



## Assessment Leadership Model for Malaysia: A Conceptual Approach

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**Abstract:** The need for an effective leadership in assessment has become increasingly significant in the Malaysian educational context. This concept paper discusses the changing dynamics of educational assessment, emphasising the significance of classroom assessment in promoting student learning. The discussion initiates by delineating the diverse categories of educational assessments and emphasise the increasing significance of classroom assessment in fostering effective learning environments. In Malaysia, there is a noticeable shift from a traditional exam-oriented culture to a more holistic, learning-centred approach. However, this shift presents various obstacles, especially for teachers in successfully executing classroom assessment. Thus, this paper highlights the pivotal role of school leaders in facilitating and assisting teachers as they navigate these challenges. It emphasises on the need for establishing a strong assessment leadership model that acts as a framework for school leaders, enabling them to offer essential direction and support to their teachers. Although current frameworks and standards provide valuable insights, they frequently do not meet the contextual and contemporary requirements of the Malaysian education system. Therefore, this paper provides a foundation for future research and advocates for the development of a contextualized and contemporary assessment leadership model that aligns with both the current educational landscape and the nation's cultural context. A model that is anticipated to enhance the ability of school leaders to effectively support teachers in fostering a culture of continuous learning.

**Keywords:** Assessment Leadership, Classroom Assessment, School Leaders

### Introduction

The primary aim of education is to prepare the students with an adequate knowledge, skills, and noble ethics to navigate the swift transformations and challenges present both nationally and globally. For the past three decades, there have been a reformation in educational assessment as it has been identified as having a central impact on student learning and teaching (Baird et al., 2017; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart, 2011; Ketonen & Nieminen, 2024). There are various types of assessment that have been practiced for centuries, such as large-scale assessments, standardised assessments, classroom assessments and others. Large scale assessments help to compare the performance of students across various countries on specific educational matters (Shah et al., 2022). These assessments are globally conducted by organisations such as Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Some examples of the assessments are: The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and others. In Malaysia, results of TIMSS and PISA play huge roles in influencing the changes made in national educational policies, curricula, and other programs. Recently, the World Bank Report (2024) has reported that Malaysian students situated behind aspirational peers in reading, mathematics and science. The outcome is far from Malaysians'



aim to rank within the top third in global assessments. Thus, Ministry of Education (MOE) is looking into every aspect to improve TIMSS and PISA results and eradicate leaning poverty.

Beside large-scale assessments, Malaysian students adhere to national examination which are administrated by national examination board. The grades of the assessment are used for admission into higher education and to evaluate the national education system by policy makers (Shah et al., 2022). The challenge of improving student learning while increasing performance in international assessments and national exams is central to current educational reform initiatives. A key approach to addressing this issue is the potential of classroom assessments. Stiggins and Duke (2008) highlight the essential function of classroom assessments, asserting that *“If classroom assessments aren’t working effectively day to day in the classroom, then accountability tests and benchmark assessments cannot pick up the slack”* (p. 286). This highlights that classroom assessments, when properly executed, serve not only as a means of measuring learning but also as a crucial mechanism for influencing and improving learning outcomes. According to Carney et al. (2022), too much of attention to summative assessments can distract the focus of formative assessment. To rebalance focus in education, classroom assessments must be acknowledged as equally important as large-scale assessments (Wilson, 2018). Thus, school leaders being the pivotal players in realising nation’s educational goal must fully guide and support their teacher’s classroom assessment practice.

### **A Shift Towards Classroom Assessment**

For the past three decades, there has been an urge to pay importance on classroom assessments at least as much as large-scale assessments or standardised assessments. This is due to the growing recognition of the vital links between classroom assessment, student learning and teaching (Baird et al., 2017; Baniyadi et al., 2023; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart & McMillan, 2020; Guskey, 2003, 2005; Janisch et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2023; Tierney, 2006). According to Black and Wiliam (1998), standard of students’ achievement can be raised by teachers in the classroom through formative assessments. However, scholars argument is not to end accountability oriented standardised assessments as it’s important to reflect on what students have achieved and not, but standardised assessments alone is insufficient in improving student learning (Stiggins, 2004). He further emphasised that it’s essential to find a middle ground between standardised assessments and classroom assessments to support learning.

The necessity of prioritising classroom assessment is to align with the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century conditions which require the students to be globally competent (Baniyadi et al., 2023). According to Baniyadi et al., (2023), implementation of classroom assessment has changed a culture of testing to a culture of learning. Classroom assessments prioritise student-centeredness and holistic approaches (Janisch et al., 2007). This approach acknowledges the diverse strengths and talents possessed by each student, which cannot be adequately assessed or evaluated through standardised assessments that adopt a uniform approach (Janisch et al., 2007). Thus, scholars have identified that classroom assessments are the most effective assessment which allows alternative assessments for enhancing teacher instructions and student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Guskey, 2003, 2005).

In the realm of classroom assessment, three distinct types of assessment are commonly employed: assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning (Pattalitan Jr., 2016). Assessment of learning and assessment for learning are also widely referred in the literature as formative assessment and assessment of learning known as summative assessment. Formative assessment is a continuous assessment that carried out during the instructional process by teachers to improve students learning and summative assessment is used to grade and validate student achievements (Rosli et al., 2022). ). Thus,



classroom assessment encompasses both formative and summative assessment, employing a comprehensive approach to facilitate student learning and growth (Renihan & Noonan, 2018) and Malaysia adheres to these fundamental principles (Narinasamy & Nordin, 2018). Implementing classroom assessment aligns with the overarching goal of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which aims to cultivate students with holistic development. Implementation of classroom assessments also allows teachers to gain a deeper understanding of students' progress and tailor instruction, accordingly, leading to improved academic outcomes.

In Malaysia, classroom assessment was incorporated into School-Based Assessment in the year of 2011 which is regarded as a comprehensive assessment method that examines a child's cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities in accordance with the National Philosophy of Education (Curriculum Development Division, 2016). In the year 2019, Ministry of Education has declared to abolish any kind of examination for level 1 National Primary School students (students of Standard 1, Standard 2 and Standard 3). However, the implementation of classroom assessment was highly noticeable only after abolishing of two standardised assessments which were Primary School Evaluation Test (Penilaian Sekolah Rendah, UPSR) and Form Three Assessment (Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga, PT3) in the year of 2021. Recent changes in assessment practices in Malaysian schools, however, leads to some challenges (Rosli et al., 2022). Some of the challenges that teachers face in implementing classroom assessment are such as; increases in stress level (Lius & Mahamod, 2021), over emphasizing on grading the student using standardised performance indicators (TP – Tahap Prestasi) rather than concentrating on the fundamental objective of assessment, which is to improve teaching and learning (Arumugham, 2020), unable to provide effective feedback to students (Khamis & Selamat, 2019), lack of knowledge and skills (Pilok et al., 2019) and lack of readiness (Yeh, 2021). The are also issues in other developing countries in implementing classroom assessments such as lack of professional training for teachers in assessment, inadequate assessment materials and insufficient guidance on assessment by the school leaders (Shah et al., 2023). Although, classroom assessment has been implemented for more than a decade, it has been reported that teachers still need motivation (Pilok et al., 2019), supervision and proper guidance in implementing classroom assessment (Arumugham, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). This has raised concerns among stakeholders regarding the adequacy of school leaders and teachers in effectively implementing classroom assessment.

### **Are School Leaders Ready for a Culture of Learning?**

The effective leadership of school leaders is a critical factor in the successful implementation of any changes within an educational context. School leaders as instructional leaders play critical role in ensuring teachers effectiveness (Liyang et al., 2023; Marks & Nance, 2007; Spillane et al., 2002), and enhancing student achievement (Liyang et al., 2023; Marzano et al., 2005; O'Day, 2002; Witziers et al., 2003). However, Arumugham and Ariffin (2021), highlighted on the need for a continuous training to improve school leaders' assessment leadership as one of the core roles of instructional leaders. This is due to their findings as some of the school leaders are still unclear with the reformation and resist on the changes of assessment in schools. Assessment leadership is relatively a new concept in the field of educational literature that was developed to address the increasing necessity for school leaders to take a more active role in assessment practices (Morris, 2017; Noonan & Renihan, 2006; Popham, 2010; Stiggins & Duke, 2008). It aims to improve the competencies of school leaders by providing them with the requisite knowledge, skills, and beliefs to be effective leaders in the field of assessment. These competencies are essential for the successful implementation of classroom assessment practices, as leaders provide guidance and support to teachers in aligning



assessment strategies with learning objectives (Earl & Fullan, 2003; Husien et al., 2022; Noonan & Reihan, 2006; Popham, 2010; Stiggins & Duke, 2008). Ultimately, the objective of assessment leadership is to cultivate a leadership that is more informed and competent, capable of driving significant improvements in both teaching and learning through effective assessment. However, there is a paucity of studies that seek to identify predictors of a successful role of school leaders in enhancing the classroom assessment implementation.

According to Tierney (2006), any changes in assessment will have some resistance in the process of implementing either in the primary or secondary schools. Thus, school leaders should take the lead in any changes before empowering their teachers in realising it. As asserted by Tay and Tan (2019), the responsibility of implementing the assessment changes into practical teaching and learning practises predominantly falls upon school leaders. School leaders should guide and support their teachers in classroom assessment practices. However, Malaysian school leaders still hold to the practices of traditional grading systems employed for centuries via standardised assessments (Arumugham & Ariffin, 2021). Although classroom assessment has been introduced since 2011, school leaders, teachers and parents have not completely embraced the implementation.

School leaders are the assessment leaders who must have in-depth assessment knowledge, assessment skills, positive attitude, good personal characteristics and experiences to mobilise their teachers for an effective classroom assessment implementation (Husien et al., 2022; Stiggins & Duke, 2008). However, school leaders encounter numerous obstacles when it comes to implementing assessment leadership practices, including inadequate knowledge and expertise, inefficient in data system accessibility, differences in assessment-related beliefs, time constraints, and a lack of focused professional development in efficient assessment practices (Volante & Cherubini, 2011). With regard to Malaysia, assessment leadership were affected tremendously after the abolishment of Primary School Evaluation Test (UPSR) and Form Three Assessment (PT3) in year 2021 (Husien et al., 2022). It's has been a big challenge for the school leaders to shift from the culture of preparing the students for standardised assessments to classroom assessment. Researchers Arumugham and Ariffin (2021), reported that school headmasters of Malaysian Primary Schools still lack understanding in some aspects of classroom assessments implementation especially in the change of the curriculum, differentiation between formative and summative assessments, in assuring the quality of teacher's assessments and teachers' professional judgement.

School leaders need the necessary tools to enhance classroom instruction that includes classroom observation, evaluating samples of students work and utilising achievements data. According to Noohan and Reihan, (2006), assessment leadership as a role of instructional leaders entails a challenging array of expectations as it prioritises continues improvement, offer consistent feedback on student learning and encourage exploration of classroom strategies to enhance learning experiences. Indeed, Stiggins and Duke (2008) have emphasised on enhancing instructional leadership through understanding the important role of school leaders as assessment leaders in improving teaching and learning. Unfortunately, research in assessment leadership is very scarce. There were more studies have been focused on teachers' assessment literacy than on assessment leadership (Alkharusi et al., 2011; Beziat & Coleman, 2015; Brookhart, 2011; Liying et al., 2023; Morris, 2017). Notably, Noonan and Reihan (2006) found that there are significant portion of efforts in research related to assessment reform which concentrated on classroom assessment or the implementation of large-scale assessment but the crucial role of the school leaders in this domain has been largely overlooked. *“One aspect of the assessment reform movement that has not been well researched is its connection to the role of the school principal”* (Noohan & Reihan 2018. p, 1). Without a clear understanding of the



role of school leaders as assessment leaders, they will fail in guiding, evaluating, and strengthening the implementation of classroom assessment in enhancing student learning.

### Existing Standards and Frameworks for Assessment Leadership

In a developed country like United States, the chaos on education assessments reformation has been highlighted as early as in 1990's (Cizek, 1995). Various standards have been established to provide guidance and improve the efficacy of assessment practices in response to the ongoing assessment reform. The collaborative projects were carried out by American Association of School Administrators, the National Council on Measurement in Education, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and National Policy Board for Educational Administration. It's evident that educational leaders hold the capacity to significantly contribute to assessment and broader education reform. School leaders of education system, cannot overlook the significance of assessment, particularly because curriculum, instruction and assessment are inherently interconnected activities (Cizek, 1995; Husien et al., 2022; Narinasamy & Nordin, 2018; Stiggins, 2004; Wiggins, 1992). However, Cizek, (1995) has urged that school leaders should go beyond from assessment literacy to assessment leadership. They must share a coherent vision of assessment with teachers on the purpose of carrying out classroom assessment activities.

**Table 1.** 10 Leadership Competencies in Assessment (Stiggins & Duke, 2008)

<p>10 Leadership Competencies In Assessment          A well-qualified principal has 10 specific competencies in assessment.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the principles of assessments <i>for</i> (that is, used in support of) learning and works with staff to integrate them into classroom instruction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the necessity of clear academic achievement targets and their relationship to the development of accurate assessments.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows and can evaluate the teacher's classroom assessment competencies and helps teachers learn to assess accurately and use the results productively.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can plan, present, or secure professional development activities that contribute to the use of sound assessment practices.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurately analyses student assessment information, uses the information to improve curriculum and instruction, and assists teachers in doing the same.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can develop and implement sound assessment and assessment-related policies.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates the conditions necessary for the appropriate information, and can communicate effectively with all the members of the school community about student assessment results and their relationship to improving curriculum and instruction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the standards of quality for student assessments and how to verify their use in their school/district assessments.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the attributes of a sound and balanced assessment system.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the issues related to the unethical and inappropriate use of student assessment and protects students and staff from such misuse.</li> </ul>

As issues on assessment leadership continues due to the imbalance in assessment system as more emphasis given on high-stakes assessments compared to classroom assessment, this prompted Stiggins and Duke (2008) to develop ten leadership competencies in assessment (refer to Table 1) by leveraging the work of Chappius et al, (2005); An Action Guide for School Leaders. However, Charteris and Smardon (2022) took a situated perspective into assessment leadership (refer to Table 2) as they argued that the existing ten leadership competencies in



assessment put the actions of leaders in a vacuum. According to Charteris and Smardon (2022), leadership arises as a result of the interactions between individuals.

Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the essential leadership competencies in assessment by Stiggins and Duke (2008) that a well-qualified principal should possess. These competencies reflect a principal's ability to foster effective assessment practices that enhance both teaching and learning outcomes.

A well-qualified school principal demonstrates ten key competencies in the area of assessment, which are essential for effective leadership. First, a principal must have a thorough understanding of the principles of assessments that support learning, collaborating with staff to integrate these into classroom instruction. This ensures that assessment practices are aligned with teaching strategies to enhance student outcomes.

Second, principals should recognize the importance of clear academic achievement targets, understanding their connection to the development of accurate assessments. These targets guide the creation of reliable tools for evaluating student progress. Additionally, they must possess the ability to evaluate teachers' assessment practices, supporting teachers in improving their assessment accuracy and helping them to use assessment data productively to benefit student learning.

Effective principals also contribute to the professional growth of their staff by planning, presenting, or providing access to professional development opportunities focused on sound assessment practices. This ongoing training ensures that teachers are well-equipped to assess students effectively.

Another critical competency is the ability to analyze student assessment data accurately. Principals use this information to refine curriculum and instruction and guide teachers in using data to inform their teaching practices. Principals also play a key role in developing and implementing sound assessment-related policies, ensuring that assessment processes are both fair and effective.

Communication is another core competency. Principals need to foster an environment where assessment information is appropriately shared and understood by all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students. They must clearly convey how assessment results contribute to improving curriculum and instruction.

Principals must also understand the standards of quality for student assessments, ensuring these standards are met within their school or district. Additionally, they need a comprehensive grasp of the characteristics of a well-balanced assessment system, ensuring that the assessment practices used are diverse and equitable.

Lastly, a principal must be vigilant about ethical concerns, protecting students and staff from the misuse of assessment data. Understanding the potential for unethical or inappropriate use of student assessments is critical, and principals are responsible for safeguarding the integrity of the assessment process within the school.

From understanding the fundamental principles of assessment to ensuring ethical use of assessment data, these competencies highlight the critical role of school leaders in supporting teachers, developing sound policies, and utilizing student assessment information to drive curriculum improvement. Together, these skills equip principals to promote a balanced and effective assessment system within their schools.

Table 2 outlines the key dimensions of situated leadership practice that can enhance the assessment culture in schools, focusing on how leadership can influence various aspects of assessment at different levels. These dimensions emphasize leadership's role in fostering student, teacher, collective, and system capabilities, ultimately promoting a robust assessment environment.



**Table 2.** Dimensions of Situated Leadership Practice That Can Enhance Assessment Culture in Schools  
 (Charteris & Smardon, 2022)

Dimensions of situated assessment leadership practice
<p><b>Leadership for the student capability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership that targets power sharing with students to foster their assessment capability</li> <li>• Leadership that encourages children to lead their own learning</li> </ul> <p><b>Leadership for the teacher capability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership that develops teacher assessment competency and data literacy</li> <li>• Leadership that facilitates an assessment professional development focus</li> <li>• Leadership that uses accurate information to enhance curriculum and teaching and strengthen teacher capability</li> <li>• Leadership that facilitates leadership professional growth in teachers</li> </ul> <p><b>Leadership for collective capability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership that builds collaboration around the use of the data</li> <li>• Leadership for growing a school assessment culture</li> <li>• Leadership for target setting that ensures accuracy of assessments</li> <li>• Leadership in supporting the use and communication of student achievement information</li> </ul> <p><b>Leadership for system capability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership that draws on clear assessment principles on an ongoing basis</li> <li>• Leadership in implementing sound assessment and assessment-related policies</li> <li>• Leadership in determining the quality of different approaches to assessment</li> <li>• Leadership in ensuring balance in assessment systems</li> <li>• Leadership to address unethical and inappropriate student assessment</li> <li>• Leadership for managing tensions between accountability reporting and school-based decision making</li> </ul>

Leadership for student capability refers to the importance of empowering students to take ownership of their learning by involving them in the assessment process. This leadership approach promotes power-sharing with students and encourages them to lead their own learning journeys, thereby developing their assessment capabilities.

Leadership for teacher capability focuses on enhancing teachers' assessment skills and data literacy. It includes leadership practices that promote professional development with an emphasis on assessment, the use of accurate information to improve curriculum and instruction, and the fostering of leadership growth among teachers. These efforts help strengthen teachers' ability to assess student performance effectively and contribute to a culture of continuous professional learning.

Leadership for collective capability highlights the importance of building collaboration within the school community around assessment practices. This dimension involves setting accurate assessment targets, cultivating a school-wide culture of assessment, and ensuring effective communication and use of student achievement data. By promoting collaboration, this leadership practice enhances the collective use of data to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Leadership for system capability refers to the broader leadership responsibilities related to the school's assessment framework. This includes applying clear and sound assessment principles, implementing assessment-related policies, ensuring the quality and balance of assessment approaches, and addressing ethical concerns in the use of student assessment data. Additionally, it involves managing the tensions between external accountability requirements and school-based decision-making, ensuring that assessments serve the needs of both.

In summary, these dimensions of situated leadership practice provide a comprehensive framework for developing an assessment culture in schools, with a focus on empowering



students, supporting teachers, fostering collaboration, and ensuring the integrity of the broader assessment system.

In the Asian educational assessment system, which places significant emphasis on high-stakes assessments, researchers have found that even Singapore, a country that heavily invests in education, has courageously chosen to prioritise classroom assessment (Tay & Tan, 2019). They have identified four characteristics to develop a framework for threshold level of assessment leadership. The characteristics are mainly focused on lasting transformation, demonstrating coherence and integration, and serving as a catalyst for reshaping the directions and values of education. Another important characteristic has been added into the framework which is about provoking new and unfamiliar thinking of the stakeholders especially the teachers who have never changed their teaching practices for many years and parents who are more concerned about students' academic results and not interested in enhancing their children's learning (Tay & Tan, 2019). Within the Malaysian context, aspects of assessment leadership can be found in a guide book for the implementation of classroom assessment (*Panduan Pelaksanaan Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah*, Curriculum Development Division, 2019) and in a guide book for the quality control of the school-based assessment (*Panduan Penjaminan Kualiti, Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah*, Examination Board, 2014). However, according to Arumugan and Ariffin (2021), policy makers must prioritise continuous training to foster a profound understanding among school leaders as some school leaders are only able to state the terms used in the guidebooks but unable to understand or implement it. This recommendation aligns with the views of researchers Stiggins and Duke (2008), emphasizing the importance of ongoing training for school leaders in the domain of assessment leadership.

Highlighting the necessity and significance of assessment leadership on a national scale, Husein et al. (2022) have suggested an assessment leadership model. This model integrates the synthesised Leadership for Learning model by Hallinger (2011) and the Learning-Centered Leadership Framework by Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, and Porter (2006) as its foundation. Furthermore, additional elements have been incorporated into the model, drawing from the Assessment Leadership Competency Framework by Chappuis et al. (2005). However, the suggested model did not address the characteristics that focus on persistent change and are not empirically validated. It's essential to develop contextual and contemporary assessment leadership models to guide school leaders in effectively fulfilling their roles as assessment leaders. To date, even fully comprehensive assessment leadership instruments are yet to be developed and empirically validated from a measurement perspective (Morris, 2017). Thus, it is essential to have models that have undergone empirical testing to effectively train school leaders in aligning with assessment reformation for leading schools. This is crucial because a significant number of school leaders struggle to comprehend the changes occurring in the educational assessment system.

## Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that substantial research highlights the critical role of school leaders in shaping the educational assessment system. However, results from previous findings show various issues in implementing classroom assessments and lack of contextual and contemporary assessment leadership models which could hinder the efforts of a nation's education goals in fostering holistic learning in schools. It's time to identify the essential elements of assessment leadership to enhance the implementation of classroom assessment. A competent school leader will be a great role model in inspiring, leading, and guiding the teachers for an effective classroom assessment implementation which directly helps in shaping the students with holistic development. Improving the implementation of classroom assessment will enable the nation to have a balanced assessment system. Therefore, there should be more



empirical research to be carried out in the effort of developing an educational assessment leadership model. Ultimately, the aim is to develop a model to improve educational outcomes by equipping school leaders with the necessary skills and strategies to lead assessments in a manner that is both impactful and culturally relevant to the Malaysian educational system.

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