XIII. CONCLUSION

School assessment should be implemented based on the understanding and the administrator's effort to become the 'role model'. Assessment understanding is vital for teachers to create assessment tasks across various subject which are fair and transparent in nature, using instruments in line with the correct domains, and which can be equally shared with teachers and outside parties confidently. As such, administrators should equip themselves with the right information and knowledge in order to become effective school assessment leaders.

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