









## Exploring ESL teachers' alternative assessment strategies and practices in the classroom

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### Abstract

English Language teachers are expected to keep abreast with expectations and challenges that they come across in assisting their students to attain higher level of academic achievement. Studies show that teachers are unable to assess students accordingly as the current education system in Malaysia is too examination-oriented and over emphasises rote-learning. The research aims at investigating and analysing in-service teachers' alternative assessment strategies in selected Malaysian ESL classrooms. This study employed a qualitative case study involving eleven ESL teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Two instruments were used in data collection, namely interview protocol and classroom observation form. The findings showed that teachers employed different assessment strategies namely integrated alternative assessment, summative assessment, formative assessment, informal assessment via observation, online assessment, self-assessment, portfolio assessment, peer assessment and school-based assessment. The results revealed that besides alternative assessment, teachers still showed preference for employing summative assessment in the classroom. Some teachers embedded assessment activities to ensure students are given sufficient opportunity to perform, create, produce based on the tasks given in the classroom. The findings suggest that teachers need exposure and training in current assessment that they can employ in instruction.

**Keywords:** English Language; alternative assessment; summative assessment; formative assessment; ESL Teachers

## 1. Introduction

Assessment is a key part of teaching and learning and one cannot deny its importance in education. Assessment provides crucial information regarding students' mastery of learning and also assists teachers to assess their pedagogical strategies. Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) define assessment as a

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process of gathering of data or information by people with the sole purpose of making decision. Brown and Green (2006) describe that assessment is also used to scrutinise the process of learning looking specifically into the individual's learning achievement based on the end product. This is supported by Stiggins (1992) on the amount of time spent by teachers which is one-third to one-half to design appropriate activities related to assessment. A number of disputes have emerged regarding teachers' current practices and implementation of assessment strategies (Anderson & Palm, 2017; Creighton et al., 2015; Dietel, Herman & Knuth, 1991), effects of assessment on student learning (Alkharusi, 2008; McMillan, Venable & Varier, 2013; Yunus et al., 2021), role of assessment (Holmboe, 2010; Shepard, 2000), diverse methods of assessment (Ruiz-Primo & Furtak, 2006; Suah, Ong, & Shuki, 2009), and classroom assessment practices (Dunlosky et al., 2013; Singh & Samad, 2013; Singh et al., 2017).

The current education system in Malaysia is too examination-oriented and over emphasises rote-learning. Learners have to sit for major examinations namely Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR), Lower Secondary Examination (PT3), Malaysian Certificate of Examination (SPM) and Higher Malaysian School Certificate (STPM). As such, teachers teach to the test and this form of test does not indicate the multiple intelligences that students have and do not reveal the students' real abilities (Ghazali, Rabi, Hassan, & Wahab, 2018). ESL teachers struggled and faced a lot of pressure to find the best ways to assess the students' knowledge and skills that will allow students to reach their full potential (Suah, 2012; Gopal & Singh, 2020). As a result of this, major reformation took place in the Malaysian education system moving from the traditional assessment to implementation of school-based assessment. Considering the government's assessment system reform, teachers are equally expected to have solid educational knowledge and skills in assessing student mastery of classroom learning. Yet, studies revealed that ESL teachers do not possess nor demonstrate sound knowledge in alternative assessment (Ahlam Ali Salim Halali et al., 2017). Lian and Yew (2016) showed that lack of alternative assessment knowledge created problems for teachers in assessing their students accurately. Teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of alternative assessment impeded students from achieving their full potential. Past studies revealed that teachers are complacent with the traditional methods of assessment and as a consequence, did not comply to the main principles of assessment when assessing students in the classroom (Singh et al., 2017; Ghazali, 2018; Alaa et al., 2019; Tek et al., 2021). Teachers' inability to comprehend practical assessment strategies in the classroom is partially attributed to the teacher education programmes because assessment courses were not made compulsory or mandatory for graduation purpose (Metler, 2005). Most of the teacher education programmes in Malaysia teach pre-service teachers only theoretical aspects of assessment and not comprehensively (Hirshberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, Schildkampa et al. (2020) argued that teachers have their own ideologies about assessment and the nature of learning can essentially influence their decisions regarding student achievement. Other alarming problems include teachers' ambiguity on developing and determining appropriate alternative assessment (Ahlam Ali Salim Halali et al., 2017), lack of exposure to assessment training in Malaysia (Suah, 2012), poor assessment knowledge and skills causing discrepancies in using classroom assessment (Nguyen & Khairani, 2017).

Studies pertaining to teachers' alternative assessment practices have been carried out in recent years in Malaysia (e.g., Abdul Wahab et al., 2016; Ahlam Ali Salim Halali et al., 2017; Nor Hasnida Che Md Ghazali, 2016; Singh & Arshad Abdul Samad, 2013; Singh et al., 2017). Many factors that would inhibit teachers from employing the correct assessment procedure to bring about effective results of students' learning include teachers' beliefs, and emphasis on traditional assessment (Singh et al., 2017). Discerepancy exists between what teachers believed and what they practiced and the kind of assessment practices recommended by educational reformers (Schildkampa et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a need to look at how the ESL teachers apply and carry out alternative assessment strategies and practices to teach English. This study will answer two research questions:

1. What are the current assessment strategies used by the ESL teachers for teaching English?
2. How do the ESL teachers carry out the alternative assessment strategies for teaching English?

## 2. Literature Review

The term ‘assessment’ is important in the teaching and learning process. It is used to assess teaching and learning effectiveness. Assessment provides an opportunity for students to learn and it should be properly planned and implemented to bring about effective results. Educational systems implemented in schools and other institutions of learning are mostly examination oriented. Students are assessed based on standardised examinations basically summative in nature as the assessment measures the sum of their performance and the grades given are final. It is also norm-referenced whereby student performance is compared with others.

Black and William (2009, 1998: 7) refer to assessment to activities used by teachers and their students to assess themselves. These activities provide data for use as feedback to adapt teaching and learning activities. Assessment is also defined as ‘the process of gathering, interpreting, and recording, and using information about pupils’ response to an educational task’ (Harlen, Broadfoot, & Nuttal, 2005, p. 283). Hancock (1994) views assessment as an active process enabling educators as well as learners to monitor academic performance.

Since students possess multiple forms of intelligence, the outcomes from just one type of assessment cannot indicate the multiple intelligence in learners nor project their true capabilities. A single type of assessment cannot do justice to the entire range of knowledge, skills and cognitive ability students possess. Assessment for learning has assumed greater importance than assessment of learning (Van der Kleij, Cumming, & Looney, 2018, p. 620). Assessment for learning has two phases. It starts with diagnostic assessment and then formative assessment; remedial assistance will be given to poor performers. This type of assessment occurs throughout the learning process up to the time of summative assessment (Van der Kleij et al., 2015; Bennett, 2011; Torrance, 2012; Wiliam, 2011).

Hamayam (1995) defines alternative assessment as comprising techniques used in teaching and assessment incorporated into the daily learning activities. The term ‘alternative’ suggests it replaces the conventional often summative norm-referenced tests that show products of learning and produce no feedback for enhancing student learning. Hence, there is a need for an assessment to show the development of learning in students.

Alternative assessment has many types including performance assessments, self-assessments, portfolios, peer-assessments, diaries and student-teacher discussions. Herman, Aschbacher, and Williams (1992, p. 6) identify six characteristics of alternative assessments including real world applications and applying higher level cognitive abilities. Alternative assessments are non-intrusive since they evaluate tasks that learners perform in classrooms daily (Huerta-Macias, 1995). Because alternative assessments are formative in essence, they let learners know how they are managing with their studies. They give students chances to improve performance on the same task whereas ‘a summative assessment task cannot be repeated or improved’ (Dunn et al., 2004, p. 18).

This paper focuses on using alternative assessments in TESL. Since second language proficiency is multifaceted, it is difficult to measure by any single test. One test cannot deal with all the skills involved or show skill development. Even within one skill area, for example, reading, comprehension depends on the student’s interpretation of the text, prior knowledge, purpose of reading and reading strategies. Comprehension is not merely the student’s response to multiple choice items. Through assessments the complex processes and knowledge derived from reading can be explored. Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan and Mahbub Ahsan Khan (2012) agree that alternative assessment practices are less explored among educators and teachers in Malaysia. E-portfolio is one of the alternative assessment

educators can explore in documenting student learning. For this purpose, they studied pre-service teachers from a Malaysian research university. These pre-service teachers were instructed to create a personal e-portfolio. Findings showed that they were able to track and monitor their performance and achievements over time. Wei, Haslinda Ismail, Costa, and Hong Boon Tan (2018) in their review on assessment for learning (AfL) found that teachers realised the importance of AfL and its principles. Hansen (2020) explored how teacher-student dialogue enabled discussion on understanding of formative assessment practice. Wei et al. (2018) focused on seven principles of good feedback practice in relation to the student's experiences. Van der Klei (2019) found differences and similarities in feedback perceptions among teachers and students. Analysis of data collected from secondary English and Mathematics classes in five Australian schools revealed that student achievement was highly correlated with feedback quality perceptions.

Lam (2019) explored how Hong Kong secondary school teachers practice classroom-based writing assessment. Findings showed that teachers had pertinent assessment knowledge and positive conceptions about alternative writing assessments. Some of the teachers had partial understanding of assessment of learning (AoL) and assessment for learning (AfL), but not assessment as learning (AaL). Nevertheless, to ensure valid, reliable and accurate assessment, teachers need a good grounding and capability in assessment (Veloo, Ramli, & Khalid, 2016). One implication inferred from the reviews made is that ESL teachers still lacked understanding in principles of testing. Developing alternative assessment strategies that would generate a learner assessment module is important to equip teachers with the necessary assessment skills. The theoretical framework which guides this study is based on the development of alternative assessment strategies and module for learner assessment for teaching English within a constructivist learning approach and it is supported by Stiggins (1995). Second language assessment involves the cognitively demanding task of using the constructivist-oriented pedagogical approach to encourage a transformation of traditional assessment to alternative assessment.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This study used a qualitative research approach involving semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. The case study qualitative research was adopted to explore, understand and seek information regarding alternative assessments practices among in-service teachers. Yin (2015) wrote that qualitative case studies enable researchers to explore how individuals comprehend their lives in the real-life context; in this study, it was possible to explore how alternative assessments are carried out from the in-service teachers' lens through rich experiences based on their teaching. The in-service teachers' views on alternative assessments are based on their real-life teaching beliefs and experiences.

Eleven teachers participated voluntarily and purposive sampling were used to select them. Purposive sampling was deemed important as through this type of sampling, the researchers would be able to gain in-depth and rich information that would assist in answering the research questions (Patton, 2015). All the eleven teachers are still actively teaching in selected secondary schools. Six out of them have more than nine years of teaching experience, while four have more than twenty-five years of teaching experience.

Only two teachers volunteered to share their recorded videos for the observation. The videos were sent to the researchers through emails. The interview and classroom observations verbatim were analysed using thematic analysis. Also, the findings obtained were checked against the 12 defining characteristics of alternative assessments proposed by Brown and Hudson (1998, pp. 654-655) to look

at how these selected teachers used alternative assessments to assess student language proficiency and skill development. Document analysis was also used to support findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

### 3.2 *Research Instruments and Procedures*

The researchers developed and prepared an interview protocol to be used as a guide. It consisted of semi-structured questions validated by some teachers and experts in assessment. Each interview with the teachers lasted forty minutes. Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Patton (1990) stated that data obtained from interviews are able to provide detailed, in-depth and rich information of the phenomenon being studied and diverse characteristics of the sample. All the teachers' interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed manually for recurring themes.

## 4. Findings

Findings and discussion from the teachers' interviews are based on the defining characteristics of the various alternatives in assessment as summarised by Brown and Hudson (1998, pp. 654-655). Alternative assessments have twelve defining features, namely:

1. necessitate students to perform, produce, create or do something
2. utilise or use real-world contexts or simulations
3. known to be nonintrusive as it allows students to extend the day-to-day classroom activities
4. permit students to be assessed on what they usually do in class every day
5. use tasks/activities that represent meaningful instructional activities
6. focus on process as well as products
7. tap into higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills
8. provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students
9. are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered
10. ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment
11. encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria
12. call on teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles

The researchers have employed the characteristics proposed by Brown and Hudson (1998, pp. 654-655) to analyse the teachers' techniques, knowledge and mastery of alternative assessments used in instruction and assessment that they infuse into the daily learning activities. Evidence was taken from excerpts of the verbatim transcription of the interviews and classroom observations. The researchers re-read the teachers' verbatim interview transcriptions to sort and categorise the characteristics of alternative assessments that have emerged.

What are the current assessment strategies used by the ESL teachers for teaching English?

Interview data obtained from eleven teachers and classroom observations with two teachers showed that these teachers use the following assessment strategies as shown in Table 1. These strategies include alternative assessment, summative assessment, formative assessment, informal assessment via observation, online assessment, self-assessment, portfolio assessment, peer assessment and school-based assessment. The teachers' current assessment strategies were then compared against the criteria of various alternative assessments as summarised by Brown and Hudson (1998, pp. 654-655).

How do the ESL teachers carry out the alternative assessment strategies for teaching English?

### 4.1 *Teachers' knowledge and mastery of assessment*

It was very crucial and interesting to report on teachers' knowledge and mastery of assessment. All the eleven teachers interviewed in this study had shown good awareness and mastery of assessment, as apparent from interviews conducted. Teachers revealed that alternative assessment is not the standardised or traditional examinations implemented based on the levels of examinations such as PT3 and SPM. Teachers also shared that they knew the difference between formative and summative assessment. They mentioned exactly when to conduct the formative and summative assessment for their students.

All the teachers shared that they usually start with formative assessment and this could take place at the beginning of the lesson, during the lesson development or at the end of the lesson. Activities they incorporate would include questioning strategies, instructing students to watch YouTube videos posted prior to attending class, read selected newspaper articles, assign activities based on the activity and text books, give them some topics to discuss in the class and presentations. As for the summative assessment, teachers mentioned that they do not give students monthly tests to do but they usually ask students to complete questions based on units that they have taught so that they can track and monitor student progress. As for the alternative assessment, the teachers are aware that school-based assessment incorporates alternative assessment to assist students. The following Table 1 exemplifies the types of assessment methods the respondents had implemented in class to bring about effective student learning.

**Table 1.** Types of Assessment Methods

Respondents	Types of Assessment Methods
Nisha	Alternative Assessment, Summative Assessment
Kamani	Informal Assessment via observation
Ayu	Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment
Adibah	Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment
Mas	Summative Assessment
Ita	Informal Assessment, Alternative Assessment
Fiza	Online Assessment, Alternative Assessment
Intan	Summative Assessment, Performance-based Assessment
Rohaya	Formative Assessment School-based Assessment
Kavani	Alternative Assessment, Portfolio Assessment, Peer-Assessment, Self-Assessment, Self-Reflection
Mani	Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment

#### 4.2 Specify learning objectives and outcomes

All the eleven teachers interviewed agreed and admitted that alternative assessment requires teachers to spell out and specify learning objectives and learning outcomes prior to designing the tasks for students. The teachers shared that they have to follow the curriculum standards which are the content standards, learning standards and performance standards. Based on these curriculum standards, the teachers would then match students' learning outcomes using the performance standards.

#### 4.3 Performance-based assessment

Out of the eleven teachers interviewed, only one teacher (Nisha, not her real name), shared her views on how she puts emphasis and importance to allow learners an avenue for assessing speaking as well as writing skills. Teacher Nisha has implemented performance-based assessment as supported by Reynold, Livingston, and Willson (2006) as she has given her students tasks to complete based on speaking and writing skills. According to Teacher Nisha, she took the initiative to design tasks for her students that would resemble real-life situations. For example, she had instructed her students to

participate in an online debate competition and for the assessment to take place, the students had to work in groups of four to share their ideas on the debate topic given. Focus shown on performance-based assessment was apparent from the examples of classroom activities mentioned by Teacher Nisha because her approach is not limited to knowing and doing but rather more toward process as well as product. Teacher Nisha shared that she usually assigns writing task (essay) that would require students to use real-world contexts or simulations. She said that her students are of low proficiency and this means it takes time to teach and assess them. She always tried to relate the topics taught with real-life situations to ensure students can relate and share their experiences.

Teacher Intan (not her real name) instructs her students to take part in the Public Speaking activity on certain selected topics given to assess students' pronunciation, vocabulary, linguistics and grammar that they can use. She believes that it is vital to listen to the students' pronunciation, tone, enunciation and tap into their confidence level while using English language. She further shared the shortcomings of the traditional examination failed to capture and collect other measures, skills and abilities of students besides the grades given.

#### *4.4 Scoring of the alternative assessment tasks*

Teacher Ita (not her real name) shared that the worksheets she distributes after teaching each lesson would be given to the students as a follow-up practice which she believes is vital to check how each student will perform based on the topic taught. Students are instructed to upload and turn in their work upon completing the tasks given. The teacher would then mark and score the students' work. Based on the scores obtained, Teacher Ita shared that she would then be able to check whether students have achieved the planned learning outcomes or not. Student scores will be used by Teacher Ita to monitor the students' development in learning. Teacher Ita believed that on-going assessment tasks that she gives to her students will give knowledge on learner weaknesses and also their strong points as observed through time (Norris, Brwon, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998: 2; Singh et al., 2021). Teacher Ita feels that it is a win-win situation for both teacher and student. Students can also check the errors they made in learning and from the teacher feedback they would be able to track their own learning. Other teachers (Teacher Kamani, Teacher Ayu, Teacher Adibah, Teacher Mas & Teacher Fiza) shared similar views as Teacher Ita that based on the tasks or activities given to students, teachers can have rough ideas in terms of the learning content students lacked the most and need more help to attain the specified learning outcomes. It also helps the teachers to provide detailed justification for monitoring student learning. By doing so, teachers can plan ahead how to assist and overcome students' weaknesses and difficulties in learning.

#### *4.5 Tap into Higher-order Thinking Skills*

Not only that, Teacher Nisha believes that alternative assessment should be carried out to allow students to show capabilities in various kinds of skills. She also believes that alternative assessment allows students to improve their thinking skills and they are allowed to voice their point of view on certain topics. All the teachers interviewed agreed that they have used the questioning strategy to elicit more information from students based on the topic taught. By doing so, the teachers believe that they can maintain and foster positive relationship with their students. If learners find safety in the classroom, teachers quickly get to know the learners' skills better. Three out of the eleven teachers (Teacher Nisha, Teacher Intan and Teacher Rohaya) shared that examination should not be used as the only yardstick to measure student ability. Teachers have to provide some opportunities for the students to demonstrate and share their abilities with one another with their fellow classmates and also the

teachers. Teachers can always provide feedback on student performance in writing skills and speaking skills promptly, orally or in written form to enable improvement.

Teacher Nisha has voiced out her concern to other teachers as not to just assess the students based on the exam score sheet and also the homework given after teaching them in the class but they can always assess their students through other means for example using games. She shared so because she felt that it was unfair for the weak students who also needed equal attention from teachers. Teacher Nisha shared that teachers' creativity in teaching and learning can also assist weak students who she finds sometimes are good in speaking and they will participate more when she infuses game elements that prompt students to take part in the activities. A teacher does not need to assess students based on summative assessment but can still assess them through performance-based assessment. Teacher Nisha mentioned that teachers should stop focusing more on the grades and should allow students to enjoy being in the classroom where students feel free to participate in the activities. This would indirectly ease the teachers' task to assess their students.

#### *4.6 Get to know students' strengths and weaknesses*

Teacher Fiza (not her name) gave an example of the alternative assessment tasks that she has instructed her students to do in the class. She asked students to do a video recording of speaking and project-based learning. She believes that learning through own experience and the results obtained from the project may teach the students to make inferences and enhance their learning in weak areas. She also mentioned "Pembelajaran Mandiri" which means self-learning is crucial and she does this by assigning students some tasks that require them to reflect on their own experience for selected topics. Teacher Fiza mentioned that she let her students explore, experience trial and error on their own effort based on the learning topics given. Her belief is that letting students explore learning on their own by giving them a situation to analyse will allow students to propose some solutions to the problem assigned and they will share their views with everyone in the class. Teacher Fiza shared that her role as a teacher is to motivate her students to find answers and solutions to the problem posed.

#### *4.7 Use tasks/activities that represent meaningful instructional activities*

Teacher Ita (not her real name) mentioned that alternative assessments are ongoing assessment that would require students to use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities. She does this by asking students to role-play, to participate on speaking task that would allow students to show and reflect on their real performance which she cannot assess using multiple choice type questions. The role-play and speaking activities will provide teachers the opportunities to look at students' actual language competence. Teacher Ita proposed that the Ministry of Education should create a good evaluation system whereby both teachers and learners can rely and have a good platform to record for self-improvement.

#### *Teacher Mani*

Teacher Mani has been teaching for three years and shared that she has been using both formative and summative assessment to assess student understanding. She further shared that she integrates activities based on real-life situations that can give students opportunities to activate their higher-order thinking skills. Findings from the interview conducted with the teacher showed that she adhered to the characteristics of alternative assessments that warrants to necessitate students to perform, produce, create or do something. This was evident from the documents the teacher has shared to show students' products in various forms namely brochure made from newspaper cutting on eco-communities, posters and videos students created based on the classroom activities the teacher had



planned. The teacher shared that her approach in pedagogy strategies could make assessment more interesting. For this purpose, she divulged that technology plays an important role to support teacher creativity in their approach to make assessment more meaningful. She mentioned that alternative assessment can benefit both the students and teachers to check on students' understanding and comprehension on topics taught. By integrating technology, teachers can enhance their teaching while using different approaches to assist student performance. The teacher further shared that the teacher's role is to ensure assessments are appropriate and suitable to the test the students. Teachers need to know what are they testing so that the assessments can be tailored accordingly.

#### *4.1 Findings from the classroom observations*

##### *Teacher Kavani*

Teacher Kavani has been teaching English for more than fourteen years and admits that the assessment system implemented in schools has evolved over the years from merely focusing on standardised examinations to school-based assessment and aligning the curriculum and assessment to CEFR. Teachers' role today is not just limited to the teaching and learning process but also assessing and guiding students to develop their skills and competencies in order to show their cognitive operations at higher levels. During the observation, Teacher Kavani wrote the learning outcome of the day that she planned to teach. Her focus was on writing and the topic was on 'A trip to Malacca'. The first activity was on role-play. She showed a jar and, in that jar, she had put some topics for the students to pick and discuss. She randomly called two students to come forward to pick one topic from the jar and role-play the situation. Student A picked a piece of the paper from the jar. Student A acted as a tourist from the United Kingdom and Student acted as a stranger. Student A asked Student B on places of interest to visit in Malacca. Student B was very polite and he mentioned a few places to Student who acted as the tourist. Student B mentioned about A' Famosa and Jonker's Street. He also told Student B (tourist) that he can even get a map from the tourist centre so that he could use that as a guide to visit places in Malacca. After the students had completed exchanging ideas on the places the tourist can visit, all the other students clapped for their presentation and the teacher thanked them for coming forward. Next, the teacher asked the students, 'who has been to Malacca?' Half of the class raised their hands to indicate that they have been to Malacca before. The teacher asked the following questions:

Teacher: What is Malacca known as?

Students: Historical city.

Teacher: Why not Kuala Lumpur, Penang but Malacca alone got the name of historicalcity? Why?

Male Student 1: We have lots of places of history, locations of history...

Female Student1: Malacca was ruled by Portuguese before.

Male Student 2: Then by Dutch, British

Teacher: How our forefathers struggled to fight for Malacca and its independence.

After the questioning session, students were asked to refer to the PowerPoint slides and answer questions given in the worksheets distributed. The title of the worksheet 'You are the tourist of this country and based on the map, describe the journey you took and the places you visited in Malacca.' Teacher explained the meaning of 'direction', 'way', 'journey' and 'directions. Photos of 'A Famosa and description about it was shown on the slide show. One of the students stood and read the description on A' Famosa. The next image was on Stadhuys and teacher repeated the same step by asking one student to volunteer and read the description. One more image on 'Menara Taming Sari' and students mentioned the height of the tower is 110 meters. One of the students shared that they can

view city of Malacca through Menara Taming Sari. After explaining about some of the places in Malacca, the teacher instructed the students to complete the task given in the worksheets. Next, the students were asked to exchange the worksheets with their partners. Teacher Kavani wants the students to assess their friend's work and comment and improve each other's work. She believes that with the input given to the students and eliciting feedback from students through questioning can help to strengthen students' mastery of the topic. Teacher Kavani encourages her students to carry out peer-assessment during the developmental stage of the lesson. At the end of the lesson, Teacher Kavani requested learners to complete the self-assessment form to indicate their learning. She even asked her students to write a short reflection and submit to her once the class ends. All the worksheets given and marked by the teacher were then compiled by the students in their individual files known as portfolio.

### *Teacher Nisha*

Students in teacher Nisha's class are of low proficiency and for this purpose the teacher plans assessment activities for her students accordingly. One of the challenges the teacher faced while teaching her students is to ensure they are ready for her lesson and stay focused. For this purpose, she interacts more with the students using bilingual to ensure learning takes place.

T: Describe what can you see in the picture?

S1: A lady.....

S2: snake

T: Have you all seen a snake before?

S2: Yes teacher. On tv.

S4: in front of my house.

T: What happened then?

S4: I shouted

S4: help

S4: father pukul (hit) the snake.

S4: the snake goes.

T: Then, please explain more...what was your feelings?

S3: takut (scared)

T: Do you think the lady is scared of the snake?

S5: Ya. Takut (scared).

T: why are you scared?

S6: mati (die). Snake bite. Dangerous.

T: ok good. Some snakes are very poisonous and can harm lives.

T: Do you think the lady know there is a snake?

S3: The lady knows there a snake.

T: The lady saw a snake.

S1: Yes, teacher.

T: What will happen to the lady if she does not see the snake?

S4: die.....blood

T: Good.

T: Today, we will learn about informal letter. This is the format of the letter.

S1: (listens to the students).

T: Get into groups of four and brainstorm more ideas on the picture shown.

The teacher believes that students need some explanation before they could do the writing task. She mentioned that knowing her students' low proficiency in English can also obstruct the flow of

learning. Therefore, she needs to translate some word from English to Malay to assist their understanding on the pictures displayed for teaching writing. For this task, the students have to produce an informal letter informing their friends about this snake incident that they have come across. The teacher instructs the students to write down the ideas and discuss them within groups of four. As for this lesson, the teacher managed to include a real-life situation event into their lesson. Hamad (2007) and Tek et al. (2020) stated that students need chances for expanding knowledge and ability to implement learning using authentic contexts. For the assessment part, teacher Nisha assesses students formatively to test their understanding and knowledge on the topic. Teacher Nisha has tapped on the characteristics of the various alternative assessment by Brown and Hudson (1998, pp. 654-655) namely utilising real-world contexts or simulations. The process here refers to guiding students on the topic for writing and the end product was students' essays.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The findings showed that teachers integrated alternative assessment, summative assessment, formative assessment, informal assessment via observation, online assessment, self-assessment, portfolio assessment, peer assessment and school-based assessment. Teachers are still influenced by the traditional method of assessment which is the summative assessment to confirm students' achievement in learning (Singh et al., 2020) (refer to Table 1). Six teachers showed their preferences for summative assessment as a way to assess the students. Out of the eleven teachers interviewed, only four embedded alternative assessment whereby emphasis was given on both process and product of learning. It was apparent as four teachers carried out formative assessment to assess students in an on-going manner to confirm learning (Hamad, 2007). Only one teacher (Teacher Kavani) deliberately expressed her alternative assessment strategies namely portfolio assessment, performance-based assessment, peer-assessment and self-assessment to assess students in a holistic manner. Teacher Kavani's approach was to focus on the learning standards/objectives to be taught and embedding role-plays tasks to give students the chance to contribute their ideas on questions posed. Although the findings revealed teachers' different strategies and practices on assessment, their distribution across teachers was irregular with some teachers showing preferences toward other types of assessments. Teachers need more exposure in terms of in-house training to assist them to interpret data obtained from the students' assessment to make judgment or decision regarding the students' accomplishment in learning (Ghazali, 2018). Alternative assessment can be utilised as mechanisms for encouraging active learning and self-reflection as it would guide students to monitor and chart their own progress in learning (Hamayan, 1995).

The implication of this study is that teachers' use of alternative assessment together with self-assessment, peer-assessment, performance-based assessment can complement teachers' strategies of employing different pedagogical approach focusing on students' learning. Role-plays, group discussion, questioning strategies and presentations can be used during teaching and learning activities to chart new directions and development for instruction (Dikli, 2003; Veloo & Khalid, 2016; Mulyadi et al., 2021). Our study showed that student involvement in activities and tasks can provide some hints to the teachers to assist students accordingly to look into their strengths and weaknesses in learning and this is supported by (Ichsan et al., 2021) that teachers can assess students' learning based on different levels of thinking. By doing so, teachers can then plan accordingly to provide remedial activities for weak students and enhanced activities for able students; proper planning and implementation is crucial so that students are guided accordingly.

## 5. Conclusion

The study therefore provides recommendations for teachers to employ different assessment strategies to expose students to chart and assess their own learning that would indirectly expose them to higher-order thinking skills and be accountable for their own learning. Assessment is not about giving single grade or score to students but it has to be viewed in a broader sense whereby assessment can expose students to the 21st century skills needed to survive challenges outside the classroom. This study also suggests that teachers should not put much focus on summative assessment to determine students' accomplishment in learning; instead, teachers should expand their perspectives and conduct assessment not solely for ranking and achievement but to make important decisions regarding student learning. The findings obtained from this study are in line with classroom assessment strategies and practices whereby the main purpose of assessment is to ensure learners master the content taught, are guided toward the values and skills required for life rather than focused only on test scores.

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