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EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENT IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: ALIGNMENT WITH POLICY AND TEACHER PRACTICES

*Shahazwan Mat Yusoff¹, Anwar Farhan Mohamad Marzaini²,
Noorhayati Zakaria³, Hao Lijie¹

[1]
Department of
Curriculum &
Instructional
Technology, Faculty
of Education,
Universiti Malaya,
50603 Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia

[2]
Academy of
Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi
MARA, Cawangan
Pulau Pinang, 14000
Permatang Pauh,
Malaysia

[3]
Department of
Language and
Literacy Education,
Faculty of Education,
Universiti Malaya,
50603 Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia

Corresponding Author:
Department of
Curriculum &
Instructional
Technology, Faculty
of Education,
Universiti Malaya,
50603 Kuala
Lumpur, Malaysia
Email:
shahazwan@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) in Malaysian secondary schools, focusing on the alignment between teacher practices and national curriculum policies. Through qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, data were collected from four teachers in Selangor. While teachers demonstrated alignment with curriculum objectives during planning, challenges in implementation persist, largely due to an exam-centric culture, inadequate professional development, and heavy administrative workloads. These barriers hinder the transition to student-centred, formative assessments, reducing the efficacy of CBA in fostering holistic learning outcomes. The findings underscore the need for targeted policy enhancements to bridge gaps in practice and alignment. Recommendations include investing in ongoing teacher training programs to strengthen assessment literacy and equipping educators with practical strategies for adapting CBA to diverse classroom contexts. Streamlining administrative tasks through digital tools and fostering a culture shift away from exam dependency are critical. Aligning these efforts with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, particularly its focus on student-centred learning and continuous assessment will promote more effective implementation of CBA. Policymakers are urged to prioritise capacity-building initiatives that empower teachers and to develop resources that support the practical application of CBA policies. These steps are essential for achieving the blueprint's goals of cultivating higher-order thinking skills and students' lifelong learning competencies. This research provides actionable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators aiming to enhance assessment practices in Malaysia's secondary education system.

Keywords: Classroom-Based Assessment, Malaysian Education, Secondary Schools, Policy Alignment, Formative Assessment



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INTRODUCTION

Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) plays a pivotal role in the educational process, serving as a tool for continuously monitoring students' development, proficiency, and attainment of curriculum objectives. Since Michael Scriven's work on formative and summative evaluations in 1967, the potential of CBA to enhance pedagogical practices through data-driven, reflective decision-making has been widely acknowledged. For example, the Malaysian Education Blueprint emphasizes formative assessment as a key driver of educational improvement, yet research highlights persistent challenges in its implementation. Studies indicate that while efforts have been made to integrate formative assessment practices, many teachers rely heavily on summative methods. For instance, Pang (2022) found that teachers' competencies in Assessment for Learning (AfL) remained basic, reflecting a preference for traditional assessment approaches. Similarly, Mohamad Marzaini et al. (2024) observed that Malaysian ESL teachers predominantly employed formal assessments, with limited adoption of student-centered, formative strategies, underscoring the continued influence of an exam-oriented culture. This discrepancy between theory and practice highlights a critical gap in research—namely, the extent to which teachers are equipped to integrate CBA into their daily practices while adhering to curriculum and policy requirements.

Despite its widespread use, there is still limited empirical evidence on how Malaysian teachers operationalize CBA in the classroom, particularly concerning their understanding and application of policy guidelines. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the alignment between classroom practices and national educational policies, shedding light on the complexities and barriers that teachers face. One of the major issues with CBA implementation in Malaysia is the inadequate professional development provided to teachers, as highlighted in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which emphasizes the need for continuous teacher training to improve educational practices (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). Additionally, the administrative workload remains a significant barrier; a report by UNESCO (2021) discusses how excessive administrative tasks limit teachers' capacity to focus on effective instructional strategies. These systemic challenges hinder the full realization of CBA's potential to promote formative learning approaches, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that balance instructional and administrative responsibilities.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide actionable insights for addressing these challenges and bridging the gap between policy intentions and actual classroom practices. By exploring the practical realities of CBA implementation, the findings will contribute to developing strategies and recommendations that can inform policymakers, educators, and administrators. This research is particularly crucial for enhancing the efficacy of classroom-based assessments in achieving the Malaysian Education Blueprint's goals of fostering holistic student development, higher-order thinking skills, and lifelong learning competencies.

The CBA policy primarily aims to bridge the gap between teaching and learning by integrating formative and summative assessments within a coherent framework. This approach aspires to shift the traditional exam-centric culture towards more balanced, student-centered evaluation practices, aligning closely with the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019; Plake, 1993). Despite these ambitious goals, persistent implementation challenges remain, including limited teacher training, administrative burdens, and resistance to cultural shifts, which continue to undermine the effectiveness of CBA in fostering meaningful learning outcomes. The importance of aligning classroom assessments with curriculum objectives cannot be overstated, particularly in Malaysia's OBE framework. In OBE, learning outcomes are explicitly defined, and assessments are expected to measure the degree to which students achieve these outcomes. While CBA is ideal for continuously gauging student progress, teachers often struggle to implement it effectively due to a lack of training and understanding of policy guidelines. Studies by Mohamad Marzaini et al. (2024), Mandinach and Gummer (2016), and Airasian (1994) indicate that many educators lack comprehensive assessment literacy, which inhibits their ability to design assessments that are both valid and aligned with curriculum standards. This lack of assessment literacy is particularly significant when translating national policies into classroom practices. Although teachers may employ a



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variety of assessment methods, such as formative assessments, peer assessments, and self-assessments, their approaches often lack coherence with national standards, leading to a disconnect between policy intentions and actual classroom practice (Plake, 1993; Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). This research seeks to address this gap by examining how well teachers in Malaysian secondary schools are equipped to align their CBA practices with national policies.

A critical barrier to the successful implementation of CBA is the gap in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), particularly when understanding and interpreting curriculum policies. Research has consistently highlighted the need for teachers to possess a strong grasp of both subject matter and pedagogical strategies to design assessments that are aligned with curriculum goals (Abdul Razak et al., 2023; Heitink et al., 2016; Mat Yusoff et al., 2023; Revell & Arthur, 2007). Despite this, many Malaysian teachers struggle with the practical application of CBA because they lack the necessary skills to align their assessments with policy guidelines. This gap is particularly pronounced in Malaysia's OBE framework, where the alignment of learning outcomes, instructional practices, and assessment methods is crucial for achieving educational objectives. Teachers' difficulties in this area often stem from inadequate professional development opportunities, which limit their ability to refine their assessment strategies per evolving policy demands. This study will explore this gap by investigating teachers' current assessment practices and identifying areas needing further professional development.

Moreover, the diversity of teachers' assessment strategies adds another layer of complexity to the issue. Research by Trask and Cowie (2022) shows that teachers often use a range of formative and summative assessments and traditional and alternative methods in their classrooms. While this diversity can enhance student learning, it raises concerns about consistency and coherence, particularly when teachers' practices diverge from curriculum policies. The lack of a unified approach to CBA can result in assessments that fail to accurately reflect students' mastery of curriculum objectives, ultimately undermining the validity of the assessment process. Furthermore, studies suggest that teachers' personal preferences and varying familiarity with policy guidelines significantly influence their choice of assessment methods (Christoforidou & Kyriakides, 2021). This divergence from policy requirements presents a major gap in the current research, as there is limited evidence on how teachers' practices align with national standards. By addressing this gap, this study will provide valuable insights into how Malaysian teachers navigate the complexities of policy implementation in their classrooms.

One of the most pressing gaps in the literature is the lack of research on how teachers' understanding of national curriculum policies affects their assessment practices. While existing studies (Schuitema et al., 2018) emphasize the importance of pedagogical content knowledge in transforming curriculum objectives into meaningful assessments, little research specifically examines the alignment between teachers' CBA practices and policy directives. This study seeks to bridge this gap by focusing on the practical realities of implementing CBA in Malaysian secondary schools. The research will investigate how teachers interpret and apply policy guidelines in their assessment practices and to what extent their assessments reflect the intended curriculum outcomes. By doing so, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the factors influencing the successful alignment of CBA practices with policy, ultimately offering recommendations for improving teacher training and professional development.

Policy implementation theories, particularly the "Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches" proposed by Sabatier (2014), serve as the theoretical framework for this research. These theories offer insights into how educators interpret macro-level policy decisions and apply them at the micro-level. The study also draws on Lipsky's (2010) "Street-Level Bureaucracy" theory to examine how teachers' discretionary practices shape the enactment of CBA policies in real-world contexts. Therefore, while the theoretical benefits of CBA are well-documented, there remains a significant gap between policy and practice in its implementation, particularly in the Malaysian context. Teachers' struggles to align their assessment strategies with national curriculum policies indicate insufficient training and support. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating secondary school teachers' strategies to implement CBA and evaluating the extent to which their practices align with curriculum policy guidelines. By focusing on these research questions, the study will provide critical insights into the challenges of CBA implementation and offer



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practical recommendations for improving the alignment between classroom assessments and national educational policies. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the strategies teachers used to implement CBA in Malaysian secondary school classrooms?
2. To what extent do teachers' strategies in executing CBA align with the policy mandates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Classroom-Based Assessment

Classroom-based assessment (CBA) is a crucial tool in teaching and learning, providing real-time feedback and insights into students' development, proficiency, and mastery of curriculum objectives (Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021). It plays a pivotal role in formative and summative assessments, blending continuous evaluation with formal grading measures. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) positions CBA as central to achieving the goals of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which emphasizes student-centered learning and lifelong skills development (MOE, 2012). However, implementing these policies reveals a gap between vision and practice, largely due to systemic barriers such as inadequate teacher training and excessive administrative demands (Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024).

CBA has been shown to enhance student motivation and engagement, promote fairness, and improve assessment accuracy (Chen & Bonner, 2020; Chuang et al., 2018; Tabuena, 2019). However, these benefits can only be fully realized when teachers possess the requisite pedagogical content knowledge and effectively align their practices with national policies. While previous studies (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020; Hill, 2019; Rasooli et al., 2019) underscore the advantages of CBA, many fail to consider the crucial role that policy alignment and teacher expertise play in its success. In the Malaysian context, this knowledge gap is particularly significant as teachers must ensure that their classroom assessments adhere to national guidelines while fostering students' learning.

Shepard (2019) underscores the importance of CBA in helping teachers gather insights into student progress, thereby informing instructional adjustments. However, the success of this approach in Malaysian schools hinges not just on teachers' abilities to interpret student data but also on their understanding of how to align these interpretations with curriculum standards and policy guidelines. Black and William (2018) highlight that teachers' assessment skills are key to effective CBA, and insufficient training in this area can limit the benefits of such assessments. This underscores the need for comprehensive professional development programs that emphasize both assessment techniques and aligning these techniques with policy.

In Malaysian secondary schools, classroom assessment is increasingly curriculum-integrated and ongoing (Tee & Ahmed, 2014). To fully align with policy, teachers are encouraged to integrate formative and summative assessments into a continuum, where formative evaluations help scaffold students' learning in line with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Black, 2015; Pattalitan Jr., 2016). Summative assessment, meanwhile, serves as an accountability measure that evaluates student learning at the end of a unit or term (Tee & Ahmed, 2014) and plays an essential role in gauging how well students meet specific learning standards as outlined by the Malaysian education system.

Malaysian CBA is also framed within modern learning theories, which divide classroom evaluation into three key categories: assessment of learning, assessment as learning, and assessment for learning (Pattalitan Jr., 2016). "Assessment of learning" aligns with summative assessment, where teachers evaluate student performance against predefined learning standards, helping shape future educational programs. In contrast, "assessment as learning" encourages students to self-monitor and reflect on their progress, fostering greater independence in their learning journey. This aligns with Malaysia's policy on developing critical thinking and self-directed learning. "Assessment for learning," typically formative, involves providing constructive feedback to students, allowing them to make continuous improvements based on teachers' observations and inferences.



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Against international frameworks, Malaysia's approach to CBA reveals areas for improvement. For example, Finland emphasizes a decentralized education system, empowering teachers with autonomy and continuous professional development (Sahlberg, 2011). Similarly, Singapore integrates formative assessment practices with robust teacher training programs, supported by a performance management system that aligns with national policies (Ng, 2017). These countries highlight the importance of providing teachers with the autonomy, resources, and training to adapt assessments to their students' diverse needs. Malaysia could adopt similar strategies, such as expanding access to professional development workshops and leveraging technology to reduce administrative workloads, enabling teachers to focus more on formative assessment practices.

Despite the clear benefits of these approaches, Malaysian teachers face challenges in effectively blending assessment types in practice. Leong (2014) and Harlen (2012) advocate for a balanced integration of formative and summative assessments, but many teachers struggle to implement this balance due to limited pedagogical content knowledge and inadequate professional training. This gap often results in a reliance on traditional assessment methods that may not fully reflect the goals of the curriculum. Further, as Ismail et al. (2022) note, while CBA helps teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance, insufficient pedagogical expertise can hinder teachers' ability to fully leverage these insights for instructional adjustments.

Professional development plays a critical role in addressing these issues. Cui et al. (2022) argue that teachers who receive professional training in CBA are better equipped to implement it successfully. However, training programs in Malaysia must go beyond assessment mechanics, enhancing teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and understanding of policy requirements. Such programs should equip teachers to not only apply assessment strategies effectively but also ensure that these strategies align with the broader goals of the curriculum.

Therefore, while CBA offers numerous advantages for improving student outcomes and fostering fair assessments, its effective implementation in Malaysian secondary schools requires careful alignment with curriculum policies. Teachers need both strong pedagogical content knowledge and an understanding of managing CBA in line with national guidelines. Future research should focus on developing professional training programs that emphasize policy alignment and provide teachers with actionable strategies for integrating formative and summative assessments. By addressing these gaps, Malaysian schools can fully leverage the potential of CBA to enhance student learning and meet the educational goals of the nation.

The Implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) in Malaysian Secondary Schools

Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) is a continuous and iterative process requiring teachers to have full autonomy over classroom assessment practices. According to the Ministry of Education (2017), the CBA framework mandates that teachers plan, create assessment items, administer, monitor, record, and report on students' mastery levels in any subject taught. Integrating CBA into the teaching and learning process is not just recommended but essential, as it ensures a holistic approach to evaluating student progress and aligns with the national curriculum's expectations.

Implementing CBA begins with teachers developing a comprehensive instructional plan, including assessment strategies. Teachers must identify specific learning objectives aligned with curriculum standards and determine the appropriate assessment methods for evaluating student progress (Ministry of Education, 2017). These assessment techniques must be relevant to the content and cater to the student's proficiency levels. This stage also demands that teachers consider their classrooms' cultural and contextual factors when selecting evaluation methods, ensuring that the assessments are culturally sensitive and appropriate for the student population.

Once learning objectives and assessment strategies are established, teachers can administer the assessments. A range of approaches can be employed, including oral, written, and observational assessments, allowing teachers to evaluate student progress throughout the teaching and learning process. Importantly, teachers are encouraged to integrate these assessments seamlessly into their daily instruction, making them a natural part of classroom



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activities rather than separate, isolated events. This continuous evaluation is central to "assessment for learning," which focuses on providing immediate and relevant feedback to students, helping them improve their performance and understanding (Mat Yusoff et al., 2024; Pattalitan Jr., 2016; Tee & Ahmed, 2014; Zhao et al., 2017).

A key feature of CBA is its flexibility, allowing teachers to employ multiple assessment methods that align with their students' skills and abilities. Teachers assess students' mastery of specific topics and learning standards using various tools, such as rubrics, which clearly describe expected outcomes. The results of these assessments are recorded in templates and analyzed to identify areas for improvement in students' learning trajectories. This analysis enables teachers to take immediate action, whether through individual support or adjustments to instructional strategies, to help struggling students or reinforce the learning of those who have mastered the material (Mat Yusoff et al., 2023).

During the assessment process, teachers can identify students who have not yet fully grasped the material or have achieved mastery. This allows teachers to take appropriate follow-up actions, which may involve differentiated instruction, remedial work, or enrichment activities tailored to each student's needs. These actions can be taken immediately or planned for future lessons, depending on the student's progress and cognitive abilities. The ability to provide timely interventions based on assessment data is a crucial aspect of CBA, as it ensures that every student receives the support they need to advance their learning (Abdul Razak et al., 2023; Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024). Teachers compile reports on students' academic progress in the final phase of CBA. Reporting is a critical component, as it involves regularly informing key stakeholders—particularly parents—about their child's progress, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and mastery of learning objectives. This transparent communication allows parents to track their child's educational advancement and actively engage in supporting their academic growth.

In the context of Malaysian secondary schools, aligning CBA with the national curriculum and policy guidelines is vital. Teachers are expected to incorporate assessments that not only evaluate student achievement but also foster continuous improvement. The Malaysian education system emphasizes outcome-based education, and CBA serves as a tool to ensure that students meet the learning standards outlined by the curriculum (Mat Yusoff et al., 2023). For CBA to be effective, teachers must be empowered with professional development opportunities that enhance their assessment literacy and understanding of policy requirements. This training should focus on helping teachers design culturally and contextually relevant assessments, ensuring they can manage CBA effectively within the diverse classroom environments found in Malaysian schools.

Additionally, there is a need for schools to support teachers in managing the administrative aspects of CBA. Recording and analyzing assessment data can be time-consuming, and teachers may benefit from using digital tools and platforms that streamline these processes. By leveraging technology, teachers can focus more on instructional improvements and less on administrative tasks, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of CBA in promoting student learning (Lijie et al., 2024; Mat Yusoff et al., 2024). Thus, the successful implementation of CBA in Malaysian secondary schools depends on teachers' ability to align their assessment practices with curriculum policies while effectively managing the assessment process. To achieve this, teachers need adequate support in terms of professional development, resources, and tools that enable them to integrate CBA into their teaching practices. By strengthening the alignment between CBA and national educational goals, Malaysian schools can ensure that assessments become a powerful tool for improving student outcomes and fostering long-term academic success.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology as the primary approach to gather data regarding implementing Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) among secondary school teachers. A case study design, as described by Yin (2014), was selected to explore the subject within a specific context. This design provided an opportunity for comprehensive investigation by triangulating data from multiple sources, including semi-structured



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interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. The case study approach is particularly suitable for examining complex phenomena such as policy implementation. It allows for in-depth analysis of how policies are interpreted and applied at the ground level, offering insights that can inform broader policy evaluation and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Case study research is well-suited for deeply understanding the process and outcomes of implementing CBA, particularly in diverse educational settings like Malaysia. This approach offers a detailed description and analysis, aligning with Yin's (2014) framework, allowing researchers to uncover practical implications and real-world challenges. Moreover, Rahman (2014) suggests that case studies provide valuable insights into the "lived experiences" of participants, making them an ideal method for exploring the intricacies of adopting new educational policies, such as CBA.

By focusing on teachers' lived experiences in this new assessment environment, this study seeks to uncover not only surface-level practices but also deeper contextual elements that impact CBA implementation. This holistic perspective enables the research to capture successes and difficulties in adopting policy-driven assessments, particularly how these policies are interpreted and applied in everyday classroom settings. The case study design in this research provides a robust means to investigate the complexities of policy implementation at the ground level while also aligning with established principles of qualitative research, which aim to comprehend the dynamic and multifaceted dimensions of educational practice.

Research Participants

This study targets Malaysian secondary school teachers as its population. This group was selected because they are crucial as the primary implementers of the CBA policy reform at the grassroots level. Therefore, examining this population can offer valuable insights into how the policy is translated into practice at the micro level within the classroom. Thus, to disseminate the samples out of a larger population, the purposive sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was employed in the present study. This sampling technique allows researchers to identify shared patterns across diverse participant backgrounds, which Rahman (2014) suggested enhances the richness of the data presented. The participants for this study consisted of four secondary school teachers from two public secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia. One school was in an urban area, while another was in a suburban area. Although the sample size may appear limited, studies by Creswell (2012) suggest that qualitative research involving four to five participants is adequate for achieving depth in data collection and analysis, particularly when focusing on capturing detailed, context-specific insights. These schools were deliberately chosen because they differed in size, student population, and institutional culture, providing a comparative view of CBA implementation in varying educational settings. School A was designated a High-Performance School, with approximately 62 classes, making it more than double the size of School B. As a High-Performance School, School A has rigorous teaching, learning, and assessment practices, including regularly scheduled research activities that emphasize the application of educational theories in the classroom. Meanwhile, School B, a bit smaller institution, offers a contrasting context and allows for an exploration of how CBA is managed in different school environments.

The teachers in this study, all from Form 2, were selected based on the criterion that they had at least three years of teaching experience in the secondary school curriculum. The criterion of having at least three years of teaching experience was chosen to ensure that the teachers have sufficient familiarity and expertise with the secondary school curriculum. During this temporal timeframe, teachers also experienced the transition of assessment reform. This experience level allows them to deeply understand the curriculum's changes and demands, challenges, and effective implementation strategies, making their insights more reliable and valuable for the study. They must also possess a bachelor's degree and have attended formal CBA training workshops facilitated by the state or district education department. This criterion-based selection method ensured they had the requisite pedagogical and content knowledge to provide meaningful insights into CBA implementation. Also, the researchers upheld ethical standards by securing permission letters for conducting interviews and classroom observations and obtaining approvals from both the Educational Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the



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University Malaya Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical). Before participating, written consent was obtained from all respondents. Table 1 below depicts the participants' demographic profile. A pseudonym was used to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 1. *Participants' Demographic Profile*

Participants	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Major	Teaching experience
Teacher 1	Female	35	Bachelor Degree	Science	7
Teacher 2	Male	32	Master's Degree	English	6
Teacher 3	Male	30	Bachelor Degree	Geography	6
Teacher 4	Female	29	Master's Degree	Mathematics	4

Data Collection

This study employed a multifaceted approach to data collection to ensure the reliability and validity of its findings. As previously mentioned, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were the primary methods for gathering essential data. The subsequent sections describe the data collection methods used in the study.

1. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews, consisting of open-ended questions, served as the primary data collection method for exploring the implementation of CBA among ESL teachers. Creswell (2002) emphasized that responses generated from open-ended questions are valuable, as they allow participants to express their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives in their own words. This method is particularly effective in uncovering subjective experiences and the nuances of policy implementation at the classroom level (Rahman, 2014). An interview guide was utilized to ensure consistency in data collection (Patton, 2015), enabling the researcher to maintain focus on the study's predetermined themes (Merriam, 1998). The interview instrument comprised three sections: Section A gathered participants' personal background information, including teaching experience and educational qualifications; Section B focused on teachers' knowledge of CBA implementation; and Section C encouraged participants to describe their specific practices related to assessment within their classrooms. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and were recorded to facilitate detailed analysis. The interview was also conducted in English. However, a code switch was also employed during the interview session when the participants needed further clarification as they were not native speakers.

2. Classroom observations

Classroom observation was employed to validate the data collected through interviews. The purpose of incorporating observations was to ensure that detailed information regarding teachers' CBA practices within the classroom could be captured and analyzed. Merriam and Tisdell (2009) advocated for the inclusion of classroom observations as a means of revealing the dynamics of teacher-student interactions, particularly in the context of curriculum implementation. This method allowed researchers to closely examine communication patterns and assessment strategies in real time, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of policy application in the classroom. Field notes were used during classroom observations, with two columns designated for the "Description of events" and "Reflections." The first column provided detailed descriptions of assessment practices, classroom interactions, and the physical environment, ensuring a full account of assessment administration methods was recorded. The second column allowed the researcher to reflect on observed practices and classroom procedures, facilitating the generalization of findings across participants. Meticulous note-taking ensured a thorough and accurate representation of teachers' assessment practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). To minimize the "Hawthorne effect"—where participants alter their behavior due to being observed—the researchers maintained a "Complete Observer" role (Baker, 2006) and refrained from using video recordings to allow teachers to implement their assessment methods authentically.

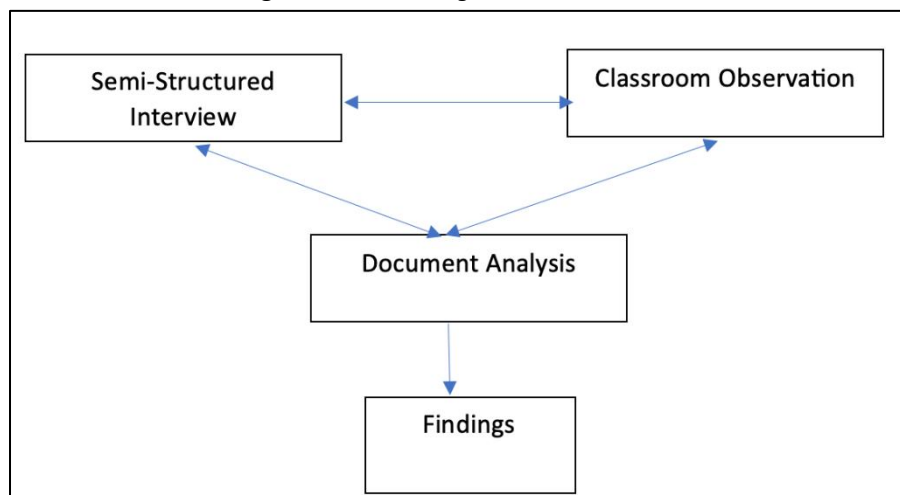


3. Document analysis

To further enhance the credibility of the data, teachers' assessment practices observed in the interviews and classroom sessions were compared to the requirements outlined in the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document and the CBA Guidebook. The document analysis employed a summary form (Yin, 2014), which helped to systematically extract pertinent information from these documents. The form included fields such as the document's date, title, description, contents, relevance to the research, and the researcher's reflections. This structured approach facilitated efficient data organization and ensured that the content analysis process could effectively determine whether teachers' assessment practices aligned with policy guidelines. The document analysis enabled researchers to assess how teachers' pedagogical practices adhered to curriculum standards, ensuring that their assessments were policy-compliant and pedagogically sound. An ascending-order labelling system was applied to documents to improve clarity and ease of reference during the analysis process (Merriam, 2009).

Integrating multiple data collection procedures in the present study can facilitate the rigor of data triangulation. Triangulation was employed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers' assessment practices align with the objectives and requirements of the educational policy under investigation. In this sense, the classroom observations served as an additional means to corroborate data from the interviews, allowing for a broader and more contextual understanding of teachers' implementation of assessment practices within real-world classroom settings. Moreover, the interview and observation data were meticulously cross-referenced and corroborated with curriculum documents, utilizing document analysis. This triangulation approach was critical in uncovering the degree to which teachers' assessment practices align with the specific requirements and objectives of the educational policy. By cross-referencing these diverse data sources, this methodology enabled the study to assess the extent of alignment between teachers' instructional decisions and policy objectives (Rahman, 2014). The ultimate goal of this triangulation strategy was to provide a thorough evaluation of teachers' compliance with policy requirements and offer insights into potential avenues for improving policy implementation at the grassroots level, where practical implications are most evident. By leveraging multiple data sources and employing triangulation, the study aimed to enhance the depth and credibility of its findings, thereby contributing to a robust analysis of teachers' assessment practices concerning the educational policy's goals. As illustrated in Figure 1, this triangulation procedure integrated semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to comprehensively understand the phenomena under investigation.

Figure 1. Data Triangulation Procedures





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4. Access to research sites

Access to the research sites was streamlined as one of the researchers had a personal and established relationship with the principals of the two selected schools. This connection significantly facilitated obtaining formal approval and expedited communication with the school administrations. Nevertheless, formal authorization letters were still obtained from the Planning and Research Development Unit (PRD) of the Ministry of Education and the Selangor Education Department (JPN) to ensure adherence to official protocols. An initial meeting was held with the school principals, during which the researcher's familiarity with the school leadership further supported the clarity of communication regarding the research objectives, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Information letters were subsequently provided to the schools to formalize the upcoming data collection activities. This personal rapport with the school principals is crucial in ensuring smooth coordination and a swift approval process. Once authorization was secured, secondary school teachers were identified and invited to participate through a formal informed consent process. The teachers were thoroughly briefed on the research's aims, procedures, and ethical considerations and provided written consent before involvement. A detailed schedule for conducting interviews and classroom observations was then developed to ensure all data collection activities took place during regular school hours, allowing the capture of authentic and representative classroom experiences.

Data Collection Process

The data collection was conducted in three stages: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four secondary school teachers, lasting approximately 30 minutes each. These interviews aimed to capture teachers' experiences and practices in implementing CBA. Classroom observations followed a non-participatory approach to minimize the Hawthorne effect and allowed researchers to document real-time practices. Field notes were meticulously recorded, focusing on assessment methods, teacher-student interactions, and classroom dynamics. Document analysis was performed by reviewing official curriculum documents and the CBA Guidebook, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of policy expectations. Ethical approval was obtained, and written consent was secured from all participants. The data collection spanned six weeks to allow thorough examination and verification of practices.

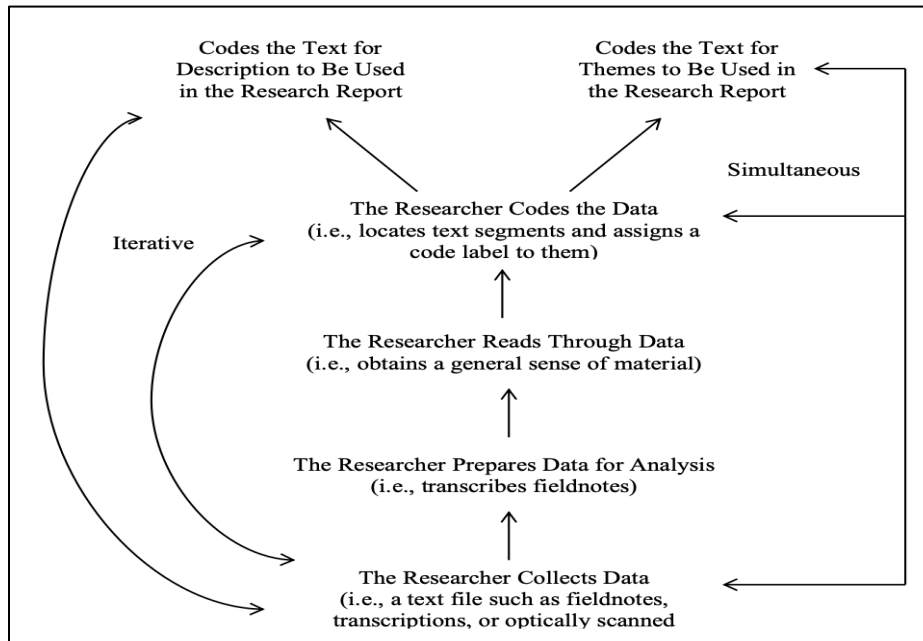
Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to the data collected to shed light on teachers' policy adherence. Patterns in teachers' CBA practices were identified through a detailed analysis of interview transcripts and classroom observations to address the research questions. Multiple readings and thorough examination of the transcripts generated various codes related to teachers' CBA practices. The comparison of these codes across datasets from different participants yielded key themes. Consistent with the Ministry of Education's CBA Guidebook (2019), these themes were categorized into three main areas: planning, implementing and grading procedures. This classification effectively captured the scope of teachers' assessment practices.

A comparative analysis was conducted using the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document and CBA Guidebook to assess the alignment of these practices with the curriculum standards. This process provided additional insights into teachers' lived experiences implementing CBA in Malaysian secondary school classrooms. The findings derived from the triangulation of data (semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis) were then subjected to thematic analysis procedures, as recommended by Creswell (2012), and are depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2. *The Qualitative Process of Data Analysis*



The Atlas.ti software for qualitative data analysis (QDA) was employed to facilitate the data management. This software supports researchers in organizing and storing their data, assigning codes to specific text segments, and simplifying the search for relevant content (Creswell, 2012). While QDA programs do not perform the analysis, they significantly reduce the manual workload for researchers, allowing for more efficient data management (Bryman, 2008).

The process began with organizing and preparing the data for analysis. Separate files were created and labelled for each participant, with individual dossiers containing information from interviews, classroom observations, and curriculum documents. The initial phase of data analysis involved gaining an overall understanding of each participant's data. The analysis was conducted systematically, participant by participant, beginning with each teacher's dataset (comprising semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis) and repeating the same procedure for each subsequent participant.

Given the complexity of the research design, a structured system was developed to ensure that the categorization of data was both systematic and thorough, preventing any data from being overlooked. An open coding technique was first employed in the data set by initially segmenting the raw data into the practices in "Planning", "Implementing," or "Grading" to identify the concepts and categories of the emerging themes. The next phase of the coding technique was employed through the axial coding procedure. In this phase, the data was further analyzed and aligned with the research questions, using the identified codes and sub-codes to formulate overarching themes. This iterative thematic exploration was key to answering the research questions (Creswell, 2012).

The findings were presented in a narrative format, where the themes were discussed in detail concerning the data analysis. Once the analysis was completed, the interpretation of findings was critical to addressing the research questions. These findings were subsequently discussed within the context of contemporary literature, helping to derive answers to the research questions.

An Interrater Reliability assessment was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings. The



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level of agreement between coders was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, a widely accepted measure of inter-coder agreement. The results, presented in Table 2, indicate the threshold of agreement achieved in the coding process, thereby enhancing the overall reliability and validity of the study's findings.

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

Trustworthiness of the Study

In addition to utilizing triangulation methods, an Interrater Reliability (IRR) assessment was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings, particularly regarding the emerging codes and themes. This assessment aimed to evaluate the consistency and agreement between coders in identifying and labelling the study's emerging data patterns. By incorporating this rigorous evaluation process, the study enhances the trustworthiness of its findings, thus bolstering its overall credibility.

Fifteen codes were independently cross-analyzed by two separate raters, as O'Connor and Joffe (2020) stress that the implementation of IRR analysis can occur through the random selection of 10 to 30 codes. Cohen's Kappa analysis was performed to assess the level of agreement between the raters. The coding process began with Coder 1, which segmented and labelled the data. After the coding was completed, the "clean" file was handed to Coder 2, who applied the same coding framework. Coder 2 independently coded the data using a framework similar to the first coder. Once the codes were assigned, the level of agreement between the coders was evaluated and converted into a nominal form, with "0" representing no agreement and "1" representing perfect agreement between the raters.

O'Connor and Joffe (2020) note that Cohen's Kappa ranges between 0 and 1, and converting the codes to nominal form facilitated the reliability calculation process. The SPSS analysis of the ICR assessment displays the results of Cohen's Kappa evaluation. As indicated in the results, the level of agreement between coders was $k = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$, which is considered statistically significant. This Kappa value was then compared to the threshold for agreement outlined by Landis and Koch (1977), displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3. ICR Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standardized Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.65	.14	3.55	.00
N of Valid Cases		15			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					

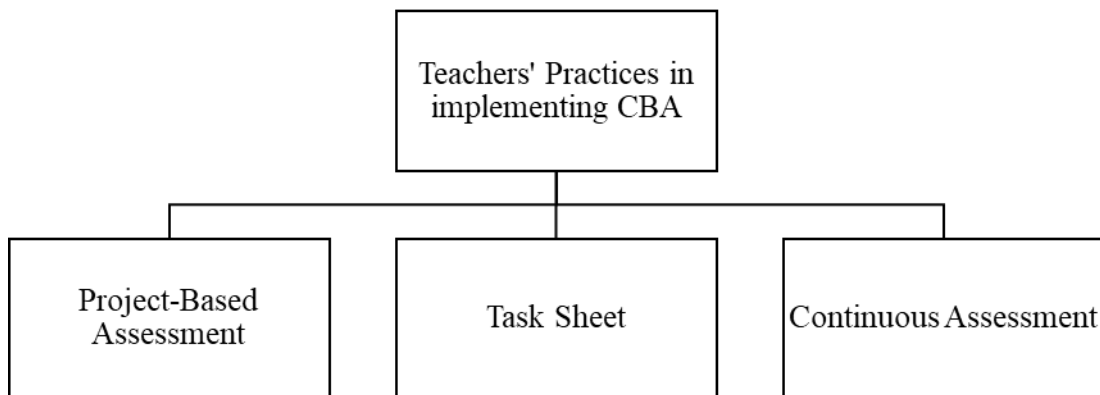
The analysis above demonstrates a "substantial agreement" between the coders, as Cohen's Kappa score of 0.65 falls within the acceptable range of agreement when compared to the threshold (Table 2). This result confirms the reliability of the coding process, which is further discussed in subsequent sections of this study. By ensuring substantial intercoder agreement, the study's findings are rendered more robust and reliable, contributing to the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews with four Malaysian secondary school teachers regarding their implementation of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA). This section presents the data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observation. The data is compared to the document analysis of the curriculum document and CBA Guidebook. Figure 3 below presents the teachers' practices in implementing CBA.

Figure 3. Teacher's Practices in Implementing CBA



Project-Based Assessment

The findings revealed that teachers' practices in CBA are diverse according to their field. They focus on development assessment in a project-based medium to engage students with the learning process. The present study revealed that the project-based assessment was conducted through written assignments, group projects, and oral presentations. These assessment methods were grounded in classroom instruction. For example, Teacher 1 (Science) used group projects through experiments and hands-on activities during teaching and learning. He lamented that this method boosts students' comprehension and helps them grasp the scientific concept better.

"I like to use experiments and hands-on activities to assess the students... I see if they understand the scientific concept better when they do practical work." (Teacher 1)

Furthermore, Teacher 2 (English), who applied a comparable method in the assessment procedures, also supported the notion mentioned earlier. In his practice, he blended multiple language skills in one assessment session through hands-on activities with the students. He focuses on integrating essay writing skills, presentations, and debate activities to assess students' language skills. He believed this method can be beneficial as it gives immediate insights into students' performance in the classroom.

"I use essays, presentations, and sometimes even debates... It gives me a clearer picture of their progress in writing and speaking." (Teacher 2)

Levi and Inbar-Lourie (2020) further supported using diverse, subject-specific assessments to reflect best practices in language education, as they cater to different modes of communication and encourage holistic language development. The practices described above are aligned with the recommendations in the CBA Guidebook. It emphasized the need for teachers to implement the students-centered process in the assessment.



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The implementation of the project is a student-centered learning process where various disciplines of knowledge can be integrated systematically and in a well-planned manner.

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.53)

Although teachers were found to incorporate project-based assessments in the classroom-Based Assessment (CBA), implementing this method often did not align closely with policy requirements. A significant issue in the process was that the assessment objectives were not communicated to students, which hindered the effective execution of the project-based CBA. This was observed during a classroom session with Teacher 1 (Science), who failed to clearly outline the objectives needed during the assessment. As a result, many students were uncertain about what constituted best practices for the assessment, leading to responses that diverged from the intended learning goals. This contradicts the guidelines outlined in the CBA Guidebook, which emphasizes the importance of teachers communicating the assessment criteria to students to guide them toward achieving the assessment objectives.

The teacher needs to determine the learning objectives that students need to achieve and that the teacher intends to assess. These objectives must be communicated to the students.

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.43)

The findings of this study align with the research previously cited by Yan et al. (2021), which highlighted similar challenges. Specifically, the lack of clarity from teachers in communicating explicit learning objectives resulted in the ineffectiveness of peer assessment practices. This lack of transparency created confusion among students, making it difficult to understand the expectations and requirements necessary to achieve the desired learning and assessment outcomes. Consequently, the students cannot effectively engage with the assessment process, which ultimately hinders their ability to reach the intended educational goals.

Task Sheet

Another way CBA was implemented was through the task sheet. Teachers demonstrated using the task sheet they developed or adapted from supplementary materials like textbooks and workbooks. They also mentioned integrating other skills and content while using the task sheet with students. For instance, Teacher 3 described using worksheets to assess students' abilities in map reading skills and population studies. He believed this approach could be an effective way to evaluate how well students respond to the questions in the task sheet.

"For Geography, I start with map reading and population studies. I assess them using worksheets and sometimes group projects. But I also observe how they answer questions in class." (Teacher 3)

Moreover, Teacher 4, who also utilized a similar approach to the conduct of CBA, holds a similar belief in this sentiment. He stated that the task sheet was used as the weekly quizzes to assess students' comprehension of the problem-solving skills on the syllabus taught in the class. For him, the task sheet can help him to retrieve immediate feedback on the students' comprehension and progress, hence assisting him in deciding the need for scaffolding.

"For Maths, I use weekly quizzes to assess. I also give them problem-solving exercises, and during class, I observe how they work on these tasks. If someone is struggling, I give extra practice." (Teacher 4)

As a whole, using task sheets emerged as a prominent method for implementing Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) among the teachers. These task sheets not only served as a tool for evaluating students' abilities in specific skills, like map reading, population studies, and problem-solving but also provided teachers with immediate insights into students' comprehension and progress. This approach allowed teachers to identify areas where students required additional support or scaffolding, enabling more targeted and effective teaching strategies. Overall, using task sheets in CBA proved to be a valuable method for facilitating ongoing assessment and guiding instructional decisions to meet students' learning needs. This matter corroborated the information from the CBA Guidebook, which states



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that task sheets through written assessment can ease the tracking of students' progress in the classroom and encourage students' self-assessment.

This method is implemented to assess students' ability to master skills and monitor their development, which involves activities such as reviewing and checking students' work as well as self-assessment.

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.81)

Despite the demonstration of task sheet augurs well among teachers' practices in enacting the CBA, their assessment practices were sometimes misaligned with the policy mandates. During the classroom observation of Teacher 4 and Teacher 3, the incorporation of the task sheet deviates from the purpose of CBA. For example, Teacher 4 used the task sheet with questions and instruments comparable to the students' formal assessment in the previous high-stakes exam culture. This was also evident from her claim below.

"Most of my assessments are similar to exam questions. It helps them prepare for the final exams." (Teacher 4)

This tendency to revert to exam-style assessments, despite the flexibility encouraged by the CBA Guidebook, suggests that teachers are still heavily influenced by the exam-oriented culture prevalent in Malaysian education (Abdul Razak et al., 2023). This reliance on summative assessments limits opportunities for formative, student-centered learning and indicates a misalignment with the SBELC's goals of promoting continuous assessment. In another instance, Teacher 3, who strayed from the intended purpose of CBA, placed significant emphasis on test-taking skills while concentrating on boosting students' grades at the end of the learning session. This focus undermines the primary objective of CBA, as it resembles the previous high-stakes exam culture. The CBA Guidebook stresses that the assessment in the new norm should be conducted in a stress-free environment as the students' performance should not be compared.

All information obtained from assessments is not intended for comparison or competition among students. Instead, this information should be used to assist schools and parents in planning follow-up actions aimed at improving students' mastery and achievement in learning.

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.5)

Therefore, the focus on test-taking skills within the task sheet during the CBA significantly diverges from the true intent of its implementation. A comparable finding was reported in a study by Yan et al. (2021) in China, where formal testing remained prevalent among teachers in their approach to classroom-based assessment. Providing feedback in grades and general praise to determine whether students had mastered the language knowledge objectives was also noted to deviate from the primary purpose of conducting classroom assessments.

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment emerged as a key theme across the interviews, with teachers recognizing its importance in monitoring student progress. Teachers claim CBA should be done progressively by blending it into classroom instruction. This was evident from Teacher 1 (Science), who remarked the CBA she conducted was done continuously during teaching and learning in the classroom through quizzes and observation.

"I assess them continuously, through quizzes or even observing their participation during experiments." (Teacher 1)

She also believed that when the CBA was conducted continuously, it helped her to retrieve ongoing feedback concerning the student's progression in the teaching and learning session.



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...it helps me to retrieve real-time feedback from the students, hence, in that way assisting me to be aware on their development... (Teacher 1)

Pragmatically, this notion can be supported by the recommendations stipulated in the CBA Guidebook. It describes that the CBA is a continuous process of collecting and analyzing information, which inadvertently assists in consistent judgment in improving the classroom teaching and learning process.

CBA involves the process of collecting and analyzing information as well as continuously reflecting on the teaching and learning process (T&L) to make consistent judgments aimed at improving the T&L.

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p. 5)

Namaziandost et al. (2024) further supported that a continuous assessment culture can provide ongoing feedback, enabling teachers to adjust their instruction to meet student's needs, which is critical for fostering a growth-oriented learning environment. Even though some teachers believe the CBA is beneficial as it embodies continuous and progressive assessment, others are apprehensive towards this new climate. Teachers claim that they were hampered by numerous contextual challenges that impede the CBA from being conducted exhaustively. One of the pressing issues they faced was the pressing time constraint. This is seen in the assertion made by Teacher 2 (English) below.

"There's not enough time to assess continuously when there's so much paperwork and marking to do. I try my best, but it's difficult." (Teacher 2)

He faced the greatest challenge to employ CBA continuously due to the many clerical work that he had to deal with. He further asserted that the enactment of CBA is tedious due to the many documents that he needs to prepare. This sparked a contested issue, especially when he had to deal with a large number of students in the classroom.

"CBA involves a lot of paperwork... keeping track of each student's performance is hard when you have 30 or 40 students in a class." (Teacher 2)

These contextual challenges that teachers face can potentially lead teachers to neglect the primary aims of CBA that were executed in the education system. Previous studies have shown that time constraints and heavy administrative workloads are common barriers to continuous assessment, reducing its effectiveness and potentially shifting the focus away from formative feedback (Latifah & Anuar, 2021). In fact, during the classroom observation of Teacher 2, it was found that he could not finish the assessment due to the time constraints in the classroom instruction. He was challenged by finishing the lesson and content delivery while integrating the CBA into the teaching and learning process. Additionally, this finding reflects the administrative burden associated with CBA, which has been identified as a major obstacle to its effective implementation (Aziz et al., 2020; Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024). Teachers are often overwhelmed by the documentation requirements, which detract from the formative purpose of CBA and limit the time available for meaningful feedback. This issue has lowered their self-efficacy in enacting the reform. This study found that most teachers shifted their focus to preparing students for the exam by emphasizing the need to attain high in a single assessment. This was evident in the claim of Teacher 3 (Geography) and Teacher 4, who expressed the importance of preparing students to answer the exam question.

"We have to prepare them for that, even if it means focusing more on exams than continuous assessment" (Teacher 3)

"I still rely on exams most of the time... it's just easier to measure their performance this way, and the school expects it." (Teacher 4)

This situation suggests that the exam-centric culture is still in practice in the CBA climate, which can potentially act



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as a significant barrier to the full implementation of assessment reform, as it shifts the focus away from formative assessment practices and towards summative evaluation (Abdul Razak et al., 2023). Apparently, this issue highlights a contradiction to the CBA Guidebook, which states that exam-oriented culture should not be the main emphasis in the enactment of CBA.

Teachers need to use data to plan and implement more constructive and meaningful strategies to encourage active student engagement in learning, advance their future learning, and subsequently enhance their mastery and achievement in learning. It is not intended for comparison between students. The information and data from this assessment can also serve as a basic indicator of a student's achievement in a particular topic before moving on to the next topic or lesson.

(CBA Guidebook, 2019, p.8)

Hence, in order to make continuous assessment more feasible, the CBA Guidebook recommends adopting streamlined tools for monitoring and recording progress, but the uptake of such tools remains limited due to resource constraints (Ministry of Education, 2019). Triangulation was conducted across three data collection methods (observations, interviews, and document analysis) to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The findings revealed a consistent narrative across these sources. For planning (Theme 1), classroom observations highlighted inconsistencies in lesson planning, where some teachers incorporated student-centered activities while others relied on traditional methods. Interviews supported these observations, with teachers expressing challenges in aligning lesson plans with CBA policy requirements, citing administrative burdens and time constraints as key barriers. Document analysis further confirmed a lack of alignment with policy, as lesson plans from suburban schools showed limited inclusion of formative assessment strategies (Mandinach & Gummer, 2016; Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024).

Regarding implementation (Theme 2), observations showed variability, with performing schools employing diverse, formative assessment methods, while suburban schools relied more on summative approaches. Interviews identified resource limitations and a lack of professional development as primary factors influencing these differences, and document analysis corroborated this, revealing a heavy reliance on traditional assessment methods in rural settings (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019). Concerning challenges (Theme 3), all three data sources pointed to systemic barriers such as administrative workloads, time constraints, and large class sizes, which hindered effective CBA implementation. Teachers reported struggling to provide timely feedback and adjust their teaching strategies due to these challenges, as confirmed by observations and assessment records.

Finally, for professional development (Theme 4), the data consistently emphasized the importance of training in enabling teachers to implement CBA effectively. Observations showed that teachers who had attended CBA workshops were better able to incorporate policy-aligned practices, while interviews highlighted a need for ongoing, context-specific training. Document analysis further revealed gaps between training content and practical application in the classroom, suggesting a need for professional development programs tailored to Malaysian educators' needs (Abdul Razak et al., 2023; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019; Mohamad Marzaini et al., 2024). These findings highlight the critical need for addressing systemic challenges and enhancing teacher training to bridge the gap between CBA policy and practice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has thoroughly examined how teachers comply with policy requirements to complement CBA in Malaysian secondary schools. The findings indicate that teachers actively engage with CBA practices, as demonstrated by their ability to incorporate various assessment methods, including project-based assessments, task sheets, and ongoing evaluations. Most teachers have successfully managed their instructional and pedagogical approaches within the teaching and learning process. Additionally, the decision to incorporate CBA into classroom instruction suggests that teachers are keeping pace with the current demands of the new assessment system in



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education. However, despite teachers appearing to align with current policy requirements, their assessment practices do not fully correspond with policy objectives. Essentially, this study found a discrepancy between teachers' strategies for implementing CBA and the intended policy mandates. Although multiple assessment strategies were integrated within classroom instruction, the practices remained influenced by the exam-oriented culture of the previous assessment system. The emphasis on accumulating marks and grades within the CBA process suggests that teachers are still focusing on students' test-taking abilities, which inadvertently drives students to excel in a single session of continuous assessment. This fact does not necessarily mean that teachers lack the capability or capacity to translate policy into practice. Instead, their efforts are hindered by several contextual challenges at the grassroots level that impede the alignment of CBA with policy guidelines.

It is essential to implement a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes the practical needs of teachers to address these challenges and bridge the gap between policy and classroom practice. These approaches include enhancing professional development programs to equip teachers with comprehensive assessment literacy and strategies that align closely with policy requirements. Furthermore, digital tools should be introduced to streamline administrative tasks, enabling teachers to focus more on pedagogical improvements. Policies should also promote stakeholder collaboration as this could foster a supportive environment that encourages teachers to move away from traditional exam-oriented practices and towards formative, student-centered assessments. These measures are vital in ensuring that classroom practices align effectively with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 overarching goals, thereby fostering holistic student development and higher-order thinking skills. Thus, bridging the gap between policy and practice is necessary not only for improving classroom assessment but also for achieving the broader objectives of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025.

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