

Learn for Life: The Role of IB Assessment in Nurturing IB Learner Profile

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has always planted a goal to develop a holistic human capital that is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonic – which was centred in The National Philosophy of Education. However, along the way, Malaysia's education system seems to have focused more on students' academic achievement. This is reflected by the results of public examinations that consistently show a steady increase every year due to the dominance of teacher-centred learning that focuses on memorising facts. Despite the fact that public examination results increase yearly, there are still students who are unable to master key skills, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as high-level thinking skills. Many factors that are critical to the quality of education, such as the spiritual, emotional, and physical development of a student, should also be taken into account in shaping well-rounded learners. The implementation of holistic assessments is, therefore, crucial in preparing students for 21st-century challenges. The Ministry of Education has since introduced the Middle Years Program International Baccalaureate (MYPIB) to facilitate meaningful learning through holistic assessments. The assessment practices in the 10 International Baccalaureate World School Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia BWS KPM are in accordance with the Standard Program and Practices, and the MYPIB Learning Model would develop holistic individuals through the inculcation of the IB Learner Profile.

Key Words: Assessment, International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, IB Learner Profile

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has long been concerned with the development of a holistic human capital that is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonic - which has been captured in The National Philosophy of Education. In line with the philosophy, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 highlights the six students' aspirations, which include students' knowledge, thinking skills, bilingual skills, leadership skills, national identity, as well as ethics and spirituality. Promoting students' aspirations is crucial in ensuring students' success and inclusiveness so that they are ready to face global challenges and make significant contributions to families, communities, and the country (Curriculum Development Division, 2016).

However, the focus on academic achievements has significantly pressured the teachers and students. As a result, teachers are more likely to practice teacher-centred classroom learning and neglect meaningful learning in order to prepare students for national exams as school performance is usually measured based on students' achievement in public examinations (Biesta, 2015). Meanwhile, students with low learning skills felt left behind and demotivated because they cannot measure up to their peers in academics. Given the fact that the results of public examinations are steadily increasing every year, some students still have difficulties mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as higher-order thinking skills.

Moreover, Malaysia is still lagging behind other Asian countries, such as Singapore, in international assessments, e.g., Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Many aspects of quality education, such as the financial, emotional and physical development of a student must be taken into account in equipping students with 21st-century skills as rapid economic change requires students to possess a wide range of knowledge, skills, and values in order to remain relevant and be a fit for future job opportunities. The implementation of a holistic assessment is, therefore, critical in preparing students for the 21st-century challenges.

In order to achieve this goal, the curriculum and assessment have been strengthened to ensure that students acquire knowledge, skills, and values in order to remain responsive to global changes and to keep pace with lifelong learning (Education Performance and Delivery Unit, 2012). As a result, a new curriculum has been developed as an effort to increase students' performance. For instance, the reformation of curriculum content and pedagogy practices to focus on meaningful learning through inquiry-based approaches, problem-solving, collaborative, and context-based project-based learning. Meanwhile, the implementation of assessments has shifted its focus from academic achievement to student's holistic development where teachers need to assess the degree to which students master the learning standards based on the standard performance (Curriculum Development Division, 2016).

2. TYPE OF ASSESSMENTS

Assessment for learning is a formative assessment that is implemented during the teaching and learning process. Black et al. (2004) defined assessment for learning as giving priority to prompt students' learning by sharing of objectives and learning outcomes with the students. As a result, students are more aware and committed to their learning and are more prepared for the task assigned by the teacher. Formative assessment is seen as a more effective method of assessment to increase student motivation and thus provides the opportunity for students to achieve meaningful learning (MacPhail, Halbert, & O'Neill, 2018) through in-depth exploration and application for life.

Through assessment for learning, teachers could set learning goals more clearly based on the relevant information that students have acquired and absorbed from previous class session (Chin et al., 2019). Next, teachers should use the information they have gathered to make decisions about the approaches and activities that are relevant to their students' abilities. A wide range of activities, assisted by interesting teaching aids, will keep students inspired and focused on their learning. Sharing teachers' input on the current development of their learning can also improve the students' interest in learning through the clear and transparent help of the teacher.

Assessment as learning focuses on the active role of students in their learning. This type of assessment would enhance students' understanding of the learning content before the teaching and learning processes begin. It would help students understand their purpose of learning and be more responsible of their education progress. Assessment as learning is also closely related to the metacognitive process of thinking or the management of cognitive processes (Kuhn, 2000). Students with metacognitive thinking could analyse and evaluate critically and creatively when solving problems or making decisions.

Assessment of learning is a common form of assessment because it offers clear and understandable information to stakeholders, e.g., parents, about students' achievement after a period of time (Earl, 2013). Such summative assessments may also provide knowledge that is of high validity and reliability (Chong, 2018) and is more specific to examinations either at the national (central) or school level (Huot, 2002).

Summative assessments, e.g., final year examinations, are administered by teachers, and has become the preferred method because it saves time and costs. Students' cognitive skills are represented by examination marks that are easier to understand by stakeholders, e.g., parents. The written examinations, however, are unable to assess the skills and principles that students have acquired. Thus, summative assessments must also comprise project-based assessments to allow students to exercise both cognitive and non-cognitive skills at the same time - allowing teachers to evaluate students holistically.

3. HOW IB ASSESSMENT DEVELOP THE IB LEARNER PROFILE?

The nurturing of the IB Learner Profile is the main aim of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP). In fact, the effectiveness of IB MYP can be measured through the inculcation level of the IB Learner Profile among students. Students who acquire the IB Learner Profile are individuals who are responsible and be concerned with local and global community, respect differences and contribute to world peace. The ten attributes of the IB Learner Profile are (1) inquirers, (2) knowledgeable, (3) thinkers, (4) skilled communicators, (5) principled (principled), (6) open-minded, (7) concerned, (8) risk-takers, (9) balanced and (10) reflective (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2008).

The implementation of IB MYP is one of the extra efforts exercised by the Ministry of Education to inculcate higher-order thinking skills among students and to uplift the national standard of education to an international level. The program has been implemented for students ages 13 to 17 based on the IB MYP learning model design that focuses on student-centered learning and provides meaningful learning experiences for students (Education Performance and Delivery Unit, 2018).

The implementation of IB MYP requires each IBWS to adhere to the Program Standards and Practice and the IB MYP Learning Model to ensure its sustainability. The Program Standards and Practices consist of three sections and seven standards. Section A emphasises on school's vision, mission, and policies in line with the IB Philosophy. Section B consists of Standard B₁ while B₂ stresses on the crucial role of management and school leadership in providing resources and support to ensure the effectiveness of this program. The third section, Section C comprises of four standards, Standard C₁, C₂, C₃, and C₄ which focus on teaching and learning such as soft skills, unit plan, IB toolkits, and assessment (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014).

Based on Standard C₂, the Written Curriculum, teachers share the knowledge, skills, and experience to prepare unit plans as lesson plan documents. Unit plans serve as the complete lesson plans document to guide teachers on inquiry-based learning and to replace daily teaching plans. The unit plans emphasis on interdisciplinary units to reinforce concept-based learning among students. Moreover, teachers must include the list of summative assessments that they have planned out to assess students' mastery level based on the learning objectives. The evaluation of summative assessments in IB MYP is conducted through presentations, essay writing, and project-based approach. The summative assessments in IB MYP are designed based on inquiry statements to assess students' ability and understanding of the concepts being applied and usually associated with real-life situations for students to experience meaningful learning (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014).

The student assessment is based on a standardised rubric known as task-specific clarification for each subject group. The task-specific clarification consists of four objectives or assessment criteria that are defined by the standards and should be assessed at least twice a year. Teachers use professional judgment in designing assessment methods and instruments to assess students' performance and to determine their final grade based on all of their summative assessment results. The assessment policy states that students can be given the opportunity to improve their performance through improved work and final products for their summative assessment (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014).

Formative assessments are also carried out in the IB MYP to inform teachers on students learning progress. Teachers can assess students' understanding as students engage in classroom activities. Teachers' observations are accurate information that can be used for teachers in making decisions in teaching and learning, and when it comes to students' development. Thus, teachers in International Baccalaureate World Schools (IBWS) need to be creative in diversifying pedagogical techniques and approaches to ensure students have the opportunity to develop both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of holistic IB assessment practices in the IBWS, which is based on the Standard Program and Practices and the IB MYP learning model, could nurture the ten attributes of the IB Learner

Profile among students (Education Policy Planning and Research Division, 2015). Students who acquired the IB Learner Profile would be able to embody the aspirations presented in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, namely, knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual skills, ethics and spirituality, and national identity. Thus, teachers should continuously strive to enhance their competency and skills to successfully implement holistic assessment in schools. The changes do not only have a significant impact on teachers' professionalism, but they also expand students' potential and enhances their ability in all aspects of life.

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