An Investigation into English Teachers' Understandings and Practices of Formative Assessment in the Malaysian Primary ESL Classroom: Three Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

Formative assessment has gained increasing prominence in international educational discourse and practice as a promising way to promote student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998b). However, its implementation represents complexities, as the term and effectiveness are still contested. While a great deal of research has been conducted on formative assessment in primary and secondary Western schooling, limited research has been done in a primary English as Second Language (ESL) context in Asian settings. Drawing on the interpretivist paradigm, this exploratory, qualitative case study investigated the understandings and assessment practices of three primary ESL teachers. Analysis is based on data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, field notes and documents. The findings indicate that these primary ESL teachers' understandings of the notion of 'formative assessment' were somewhat vague. The participants seemed to lack comprehensive, profound understanding of the vital importance of formative assessment and its potential to facilitate learning. There were noticeable gaps, variations and confusions in their articulated understanding of formative assessment. However, despite the disjuncture between the teachers' understandings and actual practices, there was evidence to suggest that they attempted to incorporate elements of formative assessment in their practices, although not consistent with their espoused understandings. This study found that the three ESL teachers engaged, to some extent, in formative assessment practices such as oral questioning, observation and oral feedback to promote learning in their classes. In spite of the teachers' significant efforts, factors such as conceptual constraints, traditional means of language assessment, lack of professional development, contextual constraints, teachers' beliefs and an examination-oriented culture considerably affected their assessment practices. The findings of this study support the recommendation that there is a need to develop appropriate forms of formative assessment strategies that are more conducive to the Malaysian primary ESL context.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AoL	Assessment of Learning
ARG	Assessment Reform Group
CBA	Classroom-Based assessment
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CP	Critical Period
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
EDO	Education District Offices
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELLiE	Early Language Learning in Europe Project
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
EVA	EVAluation of English in Schools Project
FA	Formative Assessment
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
IDs	Individual Differences
KBSR	Old Curriculum for Primary Schools (Integrated Primary School Curriculum, its local acronym)
KSSR	Primary School Curriculum Standard, its local acronym
L1	First language
L2	Second Language
MES	Malaysian Examination Syndicate
MOE	Ministry of Education, Malaysia
PCO	Preliminary Classroom Observation
PLI	Pre-lesson Interview
PMR	Lower Secondary Assessment, its local acronym
POLI	Post–lesson Interview
SA	Summative Assessment
SBA	School-Based Assessment
SBELC	Standard Based English Language Curriculum
SED	State Education Department
SLDRM	Students' Learning Development Record Module
TEYL	Teaching English to Young Learners
TL	Target Language
YLL	Young Language Learner
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

This study explores Malaysian primary English as a second language (ESL) teachers' understandings and formative assessment strategies and the implications of these understandings for their formative assessment practices in the primary ESL context.

1.2 Background to the Study

The potential of assessment in facilitating learning has attracted considerable attention over recent decades. An extensive body of literature (see for example, Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Black et al., 2005; Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2005) conducted in primary and secondary schools in Western countries have shown that effective use of formative assessment can lead to improvements in learning. However, the literature on formative assessment and empirical research reporting on its implementation raise a number of issues. The key issue is related to a problem with the conceptualisation of formative assessment and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies within a generic, 'one-size-fits-all' approach. The term 'formative assessment' and its effectiveness continue to receive a lot of researchers' and policymakers' attention globally (Bennett, 2011; Klenowski, 2009) and many researchers (Black and Wiliam, 2005; Carless, 2011; Mansell et al., 2009; Wiliam et al., 2004) recognise that, while assessment can help to promote student learning, a number of questions remain around how to effectively apply formative assessment in an era of accountability as well as in diverse sociocultural milieus.

Formative assessment strategies, according to their proponents (Black et al., 2005), can be applied in the teaching and learning of any subject and involve students across the primary and secondary age range. However, given the specific circumstances in primary ESL, the indiscriminate use of strategies may not be of benefit to students, particularly young language learners. Due to their cognitive level, 'young language learners' (YLL) may not understand and therefore may not fully engage in employing these strategies. The level of proficiency in English is also important and especially the fact that 'beginner' learners do not have a sufficient understanding of the target language to be able to engage in and benefit from

formative assessment, for example, to self-correct, to reflect on whether their learning has met the learning criteria or to provide feedback to fellow students.

If the potential of formative assessment to enhance pupil learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998b) is to be realised in a primary ESL classroom, then what is required of teachers is firstly, to understand the concept itself and, secondly, to be able to integrate formative assessment strategies into the syllabus and embed the strategies in their teaching practice. However, integrating formative assessment into the syllabus and embedding them in practice need to take into account both the age of learners and their proficiency in English. Despite studies that indicate its impact on the improvement of teaching and learning (e.g., Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, 2004; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, and Black, 2004), there is a paucity of research about Malaysian primary ESL teachers' understandings of formative assessment or how it affects their teaching practices and their students' learning.

Examinations have long been a dominant characteristic of educational settings in Asian countries, including Malaysia. Examinations are among the "community interest and concern in many Asian countries" because they are "part of the social structure of many Asian societies" (Kennedy and Lee, 2008, p.73-74). The emphasis on examinations in Asian countries has resulted in a culture of teaching and learning to the test, hence producing individuals who are efficient at memorising but poor in managing information (Stiggins, 1994). In 2011, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) followed the wave of assessment innovations by launching School-Based Assessment (SBA), reflecting a shift from the traditional view of assessment (summative assessment) to formative assessment (Jaba, 2013). This kind of approach is new to Malaysian teachers because examination-based assessment has been an integral part of the national education system for so long (Tuah, 2006).

The implementation of the new assessment system in Malaysia placed new demands and expectations upon teachers as they were required to change their teaching and assessment practices and align them with the requirements of the new assessment policy. The new assessment policy expected teachers to alter their assessment practices in fundamental ways. For example, teachers were expected to use clearly defined outcomes as the basis for evaluating student work, to define clearly what students are to learn, to make the purposes of assessment clear and to use multiple assessment tools, techniques and methods (MES, 2014). The role of

teachers in this new assessment system is vital, as their teaching approaches and assessment techniques have a direct impact on assessment outcomes (Chan, Sidhu and Md. Yunus, 2006). In addition, teachers are required to simultaneously introduce continuous and authentic assessment and to ensure that assessment is objective, valid and manageable (MES, 2014).

This new method of assessment departed radically from an assessment that relied heavily on tests and examinations as final judgements on student performance. Nevertheless, many teachers may lack the conceptual knowledge to integrate effectively, especially if they were trained in a traditional approach to assessment. The questions of whether ESL teachers understand the concept of formative assessment and what the ESL teachers' perspectives are towards formative assessment has led to this study. More importantly, the study sought to explore the challenges the teachers perceive when implementing formative assessment in the classroom.

Fullan (1991) emphasises the centrality of the teachers' role as follow: "educational change depends on what teachers do and think - it's as simple and complex as that" (p.117). Given this crucial role of the teacher, there is a need to know more about what teachers do in the classroom when charged with implementing an educational reform, what their rationales for their actions are, and on what bases they resist or accept innovation. Inevitably, these changes necessitate a significant shift in teachers' understanding of assessment that requires them to relinquish previously held conceptions about the role of assessment in teaching and learning (Dixon and Williams, 2001). However, shifts in teaching and assessment procedures are likely to affect teachers' understandings of the new expectations and what these may imply for their daily practice as teachers. This is particularly the case for teachers whose practices are aligned to the old paradigm (summative assessment). While these teachers are expected to change their practices, the issue is whether they indeed change their values and abandon the old practices, or whether they carry their old pedagogic values into their practice. Hence, this study seeks to contribute in some way to understand how Malaysia's new assessment policy has influenced teachers' understandings and implementation of formative assessment, particularly in the primary ESL context.

Teachers' understanding of assessment is of utmost importance in determining the way in which they implement assessment practices (Harris and Brown, 2009). This is

because teachers are regarded as "active agents in shaping policy" as their understandings and interpretations of policy are translated into classroom practices (Taylor and Vinjevold,1999, p.21). Naicker (1999) emphasises that understanding forms the basis for the implementation of any policy and that there is a direct relationship between teachers' understandings and practices. This is also supported by Cassim (2010) who argued that teachers' classroom practices are informed by their conceptions and understanding of teaching, learning and assessment. Hence, in order for teachers to implement policy, they need to have a fairly good understanding of it. When teachers articulate an unclear, uncertain understanding of policy this, in turn, adversely affects their practices (Cassim, 2010).

Formatively focused assessment reforms are not easily understood (Cormack, Johnson, Peters, and Williams, 1998) and indeed can be misunderstood (Black, 2004) by teachers. As a consequence, teachers' views and practices often do not align (Black and Wiliam, 1998b). While there is a growing body of literature examining teachers' practices of formative assessment, there is a dearth of research that documents teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in the primary ESL context, which is the context of this study.

Notwithstanding the widespread adoption of formative assessment in education in the Western context (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, 2005; Black, McCormick, James, and Pedder, 2006; Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, and Black, 2004), there has been comparatively little research into formative assessment implementation in the teaching and learning of English as Second Language (ESL) (Davison and Leung, 2009), and among young language learners (McKay, 2006) in particular. The dearth is even more acute in the Malaysian context, partly perhaps because the field has traditionally been dominated by the tendency to employ summative assessments to make decisions about students' learning and to measure the extent of their achievement of instructional program learning outcomes (Boraie, 2012; Popham, 2009; Stiggins, 2008). Therefore, situating this study in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom context may reveal some unique principles and practices that may be in sharp contrast with those found in "Anglophone settings" (UK, US, Australia, New Zealand) (Carless, 2011, p.3) where current theories and good practices about classroom assessment have originated and thrived. In response to the limited research on formative assessment in non-Western primary ESL classrooms, this study forms an exploratory investigation of ESL teachers' understanding and assessment practices that support learning, specifically in the

context of primary ESL education in Malaysia. Hence, the originality of this study lies in the fact that it explores a largely under-researched area and makes connections between two areas of research: second/foreign language learning, on the one hand, and research into formative assessment conducted in different educational settings, on the other.

Although the Malaysian government has mandated that teachers implement the SBA policy, teachers' practices may not fulfil the government's hopes. Even though the principles and strategies of formative assessment have been developed and implemented in the context of Western educational systems, any implementation elsewhere will need to take into account those sociocultural and contextual factors.

Recent research conducted in Malaysia has found that contextual factors, which include teachers' assessment knowledge, institutional management policies and high-stakes testing have strongly impacted on teachers' assessment practices (Che Md Ghazali, 2015; Md. Ali, Veloo, and Krishnasamy, 2015). Considering the shift in Malaysia from summative assessment to a broader approach, which includes formative assessment, an investigation of teachers' understandings of assessment and how formative assessment strategies are being adopted and adapted among ESL teachers in the context of Malaysian primary ESL classroom, is timely. This thesis also seeks to identify the factors affecting the teachers' implementation of formative assessment in their classroom and the challenges they face. Such insights can make a vital contribution to the successful implementation of SBA.

1.3 Aims of Research and Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore ESL primary school teachers' understandings of assessment, how these teachers use assessment in their classroom and what factors affect their assessment practices. The study attempts to explain why teachers understand and apply formative assessment the way they do with respect to English teaching in their specific contexts. In exploring understandings and practices of formative assessment, I set out to determine shifts in understanding of teaching and assessment among primary school ESL teachers and how their understandings were being translated into practice. Although the focus of the study pertains to individual teachers' understandings and practices, identifying the ways in which various factors influence teachers' understandings and practices are of more general importance. The core question is:

What are the primary ESL teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom in Malaysia?

A subset of questions was developed and these focus on:

1) How do the teachers understand formative assessment, its purpose and what is required of them to implement it when teaching English to primary ESL students?
2) What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom?
3) What are the factors that affect the implementation of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom in Malaysia?

1.4 Research Design and Methodology

The study is guided by the interpretive paradigm, which is concerned with meaning making and seeking to understand the subjective world of human experience (Bailey, 2007; Henning, 2004). The interpretive paradigm is based on the premise that human beings create meaning in their worlds and that meaning is constructed as a result of interactions with others. The study adopted a qualitative research approach which is mainly concerned with understanding the lived experiences of the participants and the meanings they make of those experiences from their perspective in real-life situations (Henning, 2004; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 2009). To explore ESL teachers' understandings and practices in-depth, within the primary education context, this inquiry adopted a qualitative intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1995).

To gain a rich picture of the ESL teachers' understandings and practices, a multiple case study design of three cases was developed. Three ESL teachers from three different primary schools were purposefully selected for this study. The sample size consisted of ESL teachers who were teaching in Years 1, 4 and 5.

One of the strengths of a case study approach is that it allows the researcher to use a variety of research methods to generate data (Simons, 2009). Semi-structured interviews and observation were used with each teacher. Initial interviews were conducted to capture information, including teachers' biographies, their perceptions, and experiences, and to determine their understandings of the assessment change requirements. I observed two lessons taught by each of the three teachers. These

were video-recorded, followed by semi-structured interviews, to gain a detailed picture of the ESL teachers' accounts of their understanding of assessment and learning, and of the assessment strategies that they used. The factors that affect the use of assessment strategies for learning were reported in the interviews. Similarly, the teachers' expectations regarding how to use assessment for effective learning became clearer during these interviews. The non-participant observations with the support of video-recording helped "gain a comprehensive picture of the site and to provide rich description" (Simons, 2009, p. 64). I also used an observation schedule and took field notes, as a non-participant observer, to record and focus on particular aspects of teacher-student interactions that would not have been captured by the video recorder in class (Bailey, 2007; Creswell, 2010). These were used to supplement the video recorded lesson observations.

Documents, such as the Standard-based English Curriculum (SBELC), assessment policy, teachers' lesson plans and students' work, were also analysed. The analysis of documents was "a helpful precursor to observing and interviewing" (Simons, 2009, p. 64). Document analysis also helped to explore why and how policies contributed to shaping assessment practices in the primary ESL setting. Field notes served as a validation measure by allowing me to authenticate what participants said and confirming and verifying observations.

A constant comparative approach (Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen, 2010; Simons, 2009) was adopted to analyse and interpret data. That is, incidents were constantly compared and contrasted within each and across categories in order to identify emerging themes. To ensure trustworthiness of data, a range of techniques were used, including a rich description of the context, back-translation, data and methodological triangulation, and an audit trail. A more detailed discussion of the research design and the rationale for the choice of methodology, is presented in Chapter 5.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study was conducted as a response to the assessment changes that have recently been introduced in Malaysia and the lack of research into formative assessment practices in non-Western primary ESL settings. This thesis aims to provide insights into primary ESL teachers' understandings of formative assessment and how such understandings translate into their assessment practices. This will contribute to theorising teachers' understandings of formative assessment, the ways

in which assessment is implemented, and the reasons behind their understandings and practices. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to knowledge about formative assessment in the primary ESL context.

It is hoped that the findings of this study may provide school leaders and teachers with a stimulus for reflection and discussion on the practice of formative assessment to improve students' learning, to encourage teachers to collaborate and to promote professional training. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study might serve as a source of information to policy makers and teacher training institutions to evaluate the relevance of pre-service and in-service assessment training in order to integrate formative assessment into daily instruction. Hence, they will be consistent with the proposed assessment reform in Malaysia.

In terms of theoretical contribution, the findings provide empirical evidence on the use of formative assessment in a non-Western setting, that of Malaysia. In particular, the study provides evidence of formative assessment use in a Malaysian primary ESL context and the response of participants to innovate and use a 'Westernised' pedagogical model The findings reveal factors that affect the implementation of formative assessment in an authentic, primary ESL context. While acknowledging that the study investigated only three cases and cannot be generalisable to other primary ESL settings, it does provide examples of formative assessment in a particular setting and insights about implementation from the perspective of the teachers.

Finally, at a personal level, as an English teacher, I was motivated to improve my students' participation in deep rather than rote learning. At the time this research began, the Malaysian government's demands to enhance the quality of English education were prominent. However, the most important trigger for my research was the obvious research gap. Significant research based on formative assessment had been conducted in Western settings, but very little existed in my own country, Malaysia. Effective implementation of formative assessment practices involves a range of historical, social, cultural, political and contextual factors and I was interested in exploring how the practices of formative assessment could be enacted and researched in the Malaysian educational context, particularly with young language learners. Furthermore, as the researcher, I was also prompted to undertake this research as part of developing my professional and academic competences, while giving me the opportunity to advance my knowledge and

understanding of the cutting-edge debates about the theory and practice of assessment.

In the light of the above rationale and the significance of the study, I hope to make a contribution by filling the gap concerning how teachers make sense of formative assessment in general and in the primary ESL context in particular.

1.6 Overview of the Chapters

Building upon earlier arguments, this study has aimed to explore teachers' understandings and implementation of Malaysia's School Based Assessment policy, particularly formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom and the factors affecting their understandings and practices. This study is organised into ten chapters, which bring together the different parts of the research.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents the literature on young language learners, while also defining formative assessment and reviewing the extant literature related to both. The chapter ends with the identification of the research gaps, which led to the formulation of the research questions of this study.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the Malaysian education system and analysis of education in the Malaysian context. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the learning context of Malaysian primary schools, with particular reference to the implications for assessment. This chapter provides a brief account of recent policy developments related to the national assessment system of education in Malaysia. Relevant elements of Malaysian culturally based practices are discussed in order to highlight key contextual elements. The background to teaching, learning and assessment in Malaysia is examined as a means to illustrate the potential and challenges in the implementation of formative assessment.

Chapter Four focuses on the conceptual framework guiding the study and the analysis of the data gathered. The aim of this chapter is to illuminate and clarify the theory that informs the development of the conceptual framework used to guide this study.

Chapter Five describes the research design and methodology chosen to explore the three research questions. The research paradigm (interpretivist) is established in this chapter and the selected methodology (intrinsic case study) is explained. Three

teachers represented the sample, teaching Year 1, Year 4 and Year 5 English respectively. The methods of data collection included in-depth semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, collection of assessment-related documents, and field notes. This methodology resulted in the compilation of a case study report for each teacher. The analytic processes that featured open and selective coding and chains of evidence are described to establish the authenticity of the emerging themes. A discussion of ethical issues is included to demonstrate that data was recorded and analysed in an appropriate and ethical manner.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight present the case studies of the three. Each of these three chapters begins with an introduction to the school setting, the teacher's background, experience and professional development, the English classroom setting, teachers' understandings, followed by a description of key classroom assessment strategies observed in their classrooms.

Similarities and differences in the teachers' understandings and enactment of formative assessment strategies are considered in Chapter Nine. The purpose of this chapter is to present the major patterns of understanding, possible reasons for the implementation of formative assessment strategies and to identify common factors affecting the implementation of formative assessment.

In Chapter Ten, the final chapter of the study, I review the process of conducting the research. I provide possible explanations for the understandings and observed assessment practices of each of the three teachers. Conclusions, implications, recommendations and limitations of the study are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study aims to investigate primary English teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment and the factors that affected their implementation of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom. This chapter provides the study's theoretical underpinning by reviewing the relevant literature surrounding two of the study's main areas: young language learners and formative assessment. This chapter reviews what is already known about the intersection of learning and assessment, with a particular focus on formative assessment. To understand formative assessment in the context of this thesis, it is necessary to consider concepts relating to second language learning – and in particular early language learning (i.e. young learners). Hence, this chapter begins with Section 2.2 by exploring second language learning from three different perspectives. Firstly, the role of age and a possible critical period in development will be discussed from the point of view of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) theory and Piaget's Stage Theory of Cognitive Development. Secondly, early second language learning will be discussed from a socio-constructivist viewpoint. Thirdly, the attitudes and motivational strategies of young language learners and their role in second language learning will be discussed. By reviewing these areas, I identify important considerations for implementing assessment in primary English language teaching (ELT) contexts. Section 2.3 reveals that there is a need for, and value in, gaining a deeper understanding of the assessment processes involved in second language learning in childhood, with a particular focus on formative assessment. Such insights can inform assessment practices that are appropriate to the primary ELT classroom context.

2.2 Young Language Learners and Language Learning

According to McKay (2006, p.1), young language learners (YLL) are those who are learning a foreign or second language and who are doing so during the first 6 or 7 years of formal schooling. For the purpose of this study, I extend the definition to cover the 'age range from seven to twelve' (Slattery and Willis, 2001, p.4-5), since the pupils in this study are in Year 1, Year 4 and Year 5, corresponding to the ages between which children attend primary or elementary school in Malaysia (7 -12 years

old) (MOE, 2006) and are 'expected to have attained cognitive maturity' (Benigno and Jong, 2016, p.47) .

2.2.1 Age and its Possible Effects on Second Language Learning

The term 'critical period' (CP) was first introduced in the field of natural sciences where it was defined as a restriction in the development of a skill or behaviour (Pinter, 2011, p. 49). The theory of critical period hypothesis (CPH) was adapted to linguistic studies by researchers interested in knowing whether there would be a critical period in a person's first language learning. After some positive evidence (Mayberry et al., 2002) the interest then shifted to second language learning, where the situation proved to be more complex, and the debate about a critical period in second language learning has been ongoing ever since. In second language learning, the critical period is considered to be a cut-off point after which success in second language learning starts to decline (Hakuta et al., 2003). The assumption is that a critical period would explain the differences in skill levels between young and adult second language learners. However, studies have shown great variation in the age ranges of a critical period, starting from four-year-olds to fifteen-year-olds, and therefore the existence of a critical period has become a debatable topic in second language learning. Those in favour of the theory often state that the most common point in life for a critical period is at the age of seven, which is based on the stages of cognitive development by Piaget (Pinter,   2011, p.50-51).

The stage theory of cognitive development by Piaget (1959) suggests that children's intellectual development evolves in a fixed sequence of stages. The stage theory consists of four stages called Sensory-motor Stage, Pre-operational Stage, Concrete Operational Stage and Formal Operational Stage. The developmental stage of relevance to this thesis is the Concrete Operational Stage (from 7 - 11 years). According to Piaget (1959, p.75), the "revolutionary change in a child takes place at the age of seven when he develops logical thinking skills and the ability to deal with more than one aspect of a task at a time". In addition, a seven-year-old child knows how to make use of analogy and reasoning and also gradually loses the egocentric way of looking at the world. In the context of second language learning, this would mean that a young language learner needs clear instructions, simple problem-solving tasks, simple repetitive tasks and games and stories (Pinter, 2011, p.11). These kinds of activities develop the learner's skills for the future and support more goal-orientated language learning in the long run. Movement between stages

occurs in an invariant sequence and, although Piaget did not assert that children progress through stages at a fixed time, he did hypothesise an age guideline which can be utilised when classifying children (Dugan, 2003, p.15). The implications of Piaget's theory for this thesis are important in that the theory suggests that explicit teaching and testing of language forms may not be appropriate in a primary ESL classroom if this requires learners being able to process abstract rules, i.e. before they reach the formal operational stage. Furthermore, the complexity of language used in assessment tasks is an important consideration as the language of instruction could serve to inhibit learners' performance.

However, whilst the CPH and Piaget's theory are well-known and also widely researched, there has also been criticism towards them. Firstly, the critical age period has varied so much in the studies that have been conducted, the idea of a CP seems to be too vague to be useful. More recent studies (Hakuta et al., 2003, Bialystok and Hakuta, 1999) also suggest that development or regression in second language learning is more gradual than the CPH implies. On the other hand, although researchers have not been able to prove that a critical period exists, it has also been difficult to prove otherwise. With regards to Piaget's theory, the biggest questions have been about his research methods and the fact that his theory avoids consideration of the social aspects in cognitive development. Some consider his theory to be based only on biological assumptions and others find the assumption that every child would develop at the same pace in different cultures untenable (Pinter, 2011). Despite these criticisms critical period debate, it is still believed that there is something in children and their age that makes them more apt to second language learning. It is generally accepted that age does play a role in second language learning, but that it cannot be viewed separately from such factors as social support, motivation and the importance of professional instruction. The next section looks at young learners through the lens of socio-constructivist learning theory developed by Vygotsky (1978), and from the wider perspective of the surroundings and facilitators of learning.

2.2.2 Young Language Learners and the Social Environment

Successful learning is often defined as a combination of a learner's inner qualities and development together with supporting and motivating surroundings for learning. In second language learning, social support and an optimal learning environment are considered to be key factors. It may be that a critical period is not necessarily the

way to early language learning, but that also social and environmental as well as individual differences help in explaining the success of young children in second language learning (Pinter, 2011, p.64). Most of these ideas rest on the conceptions of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and his socio-constructivist learning theory.

2.2.3 Socio-constructivist Learning Theory

Whereas Piaget (1959) saw learning and cognitive development as taking place in stages, Vygotsky (1982) thought of the process as something more gradual and ongoing. Instead of the changes itself, Vygotsky focused on the role that the social environment played on the process of learning - the theory being that cognitive development does not occur in isolation but through social interaction with others.

Social interaction as a fundamental force would start the learning process in a child and the information provided by another person would then be processed by the child. After the processing of information, learning would take place and the child could internalise the given information and guidance. Vygotsky (1978) developed the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), whereby there are tasks that children cannot complete independently but are able to do with some support from the environment, a peer or a teacher. Teachers are responsible to observe and provide suitable support (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) believed that the teacher should observe closely the process rather than the products of development (Anning, 1995).

The assistance of others, individuals' active participation and the quality of relations are important mediating factors in facilitating individual learning. The assistance of others is considered to be *scaffolding*, an essential process of learning as this reflects the mediated character of learning, to assist an individual to move from a present developmental level to a more advanced one (James, 2006). To scaffold learning effectively, the teacher needs to assess and gain an understanding of the student's current knowledge and to intervene appropriately to move the student's learning forward (Murphy, 2008). Assessment is now understood as a process of interaction and negotiation between the teacher, the students and peers (Pryor and Crossouard, 2008), in which students are encouraged to self-assess and monitor their own learning (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002; Gipps, 1999). The realisation of ZPD does not necessarily mean that it is the teacher who is always challenging students; rather, students can learn from one another as well (Pinter, 2011, p.19).

The theory of ZPD also created a new approach for assessment in education as it helped to shift the focus from only measuring what students have learned, to also supporting students to progress in their learning (Gipps, 2002). Thus, assessment "must be formative in both function and purpose" (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002, p. 243) and should be integrated into the teaching process to scaffold student learning, rather than be an isolated activity at the end of the course to certify student achievement.

As the process of second language learning is complex, it is necessary to examine it from several perspectives and to contemplate the issues that could support the advantages of young learners in the process. The following section analyses second language learning from one more angle by focusing on attitudes and motivation of young children in the ESL contexts. The implications for language assessment are also discussed.

2.2.4 Young Language Learners' Motivation and Attitudes

Understanding learner motivation is a complex area in learning and teaching. Several theories have been developed focusing on the multidimensional nature of the concept. The definition of motivation "is about choice of action, the persistence with this action and the amount of effort that is put into the action" (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011, p.4). According to Gardner (2010), motivation to learn a language includes the desire to do so, combined with positive attitudes and with effort devoted to language learning. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) define attitude as a positive or a negative feeling concerning foreign language learning and what the learner may associate with that language. Attitude and motivation are often considered as inter-related (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006).

Research has indicated that YLLs tend to start foreign language learning (FLL) with high levels of motivation. A recent longitudinal study, the Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE) project (Enever, 2011), found that in the first year, the majority of learners expressed positive attitudes towards FLL, with a quarter of the learners declaring neutral attitudes. After three years, a significant number of learners remained positive with fewer providing neutral responses. This suggests that the learners expressed more informed opinions and was interpreted as indicating that changes in attitude can be influenced by the experience of FLL (Mihaljević Djigunović and Lopriore, 2011). These findings corroborate with Cenoz's (2003)

suggestion that positive attitudes can be maintained in a Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL) context given favourable conditions.

Some of the insights reported by the ELLiE team (Enever, 2011) were related to the relationship between affective dispositions and achievement. The data gathered in that study indicated that young learners with a positive self-concept, motivation and attitude were shown to perform better on listening and oral production tests (Mihaljević Djigunović and Lopriore, 2011). Moreover, it was shown that affective factors had a stronger impact on achievement at age 10-11 than in the initial phase of learning at age 7-8. However, the study did not attribute the impact of individual characteristics on achievement directly to the learners' age as it did not incorporate a control group, for instance, of children who started learning when aged 10-11. Given these insights, it seems plausible to think that assessment providing young learners with information about their foreign language achievement could play a role in how young learners motivation and attitudes change.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2015) also investigated the relationships between individual differences (IDs) and age, language proficiency and the trajectories of change over time (years 2-4 of studying English). The quantitative results suggest that younger and older beginners differ in attitude, the younger learners preferring more traditional classrooms as opposed to the older learners who preferred group work. The younger learners were more motivated but both groups experienced a decline in motivation over time. With regards to attitude, younger learners preferred more teacher-controlled environments, while their older counterparts became more aware of the benefits of group work and developed appropriate skills for participating in this type of work (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2015).

YLLs' perception of self-achievement has also been shown to be related to motivation. Masgoret et al. (2001) adapted Gardner's (1985) Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery for use with 10-15-year-old Spanish (L1) speakers learning English. The study demonstrated that children who perceived their own achievement in English as good were those who had a positive attitude towards learning English and communicating with English native speakers. Mihaljević Djigunović (2012) also found that the relationship between motivation and language achievement 'depended on what kind of measure of achievement was used: stronger correlations were found with self-assessment, course grades and integrative tests compared to discrete-point tests' (p. 161). These studies suggest that the ways in which learners

are assessed and the ways in which YLLs perceive their own achievement, perhaps as a consequence of assessment and feedback giving practices, may have implications for the development of their affective dispositions. This suggests that it would be both interesting and important to gain preliminary insights into this area by collecting evidence, from observed lessons and teacher interviews, about the range of purposes of using formative assessment – i.e. not only for establishing academic outcomes

2.3 Formative Assessment

This section begins with the definition of 'assessment' and its variants, summative and formative assessment, in order to subsequently engage with the debates about the implementation and impact that formative assessment has been reported to have. I then present the role of formative assessment in supporting learning and the empirical studies related to formative assessment in the primary English language teaching (ELT) context. Lastly, factors influencing the implementation of formative assessment are presented.

2.3.1 Definition of 'Assessment'

The term 'assessment' has an array of meanings within the educational context (Taras, 2005). At its most basic, assessment pertains to "the process of data analysis that teachers use to get evidence about their learners' performance and progress" (Pinter, 2006, p. 131). Pinter (2006) highlights assessment as a process by which educators can obtain information about the overall attainment of learners. Similarly, Gullo (2005) states that "assessment is a procedure used to determine the degree to which an individual child possesses a certain attribute" (p. 4). Assessment is, therefore, useful if one wants to examine the progress, process and level of knowledge of a learner in a particular domain. Greenstein (2010) analyses the term 'assessment' further and defines it as "the measurement of the outcomes of teaching and learning…that involve gathering and analysing the information about students' performance" (p. 169). According to Greenstein (2010), assessment does not only concern student attainment and the learning itself but also the teaching process. Drummond (2003) conceptualises the process of assessment in terms of teachers gathering and interpreting evidence of students' learning and using that knowledge to make decisions.

To satisfy the fitness for purpose condition, it is crucial to consider the functions of assessment. Leung (2014, p.1512) describes assessment as 'purpose-bound' and as usually serving two main purposes: formative and summative. Much has been written in recent times about the formative and summative functions of assessment (Bell and Cowie, 1997; Harlen and James, 1997; Pryor and Torrance, 1997). Theoretically, each has a different role to play (Harlen and James, 1997) and each should, therefore, have quite different properties and qualities (Gipps, 1994). The key difference between these two purposes of assessment is in the use made of the evidence and information gathered through the process of assessment (Leung, 2014). Harlen (2006) explains that using the terms 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment' can be confusing as it indicates that these are different types of assessment or are related to different approaches to gathering information. Thus, it is for this reason that the terms 'assessment for learning' and 'assessment of learning' are sometimes used instead. In this study, when summative and formative assessments are used, I refer to the purposes for assessment – identical to assessment of/for learning.

Typically, summative assessment is conducted periodically to measure learners' progress (Stoynoff, 2012). Its outcomes are often reported quantitatively, as a percentage or a grade, with reference to an explicit set of attainment criteria. By contrast, formative assessment is viewed as a less formal, on-going, classroom-based process that seeks to gather data demonstrating students' understanding and gaps in their knowledge and uses those insights to move learning forward (Stoynoff, ibid.).

2.3.2 A Paradigm Shift: From Summative to Formative Assessment

The paradigm shift from summative to formative assessment can be traced to the 1970s when researchers began to question the effectiveness of the traditional focus of classroom assessment on the summative activities of measuring, grading and evaluating students' performances to external standards (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). Such assessment is typically aligned with behaviourist understandings of teaching and learning. The theory of behaviourism focuses on overt behaviours that can be measured (Good and Brophy, 1978), underpinned by a view of the mind as responding to observable stimulus, thus ignoring the capability of thought processing occurring internally (Skinner, 1968). Within behaviourism, students are viewed as passive recipients, while teachers play a more significant role.

The concept of formative assessment first appeared in the late 1960s (Scriven, 1967), but it took time for this concept to be adopted by educational researchers. In the 1970s, 80s and 90s, researchers and educators shifted their focus towards emphasising the role of assessment in enhancing learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Black and Wiliam, 1998a). This shifting trend in research reflected and affected the roles of teachers and learners in the assessment process; to a certain extent, it redefined assessment. As literature in the field of assessment suggests, the assessment process in education has changed dramatically since 1967: from the learner being dependent on the teacher to the learner being able (and encouraged) to form a partnership in learning with their teacher (Sadler, 1989).

Bloom et al. (1971) were the first to apply formative assessment to the context of student learning (Bennett, 2011) and mastery learning (Frey and Schmitt, 2007). It is important to note that since the work of Bloom et al. (1971), scholarly discourse has continued to use formative assessment in relation to student learning in the classroom rather than the outcome of an educational programme (Black and Wiliam, 2003). In their definition, Bloom et al. (1971) wrote of the benefits of formative assessment for students, teachers and curriculum makers;

> Formative evaluation is the use of systematic evaluation in the process of curriculum construction, teaching, and learning for the purpose of improving any of these three processes. Since formative evaluation takes place during the formation stage, every effort should be made to use it to improve the process (p. 117).

Their definition provided three characteristics that distinguish between formative and summative assessment, which are: (i) purpose (formative assessment supports the learner while summative assessment is for certification and grading), (ii) timing (formative assessment occurs more frequently while summative assessment tends to take place at the end of teaching and learning), and (iii) level of generalisation (formative assessment targets specific aspects of proficiency while summative tests assess broad areas of learning) (Newton, 2007).

In the 1980s, Royce Sadler further developed the concept and proposed a model of formative assessment (Shepard, 2006). He advanced feedback as a key feature in formative assessment. However, feedback is only effective if the person or persons receiving it are able to make changes or take appropriate actions (Sadler, 1989). According to Sadler (1989), feedback in the classroom serves two audiences: teachers utilise feedback to make curricular and instructional decisions, while

students apply it to act on their strengths and weaknesses. He claims that the difference between formative and summative assessment lies in the "purpose and effect," and not the "timing" (p. 120). Formative assessment plays a role in shaping and improving student performance as compared to summative assessment, which is a collection of examples of a student's achievement status (Sadler, 1989).

The current popularity of and focus on formative assessment is largely due to the work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998a). They emphasised that formative assessment, although not widely or successfully practised at the time, was not a new concept. In their review, Black and Wiliam (1998a, p. 7-8) define formative assessment as encompassing "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged." This definition indicates that formative assessment involves two actions, which are: learners must be aware of a gap between their current level of competence and the desired goal and they must take action to close that gap. The idea of helping students to move from their current learning status to the desired learning goal resonates with ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) (see Section 2.2.3) and is consistent with the purposes and strategies of feedback that enhances learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989). Black and Wiliam's (1998a) definition highlights feedback as central to formative assessment and emphasizes its transformational function in relation to teaching and learning. Although this definition does not describe when formative assessment occurs and what kind of activities are conducted as formative assessment, it provides the foundation for a variety of subsequent interpretations of the term.

Since teachers could also use information from summative assessment to adapt instruction (Thompson and Wiliam, 2008), the use of assessment information was insufficient to differentiate formative assessment from summative assessment. Since formative assessment is integral to teaching and learning, the "big idea" behind formative assessment is that "pupils and teachers use evidence of learning to adapt teaching and learning to meet immediate learning needs minute-to-minute and day-to-day" (Thompson and Wiliam, 2008, p. 6). This revised definition integrates formative assessment closely with classroom activities and provides the clarion call for teachers to closely plan the use of formative assessment within their teaching activities. In an effort to distil further the definition, Black and Wiliam (2009) re-stated formative assessment as classroom practices in which;

> Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (Black and Wiliam 2009, p. 10)

This definition is significant because it advances the student's role in learning, since learners also make decisions about the next steps (Shepard, 2000). Interestingly, Black and Wiliam (2009) do not use the term assessment in their definition but replace it with practice. This is a welcome development in publications about formative assessment as it seems to better describe the nature of the form of 'assessment'.

The identification of the formative function of assessment has meant that teachers previously held understanding of assessment to evaluate and measure learning is no longer considered effective in classrooms. Thus, in essence, many teachers are now caught in a paradigm shift: the current conception of formative assessment and feedback has advocated teaching and learning as facilitative and student-centred, and as part of an interactive learning environment, with an emphasis on learning that takes place at an individual rate (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). This is in contrast to behaviourism, particularly to the centrality of teacher control over the transmission of knowledge (Skinner, 1968). Within this new paradigm, learning, teaching and assessment were conceptualised as an integrative process (Harlen and James, 1997).

Since the introduction of formative assessment, significant attention has been paid to the integrated nature of teaching, learning and assessment (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Influenced by current thinking on effective learning, the conceptualisation of assessment and its implication for teaching (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; James, 2006), and particularly how assessment informs learning (Black et al., 2004), researchers increasingly discuss assessment as a tool for enhancing learning (rather than only evaluating it). Although the initial notion of assessment was shaped and influenced by behaviourism and constructivism, sociocultural perspectives are now much more prevalent in educational theory (James, 2006).

As has been acknowledged, the paradigm shift is problematic in that both formative and summative assessments have the potential to support learning and both are important in education (Bennett, 2011; Broadfoot, 2007; Harlen, 2005). The dilemma

is that by contrasting formative with summative assessment, the positive aspect of formative assessment becomes idealised (Torrance, 2012). As Torrance (2012) argues, formative assessment, as understood by the Assessment Reform Group (1999), is always presented as a "good thing" for student learning (Torrance, 2012, p.327). Yet, summative assessment can have a formative function, and formative assessment may not always result in positive benefits to student learning. However, Black and Wiliam (1998a) suggest that formative assessment if properly implemented, would significantly impact student learning. Thus, the next section will explore the role of formative assessment processes in supporting learning.

2.3.3 The Role of Formative Assessment in Supporting Learning

As has been established above, assessment is strongly associated with learning. Formative assessment is described above as mainly concerned with promoting pupils' learning by using different strategies, especially feedback. It is heavily associated with pupils' learning, which is promoted through interactions between student and teacher. Therefore, although it is essential to discuss empirical evidence for formative assessment, it is also important to discuss the theoretical aspects of formative assessment and learning as part of the background to this study.

In the main, formative assessment approaches are situated under two main views: behaviourist and constructivist (James, 2013; Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Earlier perspectives of learning were more related to behavioural theory (Shepard, 2000a; Torrance and Pryor, 1998). James (2013); Torrance and Pryor (1998) point out that behaviourist approaches help to master learning because they encourage the teacher to specify achievable objectives and criteria. Skinner, who was instrumental in developing behaviourist theory, (as cited in Shepard, 2000a) argued that learning takes place when teachers gradually introduce complex and broad knowledge, and when they assess pupils after introducing each new part of knowledge to make sure that the introduced knowledge, although small, is mastered before moving on to explain the next point. Torrance and Pryor (1998) pointed out that behaviourists see learning as a linear process, as pupils need to master "A" before introducing "B". This type of learning is often related to grades (James, 2013; Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Lambert and Lines (2000, p.129) describe this approach by highlighting two of its features: it is about displaying the learning objectives and success criteria explicitly, while making sure that the pupils understood them; it also involves discussing the test results with the pupils and providing them with feedback, which reflects their

strengths, weaknesses and how they might overcome their difficulties. James (2013) argues that the behaviourist approach is based on 'stimulus, response and reinforcement' (p. 85). The behaviourist approach helps the teacher to know what pupils have acknowledged and feedback is often offered to reflect what was achieved, while also helping to close the gap, as its emphasis is on practice and instant reinforcement (James, 2013, p. 85). While this approach helps to reinforce knowledge, Lambert and Lines (2000) have argued that the behaviourist approach is not concerned with pupil-teacher interaction.

As the behaviourists see learning as a step-by-step process, which builds on the pupils' knowledge, this approach has often been criticised because it neglects cognitive skills, which view learning as a social process (Torrance and Pryor, 1998, p. 15). Researchers (see, for example, Black and Wiliam, 1998b; James, 2013; Shepard, 2000a; Torrance and Pryor 1998) have argued that learning is more likely to take place in a constructivist classroom environment, as these environments encourage learners to be active.

Torrance and Pryor (1998) describe the constructivist perspective of formative assessment as an aspiring approach because it considers the interaction between the teacher and the pupil in the learning process. Furthermore, they explain that in this approach, the interaction between teachers and learners means that teachers help the learners to understand new ideas, rather than just discussing the pupils' assessment results. Black (2001, p. 14) also suggests that the "constructivist approach helps learners to be active in analysing knowledge".

Importantly, the constructivist approach treats learners as individuals who are trying to 'make sense of the knowledge' that has been introduced to them (Hall and Burke, 2004, p. 5). In this approach, understanding is the process of building and rebuilding knowledge, because a constructivist approach supports the learners and helps them to 'make sense of what they already know' (James, 2013, p. 85). It is essential that teachers try to know how their pupils relate new information to ideas which are already present in their minds (James, 2013). Lambert and Lines (2000) also describe the different characteristics of the constructivist approach: it helps pupils to comprehend new knowledge, it refines old ideas, and it ought to have feedback, which should include feed-forward notions (p.130). Meanwhile, feed-forward notions focus not only on what pupils have achieved, but what they might achieve (Torrance and Pryor, 1998).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that to teach in the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) (p. 86) means that it is important to know not just where pupils are in their learning, but also what they might be able to achieve with the help of an instructor or a peer. Accepting that the ZPD is the area where learning takes place and when utilising formative assessment effectively, teachers are responsible to identify and interpret learning evidence through scaffolding information with the students. The constructivist approach emphasises teacher-pupil interaction, a collaborative model where the teacher works as the facilitator of the learning process (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). This approach needs time in order to be applied successfully and, because of this, some hold that it might be difficult to implement in modern educational systems, which emphasise immediacy and results (James, 2013). Lambert and Lines (2000) argue that adopting the constructivist perspective should not mean avoiding the use of other approaches, such as the behaviourist approach and that in order to be able to implement formative assessment successfully, both approaches are important.

A contributory observation made by Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt (2002) claims that students should no longer be seen as the passive recipients of the teachers' value judgements; rather, "they are active, engaged, and challenged contributors to their own learning" when formative assessments are used to support students' learning (p. 77). Shepard (2000) also emphasised that as students are often called upon to make their understandings explicit, formative assessment permits and encourages students to become articulate advocates of their learning. Importantly, Black and Wiliam (1998a) find that students' learning gains are greater when teachers use formative assessment to assess students' learning rather than traditional assessment formats, partly because formative assessment places much of the accountability on students by making learning student-centred.

Explaining that formative assessment can positively influence student learning, as it provides students with continuous and detailed feedback, Stiggins (2005) advocates that learners should self-assess and adjust their own learning to help achieve their expected learning goals. Furthermore, using feedback as scaffolding can help students understand their current level of knowledge and aim for new goals. Students can be motivated to have a positive belief in their ability, and make more of an effort to reach their expected level. Involvement in these assessment practices can lead to success (Stiggins, 2005). The feeling of being successful in learning can be a driving force to move students forward. Formative assessment can contribute to

the enhancement of students' motivation to learn (Harlen, 2012). Equally, formative assessment is also seen as valuable for teachers in order to improve their pedagogic practices (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002). Constantly collecting information about students' learning helps teachers to identify how their students are progressing and to establish their learning needs. This information is crucial for teachers to revise instruction in a timely manner to enhance their teaching effectiveness.

2.3.4 Formative Assessment in Primary ELT Contexts

The present research study was conducted in ELT classrooms, and it is therefore important to consider what research studies have suggested about formative assessment in the context of second language classrooms. Formative assessment studies that investigated classroom-based assessment practices and the formative function of assessment, including self-assessment, have been reviewed as they provide insights that have direct relevance to the current study. This section reports studies that have focused on investigating different aspects of formative assessment in primary ELT contexts.

Several researchers have shown that formative assessment is essential in ESL/EFL teaching and learning (Butler and Lee, 2010; Gattullo, 2000; Hill and McNamara, 2012). Hill and McNamara (2012) researched the process of Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA), which they define as "any reflection by teachers and/or learners on the qualities of a learner's work and the use of that information by teachers and/or learners for teaching, learning, reporting, management or socialisation purposes" (p.396). This understanding incorporates both the summative and formative functions of assessment. It seems to indicate that, in order to move learning forward (emphasising the formative function) an assessment opportunity must first reflect on what learners can already do. Assessment opportunities, as understood by Hill and McNamara (2012) are "any actions, interactions or artefacts (planned or unplanned, deliberate or unconscious, explicit or embedded) which have the potential to provide information on the qualities of a learner's performance" (p. 398). They propose a framework for investigating CBA that is sensitive to how teachers plan, enact and follow up on assessment. The framework highlights four important areas in CBA, which are; (i) what teachers do, (ii) what information they collect to inform assessment, (iii) teachers' and learners' theories and (iv) beliefs about learning and assessment. This is significant to this study as they imply that when investigating

assessment, it is important to research teachers' actions together with their understanding of their actions.

Implementing CBA, as defined above, seems to require a degree of competence in evaluating learning. However, primary language teachers are rarely experts in language assessment (Hasslegreen, 2005). It has been suggested that another way in which diagnostic efforts in primary EFL classrooms can be aided is through purpose-designed assessment materials. A case in point is a Norwegian project called EVAluation of English in Schools (EVA), within which assessment materials were developed to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of primary students' performance in schools (Hasselgreen, 2000). The materials had a formative function in that they informed classroom practices. The results indicated that the children were highly engaged in the activities. This assessment tool also included a self-assessment component. The primary students were required to indicate whether they could complete the tasks independently on a 4-point scale and were also asked to rate the materials. The teachers were provided with scoring sheets to record the children's progress, areas needing development and the results of their self-assessments. This project provided evidence that assessment materials used in primary ESL/EFL classrooms should be well contextualised and engaging for primary students. It also seems to indicate that a continuous approach offers an opportunity for gaining reliable insights into the foreign language achievement of children.

Another insight into how aspects of formative assessment can be implemented, in contexts where teacher-centred teaching and measurement-driven assessment have been traditionally valued, is provided by Butler and Lee (2006), who examined the validity of on-task and off-task self-assessment in a primary EFL classroom context (9-12-year-old) in South Korea. The results of the summative tests and teacher assessment were compared with the results of the students' self-assessment. Butler and Lee (2006) concluded that on-task self-assessments, where self-evaluation takes place immediately after a learner has completed a task, are more accurate than off-task self-assessments that are unrelated to a specific task and are less influenced by contextual and individual factors. It was found that older learners (11-12 years old) were able to self-assess more accurately than their younger counterparts (9-10) and that all the children could develop accuracy in their self-assessments over time. This study is significant because Butler and Lee (2006) discussed self-assessment with a temporal reference to completing classroom tasks.

Most importantly, it emphasised the importance of integrating self-assessment with teaching and learning.

Subsequently, Butler and Lee (2010) reported an intervention study involving 254 learners aged 11-12, conducted in two public primary schools in South Korea. The aims were to investigate whether learners develop accuracy in self-assessment over time and the effectiveness of self-assessment in supporting learning. Butler and Lee (ibid.) found that the implementation of self-assessment in both schools differed. In one school, the focus was on the role of self-assessment in increasing positive feelings, while in the other it was on increasing achievement. They concluded that the differences in how formative assessment was perceived and implemented were influenced by teacher beliefs. This study provided useful evidence that the primary students were able to improve the accuracy of their self-assessments over a relatively short period of time but only in the intervention group. The learners in the control group demonstrated declining accuracy in self-assessment. Butler and Lee (ibid) suggest that this may have been due to the fact that the children started learning with a positive self-concept but that this declined as they accumulated learning experiences. The study also revealed that teachers found it challenging to provide feedback to the children because they were concerned that it might increase the already high levels of competitiveness between students. This suggests that there is a link between self-assessment in primary ESL/EFL classroom classrooms and the research on affect, as affect may impact on the accuracy of self-assessments. The study also suggests that children can be trained in how to self-assess.

In another study describing the use of formative assessment in a primary ELT context, Gattullo (2000) conducted a case study in which he observed four teachers' performance in applying formative assessment in their classes and reported the methods used. His study was a kind of survey in which the focus was just on techniques used in children's classes. She reported nine categories of assessment features that were used in the primary ELT classrooms: questioning/eliciting, correcting, judging, rewarding, observing the process, examining the product, clarifying task criteria and metacognitive questioning. Her findings suggest that the teachers were willing to try implementing formative assessment and were enthusiastic about doing so. These findings indicate that it is possible to implement formative assessment techniques in a primary ELT classroom context, regardless of the learners' low levels of language proficiency and their young age. However, it

should also be noted that the teachers in Gattullo's (ibid) study tended to use techniques such as questioning and correcting significantly more frequently than techniques that Gattullo (ibid) considered more beneficial for learning, such as observing process or metacognitive questioning. She observed that the techniques favoured by the teachers were more naturally compatible with the teaching methodology used, suggesting that it may be important for CBA practices to be compatible with the teaching methodology.

2.3.5 Factors Impacting on the Implementation of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is challenging to implement in most circumstances as it requires an array of skills on the part of the teacher and some emerging dispositions on the part of the learner. Furthermore, a great deal of research shows that although recent decades have witnessed a great wave of assessment reform in many countries around the world, shifting the focus from only summative assessment to more formative assessment, few changes have been seen in actual assessment practices (Berry, 2011a). This sets the scene for this section, in which I classify the barriers to the implementation of formative assessment into four different factors, which are (i) contextual and cultural factors, (ii) examination-oriented culture and accountability, (iii) resource-related factors, (iv) teacher factors and (v) student factors. These five factors are not discrete but rather, they interact in various ways; however, some way of organising their presentation was necessary.

2.3.5.1 Contextual and Cultural Factors

Contextual factors are directly related to the teaching context, comprising physical and social environment and realities. While these contextual factors are not directly associated with teachers' thinking, they affect teachers' decisions about formative assessment. The following categories of contextual factors have been highlighted by a number of researchers: a) social and cultural preferences; b) school context and policy; and c) parent views.

Both Marsh (2007) and Tierney (2006) state that the adoption of formative assessment is affected by the cultural and societal preferences of all those who form part of the school population, such as teachers, students, administrators and parents. The teaching, learning and assessment culture of a society also influences school culture and practices. Jones and Webb (2006) have proposed that if a new innovation is relevant to the society and its culture, it can be quickly adopted.

Otherwise, the society and culture will resist adoption of the innovation and practitioners will face difficulties convincing parents, administrators and students to embrace it. For instance, in the context of this study, Malaysia, which is mainly dominated by high stake examinations, the purpose of assessment is summative and external examinations, including competition, are understood as a final point, showing the results of students' learning, as opposed to being an integral part of learning. Researchers have demonstrated that in these kinds of cultures and societies, teachers face many cultural and societal pressures when adopting formative assessment (Leung, 2004; Jones and Webb, 2006).

In terms of decision-making about classroom assessment, teachers' acts are therefore contingent upon school context and policies (Jones and Webb, 2006; Stiggins, 2002; Black and Wiliam, 2004). Researchers have found that school policies usually require teachers to use summative tests to report students' improvement on standards. Typically, because of the pressure of school administrators and head teachers to demonstrate good outcomes in tests and examinations, they tend to use summative assessment to demonstrate high assessment scores, rather than meeting students' learning needs through the use of formative assessment (Gioka, 2008). Tension arises when the school culture is dominated by traditional beliefs about learning and assessment (Boardman and Woodruff, 2004).

Parents' views and expectations of assessment also affect the adoption of formative assessment (Carless, 2005; Berry, 2010; Remesal, 2007; Black and Wiliam 2004; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). Parents may prefer their children to have traditional paper-pencil tests and examinations because they are accustomed to seeing grades and marks in order to compare and monitor the progress of their children (Berry, 2010). Research has shown that parents may be unwilling and refuse to accept the use of formative assessment that is not grade oriented (Carless, 2005). This contributes to the tension between summative and formative assessment and forces teachers to use summative assessment because it is easy to report as graded. (Remesal, 2007; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). Consultation with parents to show the benefits of formative assessment on students' learning has been suggested as a way to overcome this problem (Black et al., 2003; Marshal and Drummond, 2006).

2.3.5.2 Examination-oriented Culture and Accountability

The greatest threat to the use of formative assessment is the dominance of accountability (Berry, 2011c; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Adamson, 2011). Research has found that under pressure of accountability, "teaching well is incompatible with raising test scores" (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 50). High stake tests involve standardised tests that aim to certify and measure individual students' knowledge attainment as part of moving on to the next level.   Accountability tests consist of national and local exams that aim to maintain school success. High stake and accountability assessments put pressure on teachers to prepare students for these examinations, by seeking to cover the whole curriculum, at the expense of students' learning (Black et al., 2003). Instead of focusing on students' learning, teachers prioritise covering the content in high stake and accountability exams in their teaching, teaching to the test to score high marks or grades (Butt, 2010). The nature of high stake and accountability exams have been identified as distorting the use of formative assessment and breaking the link between assessment, teaching and learning (Adamson, 2011). Findings show consistently that in an assessment culture that focuses on summative tests, there is little room for formative feedback because teaching and learning are strongly directed by tests (Berry, 2011c; Carless, 2011). When summative testing is not aligned with the purposes underlying formative assessment, it can be difficult for formative assessment to flourish (Carless, 2011).

2.3.5.3 Resource-related Factors

Resource-related factors, which are related to resources such as policy being developed in detail, curriculum coverage, large classroom, material, funding and time, affects teachers' adoption of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). The wider curriculum or a specific subject syllabus can play a facilitating or inhibiting role (Carless, 2011). The greater the content coverage required in a syllabus, the more difficult it may be to find time for activities congruent with the development of student dispositions for formative assessment. The nature and emphases of the curriculum may also play a similar role. A curriculum focused on developing the kinds of skills supportive of formative assessment, such as active student involvement, metacognition and learning to learn, are likely to act as a facilitating factor in the implementation of formative assessment.

Even if teachers have the appropriate skills and knowledge to practice formative assessment, research shows that they do not adopt formative assessment because

of an overcrowded curriculum and lack of time (Sutton, 2010). The pressures teachers feel to cover the whole curriculum to prepare their students for external and end-of-year exams, for example, affect teachers' use of formative assessment (Sutton, 2010). The dominance of mandatory curricula in schools is mentioned as another factor that increases the pressures on teachers to prioritise coverage of curricula over students' learning (Sutton, 2010). When teachers are asked to adopt formative assessment, they frequently claim they do not have time to use it (Tierney, 2006). The extra workload, the pressure of covering the curriculum and time constraint caused the teachers to use summative assessment to assess learning outcomes rather than implementing formative assessment to improve students' learning.

Teachers' working conditions, including class size and number of lessons taught, is recognised as another factor that affects teachers' adoption of formative assessment (Jones and Webb, 2006). It was found that using formative assessment is more difficult in large classes because teachers are challenged to evaluate each student's current level and to have suitable interventions for every student (Torrance and Pryor, 2001). Furthermore, if the number of lessons taught by teachers is high, giving feedback on written work and management of marking will not be feasible. Carless (2011) further found that difficulties related to time are varied and may include not only limited time for formative assessment under pressure of content delivery but also teachers' workload and its impact on their limited time for self-reflection or other professional development activities.

It has been indicated that the availability of assessment materials and funding may affect teachers' use of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Black and Wiliam, 2004). Teachers need various types of assessment strategies and materials that are appropriate for their students and teaching. The availability of funding for participating in formative assessment-related professional development activities and purchasing assessment materials also have been mentioned as impacting on teachers' adoption of formative assessment (Jones and Webb, 2006).

2.3.5.4 The Teacher Factors

Teachers' limited understanding of formative assessment was also indicated as a potential barrier to the implementation of formative assessment (Black et al., 2006), resulting in a mechanical and superficial implementation of formative assessment in practice (Klenowski, 2009; Marshall and Drummond, 2006; Stobart, 2008; Torrance,

2012). If teachers are to implement an innovation faithfully, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practice of the proposed change (Brown and McIntyre, 1978 cited in Carless, 2011). For the purposes of this study, understanding is defined as the ability to engage with the principles of formative assessment and awareness of classroom applications of these principles. The better the teacher understands formative assessment, the more likely she/he is able to implement it effectively.

Teacher practice is "always local, situated, emergent and linked with prior practice" (Coburn and Stein, 2006, p. 42). In other words, teacher attitudes tend to derive principally from their own experiences as learners, their training, teaching experience and interaction with school colleagues. These, in turn, are embedded within the values and norms of the society in which they work. Without positive attitudes, a teacher is unlikely to invest the time and effort in promoting formative assessment. Similarly, if a teacher does not believe in formative assessment, she/ he is unlikely to implement it even if governments or schools are encouraging it.

It follows that the quality and depth of teacher preparation programs have an important impact on teacher understandings of learning, pedagogy, and assessment. Facilitating factors for teachers' understanding of formative assessment include strong subject knowledge, solid pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of development trajectories of students and associated theories of learning (Carless, 2011). High levels of teacher expertise in assessment issues act as facilitating factors for the implementation of formative assessment. The treatment of assessment in teacher preparation courses is therefore an influential factor and initial training is sometimes thought to pay insufficient attention to assessment issues (Carless, ibid.).

In examining the success of formative assessment, a strong link was found between teachers' personal strong beliefs and the successful implementation of assessment for learning purpose (Marshall and Drummond, 2006). Difficulties or obstacles in instigating these reforms were only surmounted when the teachers believed themselves professionally responsible for the success of the reform (Marshall and Drummond, 2006). If there is an assessment innovation or initiative that is significantly different to the beliefs that teachers hold, the challenge for the teachers is to restructure their belief so that it fits into their belief system (Yung, 2001). For example, some teachers view learning as the process of acquisition and from this

perspective, understand assessment as the teacher's authoritative responsibility. Students are seen to have inadequate skills and expertise to evaluate their own and others' work. Such views of assessment may lead teachers to limit opportunities for peer and self-assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). Another concern is that if students engage openly in giving feedback, this may undermine the teacher's authority in the classroom (Carless, 2011). It is important that teachers believe that students can learn best through actively participating in classroom activities (Wren and Cotton, 2008), and understand how to apply formative assessment (Marshall and Drummond, 2006). This understanding can then lead teachers to use an interactive model of teaching that focuses on students' participation, in a culture of respect, risk-taking and accepting mistakes as learning opportunities. Such a classroom culture can facilitate the effective implementation of formative assessment (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b).

Teachers' teaching skills substantially impact the effectiveness of formative assessment (Carless, 2011). As formative assessment is an integral part of teaching (Black and Wiliam, 1998a), its effectiveness directly depends on teachers' perceptions and teaching skills. For example, if teaching practices focus on assessing the quantity of work and grading, providing limited advice for improvement, and knowing little of their students' learning needs, this will limit the implementation of formative assessment in their classrooms (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). Thus, both teacher beliefs and teaching skills affect the use of formative assessment. For this reason, many authors have recommended that teachers should learn how to use formative assessment through professional development (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; DeLuca et al., 2012).

Teachers' conceptions of pedagogy also impact on their orientation toward formative assessment (Carless, 2011). To put it crudely, the more constructivist their orientation, the more likely they are to hold views congruent with the aims of formative assessment that place the student at the centre. Teachers whose focus is mainly on the transmission of content may be less likely to be sympathetic to such forms of formative assessment. Teachers who are knowledgeable about classroom assessments are more likely to use assessments effectively because they will be able to discriminate between strong and weak assessments and will also be more inclined to integrate assessment with instruction in order to use appropriate forms of teaching (McMillan, 2001). Probabilities that classroom assessments will be better increases as teachers are assessment literate because those teachers will know not

only what it is that constitutes effective assessment, but will also know what represents an accurate versus an inaccurate interpretation the data (Popham, 2006).

2.3.5.5 Student Factors

As discussed above, effective formative assessment practices involve a number of factors, and the teacher plays a crucial role. However, as Black and Wiliam (1998b) have argued, it may be unfair to place the onus of success on teachers alone. A further potential set of barriers to formative assessment is student attitudes. Formative assessment highlights the importance of the pupil's role in mediating their own learning and is shown to be effective if students are responsible and active in their learning and actively engage in the assessment process to become self-assessors (Sambell, Mcdowell, and Montgomery, 2012). The effectiveness of formative assessment therefore requires students to change their ways of thinking about learning and assessment. Successful learning occurs when learners take control of their own learning and collectively contribute to the creation of knowledge, rather than passively absorbing facts. This requires therefore not just a rethinking of the traditional role of the teacher but also of the student.

Formative assessment requires students to "involve themselves in activities such as metacognition, self-evaluation, and peer assessment" (Carless, 2011, p.93). These dispositions are not easy to develop and require persistence and repeated application. Many students may not be motivated by formative assessment due to their cultural beliefs about assessment. Many students may associate assessment with grades and ranking (Carless et al., 2006). When feedback does not affect the final results, students may believe it is not worth acting on. In addition, many students maintain an inherent belief that assessment is the sole responsibility of the teacher or that they lack the ability to accurately assess their own performance. Such views of assessment may demotivate the teacher in their use of formative assessment.

2.4 Conclusion

With the above review, this chapter has offered a comprehensive background for the study by providing a critical review and synthesis of the literature on young language learners and on formative assessment. Working on McKay's (2006) proposition that assessment practices in young language learners' classrooms should account for how children learn and are taught a foreign language, Section 2.2 examined the

features that the language assessment of young learners should incorporate. This section so far has discussed how children differ from adults in terms of cognitive development and foreign language learning processes. It has also explored the importance of affective factors in language learning among young learners. The literature discussed in this section also indicates that motivation and attitude are shown to interact and that achievement and the perception of self-achievement, might be important in sustaining learners' motivation to learn and a positive attitude. This has clear implications for the current study. Importantly, by providing feedback, any assessment method seems likely to contribute to learners' accruing a perception of their own achievement. Hence, it is important that such feedback provides learners with positive reinforcement as well as with constructive feedback.

Section 2.3. shifted attention to reviewing formative assessment and began by clarifying the terms assessment, summative assessment and formative assessment. The evolution of assessment and formative assessment were discussed, as well as the nature, elements, advantages and complexity of formative assessment. While the meaning and processes of formative assessment are debated amongst researchers, there is general agreement about its importance for teaching and learning and for helping to raise pupils' achievement. As discussed above, formative and summative assessment are not mutually exclusive but rather, are both essential for classroom learning.

Many researchers have suggested that formative assessment is best utilised in a constructivist environment, where a student-centred approach is applied and more teacher-student interaction takes place. While the constructivist perspective has been recently adopted by the Malaysian educational system, summative assessment still remains dominant.

Formative assessment has been acknowledged as a complex issue (Section 2.4). Black and Wiliam (1998b, p. 88) remind us, "there is no quick fix that can alter existing practice by promising rapid rewards" because the effective implementation of formative assessment involves a range of factors. These factors include (i) contextual and cultural factors, (ii) examination-oriented culture and accountability, (iii) resource-related factors, (iv) teacher factors and (v) student factors.   Extensive research by western researchers has found tensions between summative and formative assessment.

The literature on educational innovation shows that the way in which an innovation is introduced requires special attention. There is often little consideration as to what actually happens inside the classrooms during the implementation process. As the review of the literature shows, this has been the case for formative assessment and many studies have questioned its effectiveness. I discussed the importance of teachers' understanding and beliefs and other factors that hinder or facilitate the implementation of formative assessment innovation. Despite growing research interest in teacher assessment practices, not enough is known as to what underlies teachers' decisions about whether or how to implement formative assessment in their classrooms and the beliefs that motivate their assessment practices.

In the case of Malaysia, where despite the introduction of SBA, assessment continues to focus mainly on summarising and certifying student achievement, I argue that its historical and cultural context needs to be taken into account when the quality of its system is assessed. Research is needed that can inform the implementation of formative assessment in the Malaysian education context, particularly in the primary ESL classroom. The following chapter provides a brief description of the Malaysian educational context and how this context may influence the implementation of formative assessment in the primary ESL context in Malaysia.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSESSMENT POLICY IN THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the Malaysian education system in order to provide an understanding of the context within which this study has been conducted. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the learning context of Malaysian primary schools, with particular reference to the implications for assessment. Relevant elements of Malaysian culturally based practices are discussed in order to highlight key contextual elements. The background to teaching, learning and assessment in Malaysia is examined as a means to illustrate the potentials and challenges for the implementation of formative assessment.

3.2 Assessment in Malaysia: a 'paradigm shift'

Assessment is essential in the Malaysian education system as it is part of the national strategy to improve the quality of education (Noraini et al., 2008). In order to produce students who can compete at the international level, the Malaysian education system has undergone a transformation of education in the curriculum as well as in assessment. The Standard Curriculum for Primary School known as KSSR or *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah*, a new curriculum for primary school, was launched in the year 2011. In the same year, the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) established a new form of assessment called School-Based Assessment (SBA) or as it is known in Malaysia, *Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah* (PBS), in primary and secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2011a). This assessment is planned, administered, scored, recorded and reported systematically according to the procedures fixed by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES)**.**

This new policy has brought a significant change to the existing assessment system, which had attracted frequent criticism for being too exam-oriented (Ahmad and Warti, 2014; Talib et al., 2014). This change from a public examination-based assessment to school-based assessment was introduced for three main reasons. Firstly, students' ability and knowledge should not be tested merely through a one-off, summative evaluation but instead, should be carried out constantly throughout the year (Ong, 2010). Rather than sitting in summative examinations, students would

engage in continuous assessment carried out during the teaching and learning process using materials and instruments designed by students' own teachers. Secondly, through SBA the government wished to develop communication, creative skills and higher order thinking skills such as application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Ministry of Education, 2011b). Thirdly, social skills that centre on interpersonal relationships and working with others in teams whilst maintaining one's individual perspective are not necessarily assessed by external end-of-year examinations. SBA was deemed to have the advantage of being a fairer way to assess students' social skills and able to focus on student-student interaction, student-teacher interaction and group work models. As highlighted by Mansor et al. (2013), SBA can encourage teachers' and learners' personal progress, develop positive attitudes towards teaching and learning and enhance learners' collaborative skills through the various forms of continuous assessment in the classroom.

By implementing SBA, the focus of Malaysian assessment has shifted to the implementation of formative assessment approaches (MES, 2014). It is claimed that the implementation should help students to achieve the standard (such as the learning outcome and criteria assessment) being aimed for. This standard is important for students to be able to judge the quality of what they are producing and be able to regulate what they are doing during the process (Sadler, 1989). However, this practice is always side-lined in the Malaysian assessment system (Lim, Wun and Chew, 2014). The final grade of a students' achievement is still the main goal and most teachers prefer encouraging students to get a good grade as they believe that the final product is still the main determiner of success in teaching and learning (Lim, Wun and Chew, 2014).

According to the Ministry of Education documentation, the introduction of SBA was also supposed to give autonomy and due recognition for teachers to carry out a formative and summative assessment at their discretion (Ministry of Education, 2011b). Both assessments would be used to gauge pupils' performance and should be employed in teachers' practices. Formative assessment is now regarded in principle as an essential element within teaching and learning development and thus teaching and learning has become an important on-going process. It is also highlighted that the change of focus in assessment should be holistic and integrated and should achieve a meaningful balance between formative and summative purposes.

3.3 English Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Primary Schools

The English language is introduced to the Malaysian child as early as preschool, at the tender age of 5-6 years old. It continues to be taught as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum at the primary (6-12 years old), secondary school (13-17 years old), as well as post-secondary and tertiary levels of education (18 plus onwards). In sum, the ordinary Malaysian who completes his or her formal education from preschool to tertiary levels (undergraduate degree) averages between 14-15 years of English language education. The inclusion of the English language as a subject in the national education curriculum of Malaysia is compulsory and guided by the language in education policy. However, it is not compulsory for students to pass the subject in order to complete their education at the primary or secondary levels. Even so, the role and status of the English language is institutionalised as an important second language (L2) (Darus, 2009).

The discourse of 'privileging examination' (Koo, 2008, p.56) is dominant in Malaysia. Furthermore, classroom teaching is highly characterised by teacher-centred approaches and chalk-and-talk drill method (Ministry of Education, 2003). The most popular teaching method is drilling using past-year examination questions, worksheets and exercise books (Ambigapathy, 2002). The teachers conduct summative assessment two or three times a year, checking and recording it as a one-off report for the students and parents and for the school's record (in the form of letter grades). Whether dealing with formative or summative assessments, the teachers consider them both basically as means used to measure the ability and competence of the students in answering questions and to prepare individual learners for national standardised examinations. Consequently, the majority of the students learn by rote, memorising rules, and are unable to use what they have learned.

Some argue that grades correlate with the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Biggs, 2001) but I would argue otherwise as, in my experience, learners in teacher-centred classrooms are usually passive recipients, with a tendency to absorb and then restate all of the information received when assessed. Being able to reproduce information learned from a particular course subject and achieve high scores in some cases, does not indicate that learning has taken place. Grades alone are therefore not an effective yardstick to evaluate effective teaching and learning (Ume and Nworgu, 1997).

The Malaysian English language curriculum expects teachers to teach using the target language entirely in the teaching and learning process. Listening to the teacher modelling the spoken language is hoped to develop learners' interest in articulating and learning English. However, in the Malaysian education context, code-switching is a common phenomenon in the ESL classroom (Lee, 2010). Translating English into the Malay language or into the students' mother tongue (the language in which the pupils were brought up with at home by their parents other than the Malay language) is mainly to increase learner understanding of the subject matter and to help learners with low levels of English proficiency (Chen and Maarof, 2017). A typical Malaysian ESL classroom consists of bilingual learners from different linguistic backgrounds who communicate in two or more languages to convey their personal experiences, negotiate meaning and engage in meaningful conversations with their peers and the teacher. The communication process usually takes place in languages other than the target language or language of instruction. In most ESL classrooms, Bahasa Malaysia is used for code-switching purposes because it is the common language shared by learners (Ahmad and Jusoff, 2009; Mohd. Saat and Othman, 2010; Then and Ting, 2011).

From the teachers' perspectives, the use of code-switching is viewed as an effective teaching strategy (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Lucas and Katz, 1994). It helps teachers to achieve the desired learning outcomes and at the same time, provides the necessary language support for learners. Ali (2008) claims that teachers primarily use Bahasa Malaysia to teach English because of the pressure to get good grades in examinations. To make a particular task understandable and clear, the teachers tend to use the language which both the teachers and students feel most comfortable with and which is most convenient.

The actual teaching of the English language as a subject starts from Year One. Pupils in Year One will experience formal teaching and learning of the English language in the form of the four English language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. At this stage, pupils are not yet used to the type of assessment (formative assessment) that I am investigating in this study. This potentially lays down a challenge for teachers of younger age groups in providing feedback for learners, an issue which I am also investigating in this study. Furthermore, learners in the same class may have different levels of fluency in their L2.

In terms of class size, it is normal for Malaysian primary school teachers to have thirty to forty (sometimes more) pupils in a classroom. In dealing with large class sizes, pupils in each school are usually screened and placed in different classes according to their abilities or according to their literacy and numeracy performance. In addition, Malaysian English teachers usually teach more than one class daily (sometimes 3 or 4 groups of classes in different years or levels). Most primary school classroom in Malaysia are built with either wood or concrete walls and floors (in a rectangular shape classroom). The windows in the classrooms (the right and left side view) take up most of the walls which means that wider windows are built and with two exit doors to make ventilation system more effective for the Malaysian hot climate weather (fans and lights are supplied in each classroom; the numbers of fans depend on how large the classrooms are). Therefore, the acoustic environment is challenging- Malaysian primary school teachers may not hear their pupils clearly and may hear noise from other classrooms.

3.4 Challenges in the Implementation of the New Assessment Policy

The implementation of the new assessment policy has aroused intense debates among teachers in Malaysia (Raman and Yamat, 2014). Teachers claimed that they were not given enough information about how it would work in practice. Raman and Yamat (2014, p.69), who conducted semi-structured interviews involving 17 English language teachers in three urban secondary schools, found that whilst teachers viewed the aims of SBA positively, they were 'unhappy' with its implementation which put them under 'too much pressure'.

In the early stage of its implementation, teachers were found to be unsure of the SBA six-grading process to evaluate student achievement (Mukhari and Md. Amin, 2010) and were not following the guidelines produced by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) (Che Md. Ghazali et al., 2012). The danger in this was that if the teachers themselves were not sure about the assessment criteria and do not have a clear understanding of the grading process, their capacity to carry out such assessments will clearly be undermined.

Despite improvements to the new assessment policy in 2014, the definition of what constitutes formative assessment remains unclear and are too general. This then leads to confusion when translating them into practice (Fullan, 2007). In the Standard-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC), formative assessment is defined as:

> Formative assessment is a part of the school-based assessment. Formative assessment or assessment for learning is an important aspect of teaching and learning in the classroom and good pedagogy always include assessment. Formative assessment is carried out for teachers to gain feedback on their pupils' learning and provide them with the necessary information regarding their pupils' learning so that they can make changes to their teaching to enhance their pupils' learning. Thus, formative assessment is carried out during teaching and learning in the classroom. (Curriculum Development Centre, 2014, p. 20)

This definition highlights the importance of giving feedback to students to help them improve and enhance their learning performance. Hence, feedback is a characteristic of the new assessment policy and teachers are expected to provide feedback (Curriculum Development Centre, 2014). However, in the SBA handbook, there is no clear definition of feedback nor instructions regarding how teachers are expected to provide feedback for any form of formative assessment. There is also limited information and unclear guidelines on how the practice of quality assessment should be implemented in the classroom. Thus, the three different assessment-related documents, the SBA circular (2014), SBA Pamphlet, and the SBA guideline book (2014) are equally vague (see Table 3.1).

Table 31: Comparison of three different definitions of formative assessment from three different documents

Source	Definition(s) and Aims of SBA
SBA Circular dated 31st March 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2014, p.1)	An assessment carried out by the teacher in the classroom during the teaching and learning process. It encompasses Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of learning (AoL).
SBA Pamphlet (2014)	It is a formative assessment conducted during the teaching and learning process to assess pupils learning performance. It is a summative assessment conducted at the end of a particular unit, term, month or year to assess pupils' performance.
SBA Guideline (2014)	SBA functions as Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning. Assessment is implemented: • Formative assessment which is conducted during the teaching and learning process • Summative assessment which is conducted at the end of a particular unit, term, month or year.

An analysis of these documents shows that no clear definitions of formative and summative assessment are provided. Furthermore, there are no guidelines for teachers about how to implement formative assessment in the classroom. According to the Ministry of Education's 2014 SBA policy document, teachers are expected to keep records of students' performance according to their own time in the school year and to be systematic developing regular routines for imputing information for all learners. They are also required to note and comment on different features of a learner's performance generally and in particular language elements and expected outcomes, their attitudes, and their learning strategies. To support these records, teachers are also required to make references to a range of learners' work from different sources (e.g. in the learner's portfolio, in the workbook, interaction with

peers, etc.) (Ministry of Education, 2014). However, there are no systematic guidelines, frameworks or materials provided by the MOE to support teachers with this kind of record keeping.

In a study involving 40 secondary English teachers from various Malaysian public secondary schools, Majid (2011) found that teachers were worried that SBA would take up teaching time and at the same time put more pressure on them to rush through the syllabus. Teacher stress arising from a proliferation of change initiatives in Malaysia was also reported by other researchers (Tajulashikin, Fazura and Mohd Burhan, 2013). Their concerns included the burden of clerical work, marks input process and the filing system, all found to limit teachers' creativity in implementing SBA (Tan, 2010). Othman et al. (2013) found that teachers had a negative perception of sufficient time for the implementation of SBA. Similarly, teachers in a study by Talib et al. (2014) perceived SBA as imposing an additional workload as it requires more frequent assessment of students and keeping individual records of achievement. Additionally, assessment of each student in each classroom needs more time than the usual lesson hour as they need to prepare extra materials and documents of assessment (Raman and Yamat, 2014). Furthermore, the large number of students, more than 40 in a class, makes it difficult for teachers to assess individual students' progress.

As discussed in the previous chapter, teachers' lack of knowledge and skills can jeopardise the validity and reliability of SBA (Chan, Gurnam and Md. Yunus, 2006). This is confirmed in a study conducted by Chan et al. (2006) that a substantial number of secondary ESL teachers did not have sufficient exposure to SBA and as a result, did not know how to interpret test scores, conduct item analysis or form an item bank. The findings from a study by Hamzah and Paramasivam (2009) also revealed that SBA was simply not implemented according to the guidelines provided, partly due to teachers lacking the knowledge and skills in the area. Similarly, Talib et al. (2014) found that teachers did not have the knowledge they needed to implement SBA effectively.

Another study which provides evidence of formative assessment use and teachers' lack of knowledge and skills to implement AfL in primary ESL classroom in Malaysia was reported by Sardareh (2014). The focus of her study was on how primary ESL teachers implemented classroom discussion and questioning during AfL and how teachers provided students with formative feedback in Year One and Year Two

primary school ESL classes in Malaysia. The most prevalent findings from her study were the prevalence of teacher dominance, unmeaningful feedback, and misunderstanding of AfL. Sardareh (2014) reported that the teachers mostly asked lower cognitive questions which did not elicit thoughtful reflection. Furthermore, she claimed that a supportive and collaborative learning environment was not provided for the students and hierarchical unequal patterns of participation were observed during the discussions. The data also showed that the discussions were dominated by certain students and highly controlled by the teachers. Students rarely asked questions and most of the time the teachers themselves were the only ones who talked and posed questions. In terms of feedback, praise and one-to-one instruction were mostly observed. Sardareh (2014) also reported that although AfL was advocated by the Malaysian governments, teachers needed more training on how to conduct assessment, particularly AfL. This is in agreement with Havnes et al. (2012) who believe that proper training and guidance whether in-service or pre-service programs can at least facilitate and contribute to the success of the implementations of AfL.

In terms of the implementation of SBA in Malaysia, Norzila (2013) points out that the cascading model adopted by the Ministry was not successful in disseminating knowledge about the new assessment policy to teachers. The policymakers may have felt that they were adopting an empirical-rational strategy by trying to explain the advantages of this assessment policy for the teachers. However, in practice, the dissemination and implementation of SBA was mandated in a top-down manner, with insufficient resources and training (Norzila, 2013). Describing the introduction of the policy, Norzila (2013) explains that teachers were sent for in-service courses to equip them with the necessary skills to implement the assessment policy. However, there was much doubt over the effectiveness of such measures. There were also strong reservations about the effectiveness of the short-term in-service courses in enhancing the assessment skills of teachers. The teachers were only given brief sessions and the focus of these sessions was on how to use the standard document and teacher guidebook, with little attention to enabling teachers to understand the rationale behind the new assessment reform. It is likely that even after these short training sessions many teachers still did not have a clear understanding of what was expected of them in their new role (Che Md Ghazali, 2015; Majid, 2011; Norzila, 2013). Hence, these teachers are unlikely to have gained the necessary skills to carry out their new roles. Norzila's study (2013) concludes that even though teachers

had undergone courses organised by the MOE, they still lacked the confidence in assessing students.

Even though the Malaysian government envisaged SBA as a dramatic shift from the pre-existing, mainly summative, test-based assessment to formative assessment, in effect SBA has not replaced the former regime. Instead formative assessment was introduced with little explanation of what this would entail for teachers and little training that would enable teachers to understand this new form of assessment and its rationale.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described significant contextual features of the Malaysian education system, which served as the backdrop for this research. The successful introduction and implementation of a major innovation such as SBA would require resources, such as training, formative assessment materials and additional time, as well as a coherent focus on developing an understanding of formative assessment and its potential to improve learning. As discussed in this chapter, both the resources and the coherent focus on teachers making sense of the 'paradigm shift' expected of them, turned out to be insufficient. The next chapter explores these issues in more detail by presenting the conceptual framework that has guided this study and the analysis of the data gathered.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

4.1 Introduction

The literature on factors impacting the implementation of formative assessment reviewed in Chapter 2, together with the contextual factors that provide the backdrop to the implementation of SBA discussed in Chapter 3, suggest that it may be helpful to explore the adoption of formative assessment in Malaysian the primary ESL classroom at 'macro' and 'micro' levels. Three key macro-level influences seem to be particularly salient: firstly, contextual and cultural elements in the Malaysian ESL primary classroom. Secondly, the examination-oriented system with its attendant focus on summative assessment to the detriment of formative assessment. Thirdly, given that formative assessment could be seen as an 'innovation', the theory and practice of educational change with all of its related challenges in relation to teacher development and shift in classroom practices. The micro-level factors centre around the teachers, their understandings of learning and learners and other individual characteristics. The space between the macro and micro-levels can be considered in terms of resource-related factors such as professional development and teacher preparation programs, time and the 'crowded' curriculum, working conditions of teachers, materials, and funding (see Figure 4.1 below).

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, despite the contribution of formative assessment to student learning and teacher effectiveness being well documented, research suggests that formative assessment is not always adopted in classrooms (Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Black et al., 2003; Marshal and Drummond, 2006; Marsh, 2007). Research also shows that even when teachers may know about the notion of formative assessment and its strategies, they do not necessarily incorporate it into their own classroom practices (Leahy et al., 2005). There is thus a gap between the theory and practice of formative assessment, and teachers are the stakeholders who can make the largest contribution to closing this gap (Adamson, 2011). Formative assessment strategies (addressed in detail in Section 4.3) developed by Black and Wiliam (2009) are relevant in this study as they may help frame and analyse teachers' understanding of formative assessment and its use in their primary ESL classroom.

As has been argued, the adoption of formative assessment cannot be achieved meaningfully by coercing teachers to use formative assessment strategies. It requires stakeholders such as administrators and policymakers to motivate or incentivise teachers to improve their formative assessment practices (Marshal and Drummond, 2006). Adopting formative assessment means that teachers need to move away from an authoritarian role in the classroom and from conceptions of assessment as predominantly summative in intent, used for grading and accountability purposes, to an understanding of assessment for students' learning. These elements combine together to form the conceptual framework for this study as presented in Figure 4.1.
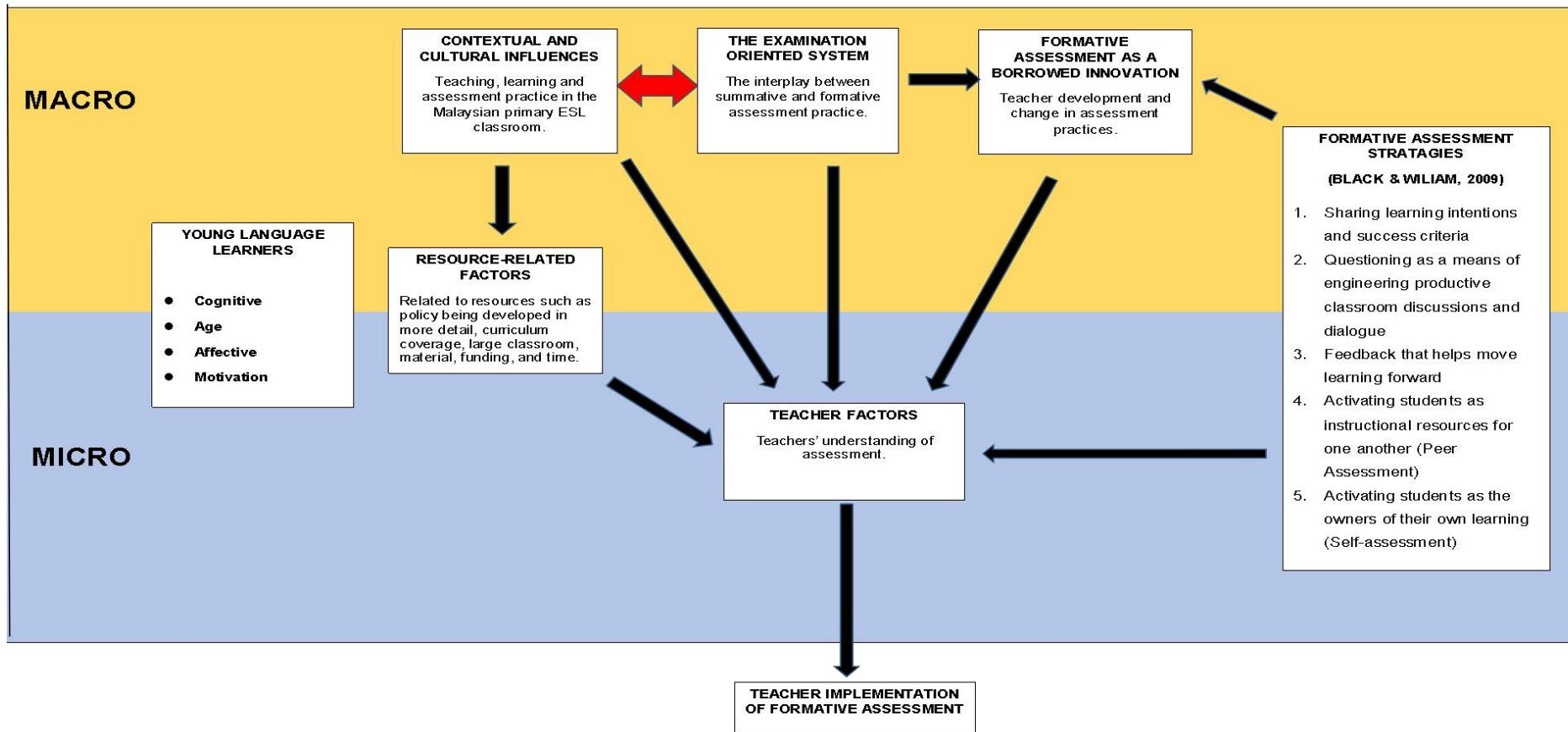
Figure 4.1: Macro and micro-level factors impacting on the implementation of formative assessment policy and practice in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom

The thick red arrows indicate a strong relationship between components while the thinner black arrows express a weaker interaction. The enactment of teachers' practices at the micro-level of the classroom is embedded in broader social, cultural and contextual influences. This is represented by the notion of contextually grounded practices represented by the downward arrows and the box at the bottom of the figure. The element pertaining to young language learners (discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.2) is of crucial importance, even though much assessment for *learning* research focuses on *learning* as a generic process rather than the learners themselves. This is reflected in Figure 4.1 through the absence of arrows to indicate interaction with the other elements. Although it is the young language learner who uses information from formative assessment in order to learn, this study focuses mainly on teacher understandings and implementation: how teachers understood and tried to construct a version of formative assessment that made sense to them in the primary ESL classrooms in Malaysia. This focus, however, does not mean that the role of the student in formative assessment has been downplayed. The contextual, cultural and education system level influences, as well as resource-related factors have been discussed in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.3.5) and Chapter 3. The remainder of this chapter will focus in particular on the elements of the conceptual framework pertaining to formative assessment strategies and the issue of 'borrowed innovation'.

4.2 Formative Assessment as a Borrowed Innovation

The position taken in this study is that formative assessment could be viewed as an innovation. Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) define innovation as an implementation of something new, where "Innovation may relate to the introduction of something large in scale, such as a new textbook...[or] something much smaller in scale such as a new procedure" (p.8). The potential and actual transfer of formative assessment to various parts of the world can also be partly seen as policy borrowing, whereby "one country seeks to ameliorate its educational problems by adopting a policy or practice deemed successful in another country" (Carless, 2011, p.97). In the contemporary globalised world, policy borrowing is common, but what looks like similar policies end up being quite different practices (Levin, 1998).

Formative assessment originated in and was developed in Anglophone contexts such as UK and USA, has developed over several decades, yet is "both conceptually and practically still a work-in-progress" (Bennett, 2011, p. 21). Regardless of its

various definitions, formative assessment principles emphasise learners' active role and constructive feedback in assessment, and thereby, improving learning outcomes and enhancing education quality (Assessment Reform Group, 2002b; Black and Wiliam, 1998b). Improvement of learning is the main purpose of any education system at all levels (Assessment Reform Group, 1999).

With its function of learning improvement, formative assessment has been adopted in assessment initiatives in multiple contexts including that of Malaysia. In Malaysia, formative assessment has been embraced by the educational administration and was promulgated as part of the curriculum and assessment requirements in 2011. With a focus on formative assessment or 'assessment *for* learning', teachers in Malaysia have been encouraged to view assessment not only as consisting of examinations and tests but also as part of a learning process that can provide feedback to students to help them improve their learning (Curriculum Development Centre, 2014).

However, despite the best intentions of policymakers, the implementation of formative assessment in multiple contexts is a rather complex process (Black and Wiliam, 2005). While implementing formative assessment in Anglophone countries such as UK and New Zealand is not without issues and concerns (Marshall and Drummond, 2006; Webb and Jones, 2009), the effective implementation of formative assessment in other cultural contexts, Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts in particular (countries including China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia) has been more challenging due to its different set of cultural values and learning traditions (Chen, 2017). This is a reminder that what works in one context may lack relevance for another (Fink and Stoll, 1998), particularly when the borrowing takes place across borders and cultures, when there might be a compatibility issue between the to-be-borrowed initiative and local traditions. Tan (2016) stated that "policy borrowing is by no means a straightforward, predictable or uncontested process. On the contrary, reform initiatives are being (re)interpreted, challenged and modified in such a way that the final form they take in a locality may be different from that in the original setting" (p. 196).

Chen (2009) and Poole (2016) highlighted that traditional values deep-rooted in the CHC contexts such as examination-oriented and product focus are at contrast with formative assessment principles such as learning-oriented and process focus. In the actual classroom practice, these reforms might meet with resistance from teachers

who remain attached to traditional pedagogies featuring teacher-centred, test-oriented and rote-based teaching and learning (Berry, 2011b). The competing demands of the old and new systems thus create a unique workplace environment for pedagogical adaptation and renegotiation of teachers' professional identities. These deep-rooted cultural heritages, along with complex teaching realities, become barriers to the effective implementation of formative assessment (Chen, 2017).

Furthermore, before policies are borrowed, it is important to understand whether the policy was successful in its original context and to determine what adaptations may be required for application in its new context (Lingard, 2010). Hence, if a policy is borrowed and implemented without appropriate modification for the local context and is then found to be unsuccessful, it may be deemed a managerial fad (Birnbaum, 2000; Ponzi and Koenig, 2002). Like other innovations, formative assessment needs time to be effective in classrooms, and more research is needed to develop its theory and practices, especially in different contexts. What is lacking is research conducted in primary ESL classroom and in Asian countries (Carless, 2011) such as Malaysia.

4.3 Formative Assessment Strategies to Support Learning

In developing a conceptual framework that can frame and analyse teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment this study has sought to explore the concept of 'formative assessment' and how teachers make sense of this concept as they apply it in their classrooms. In their earliest seminal work on formative assessment, Black and William (1998) drew together a wide range of research findings relevant to the notion of formative assessment, without basing it on any pre-defined theory. In their work '*Inside the Black Box'* (Black and Wiliam, 1998b), they suggested four activities or practices that are essential in assessing formatively which are questioning, feedback, sharing criteria and self-assessment.

In Black and Wiliam's (2009) formative assessment definition (see page 21) they used the term 'instruction' to refer to any activity that is intended to create learning. It also focuses on the agents who are involved during assessment and the use of the results to influence the decision about the subsequent instruction. In other words, assessment activities, the involvement of teachers and learners, feedback and the use of feedback to improve teaching and learning, are important in formative assessment. In developing their theory of formative assessment, Black and Wiliam (2009) combined the three processes of teaching and learning drawn from

Ramaprasad (1983) with the different agents (teacher, peer and learner) to develop the framework. These key processes are:

    a)   Establishing where the learners are in their learning

    b)   Establishing where they are going

    c)   Establishing what needs to be done to get them there

While the teacher is responsible for designing and preparing an environment conducive to learning, it is also important to take into account the role that the learners themselves and their peers play in learning. Hence, Black and Wiliam (2009) propose a theoretical framework for formative assessment by combining these three processes in teaching and learning with the different agents (teacher, learner, and peer) of teaching and learning. They indicate that formative assessment can be conceptualised as consisting of five key strategies (Black and Wiliam, 2009, p.8):

1. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success;
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding;
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward;
4. Activating students as instructional resources for one another; and
5. Activating students as the owners of their own learning.

Table 4.2 shows the framework as suggested by Black and Wiliam (2009) combining Ramaprasad's (1983) three key instructional processes, three agents and the five strategies of formative assessment. The following discussion provides further detail on how the five key formative assessment principles can be enacted in classroom practice.

Table 4.2: Aspects of formative assessment

FRAMEWORK RELATING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES TO INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES		
Where the learner is going	*Where the learner is right now*	*How to get there*
(1) **Teacher:** Clarifying learning intentions and criteria for success	**(2)** Engineering effective classroom discussions and tasks that elicit evidence of learning	**(3)** Providing feedback that moves learner forward
Peer: Understanding and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	**(4)** Activating learners as instructional resources for one another	
Learner: Understanding learning intentions and criteria for success	**(5)** Activating learners as the owners of their learning	

(Source: Black and Wiliam, 2009, p.5)

4.3.1 Clarifying and Sharing of Intentions and Criteria

It is important to clarify and share learning intentions and success criteria so that students better understand what is expected of them and have a thorough understanding of their progress towards the goals. Glasson (2009, p.10) argues that 'framing a learning intention and then sharing that learning intention with students is a very powerful way for teachers to improve learning in their classrooms. The establishment of a learning intention is the basis of everything that follows in the lesson or series of lessons'. Glasson (2009) further claimed that the learning intention should clearly state what the student is expected to know, understand, or be able to do as a result of the learning activities they are expected to complete. Similarly, Andrade and Boulay (2003) agree that it is important for teachers to clearly state what the standards of achievement are and what learners need to do to satisfy the conditions for achievement.

Sadler (1989) argues that assessment should no longer be a secret to students. Students need to be participants in the learning curriculum. Besides, they need to become a part of the assessment process, and thereby take responsibility for their

own learning (Glasson, 2009). Informing students the learning goals and enhancing students' understanding of the stated goals might also help students to engage in some form of self- and peer assessment (Cassidy, 2007).

Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that if the teacher does not develop learning intentions, however, implicit they might be, a situation of 'anything goes' will be created in the classroom (p. 24). Teachers tend to understands why the class is engaged in a particular activity, but students may be unaware of what they are learning and the context of the activity (Glasson, 2009). Establishing the learning intention (including being more precise about the aims, objectives and goals) at the start of a lesson would inform the students before they start completing the task given and that they have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to attain (Black and Wiliam, 2009; Glasson, 2009). Besides, Elwood and Klenowski (2002), contend that to promote a 'shared understanding of assessment practice' (p. 254), the criteria students are being assessed against should be made explicit to them. This is because, success criteria can help both the student and teacher know whether the learning intention has been met and are directly linked with each other (Glasson, 2009). Sharing the learning intention with students helps them focus their thinking on what is required in their learning (Clarke, 2005). A well thought out learning intention will direct students' focus to the required learning, and thereby allow students to see the difference between what they will learn and what they are intended to do (Glasson, 2009). Students driving their instruction is a primary goal in formative assessment, so if the teacher struggles to provide that clarity, students could have difficulty in self-monitoring their progress toward the learning goals (Sadler, 1989).

4.3.2 Engineering Effective Classroom Discussion and Questioning

According to Black and Wiliam (2009) questioning should be used to start effective classroom discussions and to involve learners in other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding. Clarke (2008) agrees that the kinds of questions teachers ask will enhance students' understanding. Black and Wiliam (1998b) argue that discussions leading to students talking about their own understanding, increases knowledge and improves understanding. Furthermore, questioning allows teachers to establish what is already known and then to extend beyond that to develop new ideas and understandings. Black and Wiliam (1998a) recommend that teachers should often and effectively apply questioning strategies and classroom

conversation techniques as opportunities to enhance learners' knowledge and develop better understanding.

Although teachers often naturally use questioning as a way of checking on students' learning, there are times when this is unproductive in the classroom (Black and Wiliam, 1998b). Clarke's (2005) concern is that where teacher questioning focuses mostly on recall, social or managerial questions, it has no assessment benefit. Thus, teachers need to be aware of what type of questioning they are using and its purpose. Whilst Clarke (2005) accepts that this is a difficult area of formative assessment to improve, it is one area that can result in a positive change in the classroom. Effective questioning works as formative assessment when teachers ask worthwhile and probing questions to elicit responses from students and use their professional judgement to draw conclusions about what the students know and understand (Glasson, 2009). Sullivan and Liburn (2004) claim that the level of student thinking is directly proportional to the level of questions asked. Therefore, teachers should consider the learning objectives and then develop the appropriate level and type of question to accomplish that purpose. Furthermore, this formative information can be used to adjust the teaching plan accordingly.

Chin (2006) states that the concept of 'wait-time' is an important aspect in the questioning cycle that help improve learners' thinking. Stahl (1994) regards this time as the pause directly after the teacher's question and before learner responses, giving learners time to think, to process new information, reflect on it and to consider how to respond. Increasing the wait time after teacher questioning can assist in developing students' responses and discussions and increase the length of their answers (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, 2004). However, Black and Wiliam (1998b) argue that teachers do not allow learners enough time to think before answering questions, resulting in teachers answering their own question followed by more questions being asked in rapid succession. The consequence of this style of questioning is that some students do not see any point in trying, since they know the next question will be asked within a few seconds. They are also unable to respond as quickly as some of their peers and are unwilling to make a mistake in front of them. Hence, it is important for teachers to extend wait-times as it will help learners to formulate their responses and questions (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). What seems evident from a combination of the above in classroom practice is that such practices require expert knowledge, emanating from prior teacher training/education that focuses on the merits of these approaches in relation to tangible outcomes for pupils.

4.3.3 Provision of Feedback that Moves Learners Forward

According to Irons (2008), "feedback is a key aspect in assessment and is fundamental in enabling students to learn from assessment" (p. 1). Irons (2008, p 16-17) claims that "formative assessments can be taken as any task that creates feedback to students about their learning….the primary focus of formative assessment (and formative feedback) is to help students understand the level of learning they have achieved and clarify expectations and standards". Hattie and Timperly (2007) state that feedback is conceptualised as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. Brookhart and Moss (2015) agree claiming that feedback should move students forward, clearly presenting the next steps needed to reach the goal presented. In addition, feedback is recognised as an integral component of learning because it helps learners see how they are doing, where they are in the learning process, and what needs to be done next to reach the learning targets (Thomas and Sondergeld, 2015). Therefore, feedback is a critical component to the formative assessment process, as it occurs when teachers feed information forward and back to their learners, providing information to the students about whether or not the learning is successful, suggesting ways to solve learning problems to increase learners' understanding and allowing instructors the opportunity to reinforce successful practices or modify unsatisfactory ones. The feedback portion of the assessment is what is shared with the student to give an idea of what needs to happen for learning and growth to occur. If feedback is regarded as an important aspect of formative assessment, thus, it should be provided continuously during the teaching and learning process. In this way, feedback keeps the learning moving (Hattie, 2009) and enhance the teaching process, while closing the gaps between the actual and desired achievement (Brown, Harris, and Harnett, 2010).

Heritage claims that in order to develop students' thinking and understanding, feedback should be clear, descriptive and criterion-based information, despite the fact that both the teacher and student may initially have different opinions on what and how a particular assignment should look (Wiggins, 2012). Across most research on feedback, there are commonalities about what constitutes good feedback (Brookhart and Moss, 2015; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Wiggins, 2012), but the main important element is that feedback must be useful and meaningful to the student to improve their learning. Mayer and Alexander (2011) assert that the

feedback should be meaningfully received and then acted upon by the learner. This is because, effective feedback occurs when the learners see the difference between their ideas of performance and that of their instructors or peers (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

According to Brookhart and Moss (2015), there are three lenses through which we can view feedback: (a) the micro view to determine whether the feedback has effective qualities; (b) the snap shot view to learn about whether or not the feedback will be received; and (c) the long view to determine the next steps that will lead to improvements and provide clear directions of where to head next (Brookhart and Moss, ibid.). However, according to Brookhart and Moss (ibid.), simply giving the feedback does not guarantee learning, as the student must decide how to act upon the feedback given.

Nolen (2011) argues that teacher feedback to students does not always increase student achievement. Feedback is a two-way, ongoing conversation (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). If students do not read the feedback (Hounsell, 1987), they will not act on it (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). Duncan (2007) states that it is commonly reported that students do not read feedback. Students need to understand the direct benefits of feedback (Spiller, 2009) and learners have to understand the feedback provided (Duncan, 2007). Students must understand the connection between the feedback given and learning goals. If the connection is not made, the feedback during the communication loop or feedback loop fails (Sadler, 2010). In other words, when feedback is too complex and not directed toward the learning goal or standard, feedback cannot lead to clearing misconceptions (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Feedback is not a one size fits all model, students can interpret the same feedback in different ways (Hattie and Jaeger, 1998). Though the learner is in a position to receive the feedback, he or she does not always understand it or see the benefit of the feedback provided (Heen and Stone, 2014).

Besides students' active role in the feedback process, the importance of the teachers' role should not be overlooked, as they are also a critical component to the effectiveness of the feedback. This is because, teachers also benefit from the feedback process. During instruction, teachers are able to provide effective feedback by observing students' understanding and adjust their teaching strategies to meet students' needs. What commentary the teacher provides is one foundation students may use to improve their learning progress, as well as their own understanding of

learning goals and standards, therefore giving them the opportunity for self-regulated learning (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), failure to self-regulate can negatively affect their self-motivation and self-esteem, which can, in turn, affect the way they approach the learning process and teacher feedback.

Rudland et al. (2013) claim that to ensure active engagement in the feedback process among the students, teachers are encouraged to build a positive rapport with the students and differentiate feedback based on their learning or thinking style. Building good relationships with the students will help support the teacher in creating a safe educational environment that is more conducive for learning (Rudland et al., 2013). Hence, to provide all learners the opportunity to grow and improve, feedback should be ongoing, and learners should be provided with opportunities to respond, reflect, and contribute (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2014).

Regardless of the learning and thinking style, the purpose of giving feedback is for it to influence the learner to move forward (Johnston, 2012). For this to happen, both the teacher and the student "need to listen to each other and value what's said" (Brookhart and Moss, 2015, p. 27) and trust that the best interest of the learner is at the center of the feedback.

4.3.3.1 Feedback as Written Comments

Feedback can be viewed as an important process for the improvement of writing skills for students (Hyland and Hyland, 2001). Giving written comments to students is more effective for improvement of performance than giving marks (Black and Wiliam, 1998). This is because written feedback contains heavy informational load which offers suggestions to facilitate improvement (Hyland and Hyland, 2006). Feedback can be defined as writing extensive comments on students' texts to provide a reader response to students' efforts (Hyland, 2003). Proper feedback assists students to recognise the desired goals, provides them information about their work compared to these goals, and indicates ways to close the gap between their assignment and these goals (Sadler, 1989). In order for feedback to be effective, students must be provided with effective feedback which is focused, clear, applicable, and encouraging (Lindemann, 2001).

Teachers spend a lot of time for providing feedback to students, expecting that this will enhance students' learning. However, often the teachers complain that students do not make sufficiently use of their feedback and that the effort of providing feedback was in fact a waste of time (Crisp, 2007). Furthermore, they expressed concern that students are more interested in their marks and grades compared to the feedback given (Duncan, 2007).

Sadler (1989) argues that only if students use the feedback it can be called formative feedback. However, students do not always use the feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that teachers should not give unclear or ambiguous comments. In many instances, language used by teachers to communicate feedback is not easy for learners to understand and the inability to fully understand the language used in comments contributes to learners' negative perceptions of feedback (Brown, 2007; Shute, 2008). Furthermore, if the feedback is not clear, students might not be able to understand or use it (McCune, 2004). Weaver (2006) mentions that students perceive feedback as not useful if it is too vague, too general, and/or does not indicate how to improve the assignment. In addition, feedback is also perceived as not useful if there are too many negative comments, and if it is not clearly related to the assessment criteria (Weaver, 2006). Subsequently, teachers might wrongly suppose that students understand the feedback (Crisp, 2007).

4.3.3.2 Oral Feedback

Oral feedback offers the opportunity to elaborate in the form of detailed comments in response to learners' questions and further explanation can be provided while still in class. This is consistent with Koen (2011) who states that oral feedback offers students the opportunity to seek clarification regarding comments and to invite students to ask questions if something is unclear. Koen's (ibid) findings highlight the important value of oral feedback as a communicative learning tool to communicate problems and suggest ways to correct mistakes.

4.3.4. Activating Learners as Resources for One Another (Peer Assessment)

During peer assessment, students are given the opportunity to learn through the experience of assessing their peers. Peer assessment help activate students as the owners of their own learning as well as instructional resources for one another (Brown, 2015). Peer assessment has the potential to empower and engage students besides providing them with a better understanding of criteria used by instructors to

evaluate their work (Brown, 2015). Peer assessment is often done in pairs or as a group so that they can benefit from sharing ideas and insights (Brooks, 2002). Students are encouraged to discuss the progress of their learning with each other to improve their learning development (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

According to Black and Wiliam (2009), learners can be actively involved as resources for one another by giving them the opportunity to evaluate and judge the work of their peers. The increased opportunity for communication can increase the students' confidence in their own work and make the students more sensitive to the criteria of their evaluation (Saito and Fujita, 2004). This allows the students to reflect on their own progress and learning and, if implemented carefully, will help transform singular teacher evaluation into a dynamic student to student type evaluation (Saito and Fujita, 2004).

Cheng and Warren (2005) claim that in the traditional pen and paper assessment, teachers play a major role whereas self and peer assessment is very much student-centred. Student assessment shifts from traditional testing to giving students an active role in the learning and assessment processes (Lladó, Soley, Sansbelló, Pujolras, Planella, Roura-Pascual, and Moreno, 2014). Research shows that peer feedback is often perceived as more understandable and more useful by students, because fellow students 'are on the same wave length' (Topping, 2003). Teachers, being experts in the domain, often provide feedback that is based on a thorough insight in the complexities of the subject and the expectations of a domain. Teachers should be able to translate this for their students, but research shows that they do often not succeed in this. Their feedback is often not understood or is misinterpreted (Yang et al., 2006).

In peer assessment, students are given the opportunity to become the 'teacher' and this might give them a sense of pride and their confidence level will be boosted. Students who carry out peer assessment and spot the mistakes of their peers will most likely avoid the same mistakes in their own work (Liu, Ngar-Fun, and Carless, 2006). If peer feedback proves to be a worthy substitute for teacher feedback, and in the meantime it teaches students to become self-regulated learners, two birds are killed with one stone.

According to Thomas et al. (2011), teachers should work hand in hand with their students in the assessment process and let go of their authority and pass it to the students which will give them the confidence and empowerment. Lew et al. (2008)

confirmed in their survey on students' views on peer assessment, that it was carried out in a very unbiased manner and has helped them in their learning (Sivan, 2002). Sivan (2002) also found in his study that peer assessment used in their learning process had developed their critical thinking skills. Alzaid (2017) states that peer assessment aims to transform students from mere receivers who only memorise and recall during test to active learners who can think creatively and critically.

In peer assessment, feedback is communicated in the language of the students, thereby providing an opportunity to talk about their problems and misconceptions. Research shows that learners appreciate being given the opportunity to talk about their work and clarify what needs to be done in order for them to progress (Falchikov and Goldfinch, 2000). This creates an opportunity for authentic communication and furthermore, when learners assess each others' work, they motivate each other (Falchikov and Goldfinch, 2000). To conclude, peer feedback can have an advantage for supporting learning in several ways. Peer feedback might be more understandable, and the activity of giving feedback in itself may raise students' understanding of the learning goals.

4.3.5 Activating Learners as Owners of Their Learning (Self-Assessment)

Researchers have proposed various definitions of self-assessment. Gregory, Cameron and Davies (2011, p.8) define self-assessment as a sequence of skills in a student's ability to 'reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise accordingly'. In agreement, Le Grange and Reddy (1998) add that such assessment allows the learner to be engaged in self-reflection, encourages them to be responsible for his or her own learning and also enables the teacher to identify what the learner values as important, hence, the teachers can provide them with effective feedback. Black and Wiliam (1998) also emphasise the importance of self-assessment, claiming that "it allows students to understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve" (p. 143). McMillan and Hearn (2008) agree, claiming that "student self-assessment promotes intrinsic motivation, internally controlled effort …and more meaningful learning" (p. 40). Thus, "self-assessment can be defined as students judging their own work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of improving future performance" (McMillan and Hearn, 2008, p. 40).

When learners assess their own work, they will learn to take ownership of their own learning. Self-assessment enhances communication in the sense that it focuses on learners' attention on aspects in which they experience problems. Besides, they can help learners to process and integrate new knowledge into their existing understanding. Brooks (2002) emphasises that self-assessment needs to be used during rather than at the end of the teaching-learning process of a particular learning unit so that learners can have an opportunity to reflect on the assignment while it is in progress and apply what they learn in practice while it is still relevant.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the conceptual framework that guides the study. It has also focused on introduction to the potential of and challenges in respect of the implementation of formative assessment policies. A discussion of how the seven key elements of the conceptual framework (contextual and cultural influences, the examination oriented system, formative assessment as a borrowed innovation, formative assessment strategies, resource-related factors, young language learners and teacher factors) could be understood and used by teachers during the processes of teaching, learning and assessment points both to the complex and challenging nature of how the range of assessment strategies can be taken up by teachers. Findings from empirical research reported in this chapter suggest that a consistent use of formative assessment strategies is yet to be successfully established in teachers' everyday practice. A range of factors can prevent teachers from implementing formative assessment policies related in particular the role and dominance of summative assessment (resulting in neglect of formative assessment); the context and culture; the status of formative assessment as an innovation; resource-related factors; teacher factors and the young language learners themselves. The next chapter elaborates the research design and methodology used to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The discussion in this chapter explains the methodological aspects underpinning this study and the research process.   As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, the aim of this study was to investigate the primary English teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment, and the factors that affected their implementation of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom. Methodologically, therefore, the researcher/participant interaction in the research is central and also subjective. This chapter begins with the justification for the selection of the interpretive paradigm, followed by the rationale for utilising a qualitative intrinsic case study approach. The reasons for selecting a multiple-case study strategy are also presented. Next, access to participants and ethical considerations for this research are outlined. The section on data collection provides a justification for the methods utilised in this research study, namely semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and documentary data. This chapter also explains how the data were analysed. The issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research is discussed in relation to four evaluative criteria used for judging the trustworthiness of research and findings.

5.2 The Interpretive Research Paradigm

A paradigm is defined as a worldview, "a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the real world" (Patton, 2002, p. 69). The research paradigm determines how the study should be conducted, the focus of the study and the approaches utilised in the interpretation of the data (Hammersley, 2002). In setting out to investigate teachers' understandings of formative assessment and assessment practices, an interpretive paradigm was the one I deemed most suitable because of its focus on discovering the multiple perspectives of all the participants in a setting (Henning, 2004). The belief in an interpretive paradigm holds that those who are involved in the research process construct knowledge socially and individually, hence there are multiple realities (Henning, 2004). Thus, the aim of the interpretive paradigm is to capture participants' perspectives on their lived experiences, not some objective notion of that experience. Hence, teachers participating in my study would offer multiple descriptions and explanations of their understandings of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom. This was

evident in collecting data for this study, as each teacher appeared to hold to their own understanding and use of formative assessment based on their own learning, experience, education and setting. Epistemologically, the participants in this research are assumed to be shaped by and also shape their environment as 'knowing' subjects. This study has been concerned with meaning and has sought to understand primary ESL teachers' experiences and interpretations of formative assessment in their everyday practice. In the interpretive paradigm, teachers are acknowledged as knowers with practical and personal knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998).

Indeed, the search for meaning is central to interpretive research (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, in consideration of my intention to explore teachers' meaning-making from various perspectives, this approach was considered to be the most appropriate as it is mainly concerned with understanding people's lived experience and the meanings they make of that experience as they encounter it in real-life situations (Merriam, 1998). In other words, the aims of research occurring within an interpretive paradigm are to understand, describe and develop situated explanations of a phenomenon or phenomena under study, according to its or their occurrences (Neuman, 2011). Since this research has sought to understand perceptions and interpret practices rather than find objective 'truths', the interpretive paradigm was deemed to be well suited to the aims of the research.

5. 3 Qualitative Intrinsic Case Study Design

To address the research questions identified in Chapter 1 (p.19-20), a *qualitative intrinsic case study* design (Stake, 1995) was developed. The choice of this design was greatly influenced by my aim to collect rich data and insights into the teachers' practices in the classroom (Nunan, 1992). Each individual teachers' understanding and practice of assessment were identified as the 'case' in my study and three 'cases' were selected, i.e. three English teachers working in their ESL classes in three schools in the state of Sabah, east of Malaysia.

In defining intrinsic case study, Stake (1995) uses the term 'intrinsic' to refer to research underpinned by a genuine interest in the case when the intent is to better understand the case. It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because in all its particularity and ordinariness (Stake, ibid), the case itself is of interest. The purpose is not to use the case for theory building. Therefore, as this research has sought to

understand perceptions and interpret the practices of three teachers, qualitative intrinsic case study was found to be the most suitable approach.

Definitions of 'case study' focus on its boundedness and on its holistic approach to a phenomenon, whilst at the same time attending to the particular (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) states that the key philosophical assumption upon which case study research is based is "the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 6). In the same vein, she comments that "reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality" (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Therefore, espousing this philosophical assumption, the primary interest is to understand meaning or knowledge as constructed by people. In other words, what really intrigues the case study researcher is the way people make sense of their world and their experiences in that world. Furthermore, case study provides a unique example of participants in real situations (and natural settings) which enable the researcher to understand ideas in a clear way rather than explaining them by using abstract theories (Cohen et al., 2007).

Creswell (2010) supports Merriam (1998) by adding that a case study is a qualitative research approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple-bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. The boundaries that define the cases in my study are English teachers and more specifically, those who teach learners in Year 1-5 in their specific work context, which is their primary ESL classroom. Individual case studies will be written up to document important, particularistic features of each case (Merriam, 1998) and to avoid a reductionist approach.

The qualitative methods of data collection focus on the processes and ways of finding out what people do, know, think and feel (Merriam, 1998) leading to the collection of rich qualitative data. As detailed below (Section 5.6), I used multiple methods of data collection such as semi-structured interviews, observations, video-assisted stimulated recall post-observation interviews, field notes and document analysis. By using different methods at various points in the research process, I "could build on the strength of each type of data collection and minimise the weaknesses of a single approach" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001, p. 408). The use of qualitative methods of data collection, enabled me to understand formative assessment as perceived from the teachers' point of view, as well as gain

access to the subjective experiences of English teachers within the contexts in which they interact with their learners. This approach, where context is foregrounded as a significant factor that influences human behaviour, resonated well with this study, as my intention was to find meaning within social interactions. Therefore, data were collected by interacting with research participants in their natural setting while gathering detailed information through multiple methods.

The choice of a case study was further motivated by the fact that although a case study presents the difficulty of generalising from a single case, "its uniqueness and its capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts" (Simons in Bassey 1999, p.36) constitute an advantage. In the context of my study, I did not aim to obtain information that is generalisable, but instead I aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the English teachers' meaning-making of formative assessment. As Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, a lack of generalisation does not mean that concrete knowledge obtained from each case is not valuable.

Having three teacher participants provided an opportunity to explore their individual stories in great depth and detail (Neuman, 2000). There was much to record, as teachers recounted their understanding of changes to assessment they were expected to introduce in their classrooms. As each teacher had a different story to tell, each became an individual case study and thus, the research project developed as multiple case studies (Stake, 1995). Whilst my primary focus was on individual stories, I was also aware that issues associated with assessment reform were likely to be common (Merriam, 1998) and repeated in school sites across Sabah, Malaysia. Thus, the lived experiences of three primary ESL classroom teachers are re-told, in the cross-case analysis, to show holistic patterns (Merriam, 1998) about formative assessment and assessment reform.

Multiple-case study strategy

The multiple-case study strategy I adopted provided a better understanding of each case, and the differences and similarities between them (Stake, 1995). Each case explores an individual teacher's understanding and practice of formative assessment in their primary ESL classroom (Merriam, 1998). The multiple-case strategy enabled me to explore the differences within and between cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008) in order to illustrate the "same issue" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). Multiple-case study research starts with a "quintain", which is "an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied" (Stake, 2006, p. 6). The quintain in this research was a phenomenon:

teachers' understandings of formative assessment and the role it played in their classroom practices.

As an interpretive case study, the data gathered and analysed in this study was thick and descriptive (Willis, 2007). However, following Merriam's (1998) recommendations to make the data finite, three teachers were selected for the case study. Merriam (1998) claims that "the more cases included in the study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be" (p.40). The strength of qualitative case study research is working in small samples, studied in depth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This allowed me to collect rich data as the focus was on a small participant sample. The multiple case study approach not only offers greater insight into an issue but also increases the value of imputing the findings to other cases.

5.4 Access to Participants and Ethical Issues

The question of access is central to qualitative research since the richness of the data collected ultimately depends upon what access is given to what sources of data (Akyeampong and Murphy, 1997). To grant interviews, people may need convincing that the research is of some value to them and assurances of the researcher's integrity so that they approach the interview situation in a spirit of cooperation. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) point out that:

> the problem of access is not resolved once one has gained entry to a setting, since this by no means guarantees access to all the data available within it ... not everyone may be willing to talk, and even the most willing informant will not be prepared, or perhaps even able, to divulge all the information available to him or her (p. 76).

Access has, therefore, two sides to it: first, the official permission and once in the field, the negotiated aspect with potential informants. These two aspects were taken into account in this study and are discussed next.

In order to comply with the code of ethics developed by the University of East Anglia, I applied to the Research Ethics Committee of the University, and received ethical approval for conducting the study (see Appendix A)., The process continued by gaining official permission to conduct the study in schools in Malaysia from the Malaysian Economic Planning Unit (EPU) (see Appendix B), followed by an official permission letter from the Sabah State Education Department (see Appendix C).

These consents were needed to gain complete access to all areas of the primary schools in the state in which I conducted my study.

For the recruitment of the participants, I first contacted the head teachers of five Malay-medium national primary schools that I had selected and explained the purpose of my study over the phone. Following these initial conversations, I sent each head teacher a letter explaining the study in detail and the characteristics of the English teachers required as participants, along with a tentative schedule for conducting the interviews and classroom observations. I then invited each head teacher to recommended one English teacher who was teaching in Year 1 to Year 5 (I was not given permission to include Year 6 because the students were preparing for their national examination) who met the criteria and would be willing to cooperate throughout the duration of the study. However, only four head teachers responded and gave me permission to conduct my study in their school.

Having obtained permission from the four head teachers, I went to the schools concerned to meet the head teachers. During my first meeting with the head teachers, I was introduced to the English teachers (except for 'Rachel' as she had class during that time) who had been approached and asked to participate in the study. As a result of this meeting, I was able to approach the teachers directly and briefed them about the purpose of the study and the data collection procedures, which they were going to be involved in. In Rachel's case, I contacted her (the head teacher gave her contact number) and set a meeting with her the next day in her school, in the staffroom. As the study progressed, one of the teachers decided to withdraw from the study. Therefore, three teachers from three primary schools participated in this study. Given that the participants represented no other group but themselves (Cohen et al., 2007), and that there is no intention in case study to generalise to a broader population, I was not concerned about the small number of participants.

Having obtained permission from the gatekeeper, the next ethical principle is to obtain the informed consent of the participants (Cohen et al., 2007). Richards (2003) emphasises the importance of obtaining honest consent from participants, which is vital in order to ensure that they are aware of the activities and elements that the research will involve. Therefore, at the initial meetings before data collection began, I made great efforts to reassure teachers that they were not obliged to participate and explained that their responses would be anonymised in any subsequent written

reports. This was especially important since my first point of contact in each school was the head teacher, who recommended approaching specific teachers. The nature of the research was also explained to the teachers carefully and consent for interviews to be audio recorded and classroom observation to be video recorded, obtained (all three teachers agreed to these requests). Of course, I cannot be sure of the extent to which all the teachers participated in the research willingly, but based on the rapport I established with them and on their open communications with me, I would hope that they did not feel under pressure at any point during and after data collection. Initial verbal consent was obtained and they were then asked to sign a letter of informed consent as a declaration of their willingness to participate voluntarily in the study prior to the commencement of the research (see Appendix D). Participants were also assured that participation in the study was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable (Cohen et al., 2007).

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicate that researchers have a responsibility to protect the participants' identity from the general public. To adhere to this ethical obligation, participants were informed of their right to anonymity and in order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms for participants and schools were used to protect teachers' identities and the identity of the schools (Simons, 2009). Participants were assured that information provided was to be kept safe and confidential. Data confidentiality was maintained by ensuring the data was separated from identifiable individuals. Written text, audio, and video data files and any digital recordings were securely locked and I was the only person able to access the files. I also safeguarded participants' confidentiality by transcribing all the data myself. My academic supervisors were the only other people able to read the raw data.

5.5 Site and Participant Selection

The study was employed in three selected Malay-medium national primary schools. The schools are situated in Sabah, one of the states in East Malaysia (see the map in Appendix E). The state chosen was based on my familiarity and practicality of the context, as I live there. The primary schools were selected based on convenience sampling. That is, the schools' geographical proximity and accessibility to the researcher is considered in selecting the schools (Dörnyei, 2007). Just one English language teacher from each school was selected in order to ensure that the data generated by such a number of participants would be manageable, given the limited time in which I had to conduct the research (Mugo, 2006). As a

government-sponsored research student, my data collection was expected to extend over a period of three months. Hence it seemed more practical to choose schools that were within easy traveling distance from my home.

This study has sought to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants; thus, it was important to select participants who "can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximise what we can learn" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.126). This is consistent with McMillan and Schumacher (2010) who maintain that it is on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the population that a judgement is made about which participants should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research. Hence, three English teachers teaching in a primary ESL classroom were purposively selected from three primary schools to acquire in-depth information regarding their understandings and practices of formative assessment. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select informants who were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about formative assessment. According to Merriam (2009), to begin purposeful sampling, one must first:

> Determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied. The criteria that are established for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases. (p. 77–78)

The three English teachers were selected in the hope that they would provide information about their experiences and understanding of formative assessment based on five characteristics:

  i.   Teaches English subject;

  ii. Has ESL qualifications to teach English language;

  iii. Has at least five years of teaching experience;

  iv. Has undergone School Based Assessment (SBA) training; and

  v.   Willingness to participate in the study.

Since the research was interpretive and qualitative, limiting the selection with this list of requirements was ideal as it is impossible to research everyone everywhere (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The main aim of case study research is the quality of the analysis rather than the number of participants. Table 5.1 below presents brief

demographic information about the three participants. To ensure anonymity, the three English teachers who participated in the research are referred to as 'Rachel', 'Ken' and 'Maya'.

Table 5.1: Profiles of the three primary ESL teachers

PARTICIPANTS	GENDER	TEACHING EXPERIENCES	POSITION(S) IN SCHOOL	TEACHER TRAINING EDUCATION	ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION	SUBJECT(S) TAUGHT IN SCHOOL
RACHEL (pseudonym)	Female	10 years	English teacher, class teacher	General Teaching Certificate	Bachelor in Business	English, Kadazandusun language, Music
KEN (pseudonym)	Male	10 years	Senior Assisstant, English teacher	English Teaching Diploma	Bachelor in Education (Management)	English
MAYA (pseudonym)	Female	22 years	English teacher, class teacher	English Teaching Diploma	Bachelor in Education (TESL)	English

Note: TESL refers to Teaching English as a Second Language

5.6 Methods of Data Collection

Data was collected over a period of three months. The choice of data collection methods was aligned with the aims of the research and the research questions (Creswell, 2010). Patton (2002, p.40) states that "qualitative methods are ways of finding out what people do, think and feel by observing, interviewing and analysing documents". Due to its flexibility, a qualitative case study does not have a particular data collection and analysis method. In this study, I adopted multiple methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews, video-assisted stimulated recall post-observation interviews, classroom observations, a collection of relevant documents and field notes. Data yielded by these methods helped me to find out what the participating teachers knew and understood, what they did, and reasons that were the basis of what they did, as well as documents relevant to their actions. Furthermore, these methods helped "to capture the complex reality under scrutiny" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 38) and triangulate all the data.

In the following sections, the rationale for selecting each research method and the processes of developing the research methods are discussed. Table 5.2 provides an

overview of the research methods used in the study to address the overarching research question and sub-questions.

Table 5.2: Research questions, methods, and data collection tools

Overarching Research Question: *What are the primary ESL teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom in Malaysia?*		
Research Questions	**Method**	**Data Collection Tool**
1) How do the teachers understand formative assessment, its purpose and what is required of them to implement it when teaching English to primary ESL students?	Semi-structured Interview	● Teacher interview schedules (see Appendix G and H)
2) What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom?	Lesson Observation	● Lesson Observation ● Observation Schedule ● Field notes
3) What are the factors that affect the implementation of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom in Malaysia?	Semi-structured Interview	● Teacher interview schedules
	Lesson Observation	● Lesson Observation ● Observation Schedule ● Field notes
	Scrutiny of SBA & Curriculum Documents	● SBA Documents ● Standard Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC)

5.6.1 Semi-structured Interview

For the current study, a semi-structured interview was used due to its flexibility in allowing the researcher to have a series of general questions related to the research objectives and to vary the sequence of the interview questions (Bryman, 2008). Cohen et al. (2007) define interviews as:

> A two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the purposes of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systemic description, prediction, and explanation (p.271).

I concur with Cohen et al.'s (2007) definition in that my aim was to obtain English teachers' in-depth experiences and views, with a particular focus on formative assessment.

The advantage of using semi-structured interview is that it allows participants to "voice their experiences and create the options for responding" (Creswell, 2005, p.

214). Besides, it gives room for the researcher to anticipate logical gaps in the data (Cohen et al., 2007). The use of a semi-structured interview also allowed me to construct new questions based on, and in relation to, the interviewees' responses. However, the order in which the questions were asked was not predetermined because their function was only to act as a guide that provides the themes or areas to be explored (Merriam, 2009). Teachers had the flexibility to expand and reflect on their own views within the parameters of the research questions and this allowed me to probe areas of significant interest (Cohen et al., 2007).

Deploying the interview as a research method had some limitations. First, data which were collected were teacher's subjective interpretations of classroom realities. Hence, that data provided insights into teachers' understanding about the implementation and impact of formative assessment. Secondly, the one-to-one nature of the interviews may have posed a risk of some teachers saying what they thought was expected of them rather than sharing their beliefs. To minimise these risks, as the researcher I ensured that I built a positive relationship with each teacher before the interviews were scheduled. It is believed that this contributed to teachers feeling more relaxed and willing to share their honest opinions with the researcher during the interviews. Moreover, prior to each interview, I explained to each interviewee about their anonymity, the overall purpose and the design of the study and assured them their participation or non-participation would have no bearing on any judgement made about their teaching performance. This was to limit concern that there might be negative repercussions from the education authorities. After verifying their interest in participating, the date and time for the interview were made at the participant's convenience. All participants agreed that the interviews would take place in their schools. However, Ken chose to conduct his preliminary interview at a coffee shop. Although the surrounding volume of conversation was sometimes detrimental to the quality of the audio recording, Ken seemed to feel relaxed in this setting.

Before I began the interview, I offered the participants a choice of whether they wanted to speak in English or Bahasa Malaysia. This approach was used to ensure that the participants did not feel anxious that their spoken English was in some way being tested. Having been given this option, all participants decided that the interviews be conducted in Bahasa Malaysia. With consent of the participants, all the interviews were recorded using a digital audio-recorder. Before the interview, each participant was briefed on the interview technique and reasons for using a digital

audio-recorder. The interview transcripts were also returned to the participants so that they could assess them for clarity. None of the teachers raised any issues regarding the transcripts.

Teachers were interviewed at several different points as part of this study, namely, I met them for a preliminary interview, pre-lesson interview, post-lesson video stimulated recall (VSR) interviews and follow-up interviews. This sequence of interview events will be further explained in the next section.

5.6.1.1 Preliminary Interview

The preliminary interview (see Appendix G) aimed at outlining the profile of the teacher participants to provide background information of the teachers and collecting information on what the teachers understand about assessment, particularly formative assessment. Each teacher was interviewed once before the classroom observation was conducted. The preliminary interview was the longest, approximately one hour in duration.

5.6.1. 2 Pre-lesson Interviews

The purpose of the pre-lesson interviews (see Appendix H) was to establish what the class had been doing in their English lessons, what topic the teacher would be teaching during the observation, the objectives of the lesson, instructional materials to be used and the teaching and assessment strategies that the teachers intended to use in their lesson. The interviews took approximately 15 minutes. These pre-lesson interviews resulted in uneven outcomes. The interviews with Rachel and Ken were successfully completed because they had provided time during their non-teaching periods to complete it. However, with Maya, it was not possible to complete the interviews before the classroom observations because she was unable to find the time to accommodate the interview.

5.6.1.3 Post-lesson Video Stimulated Recall (VSR) Interview

In an attempt to prompt participants to recall thoughts that they had while conducting their teaching and assessment, video stimulated recall (VSR) interviews were selected. As a type of introspective method, Gass and Mackey (2000) explain that stimulated recall methodology can be used to prompt participants to recall thoughts and comments on what was happening at the time of an activity originally took place.

In addition, it might enhance the findings of research by providing first-hand insight into each teacher's actions by creating a space for the participant to voice their thoughts and beliefs while observing their own actions (Gass and Mackey, 2000). In an attempt to explore learners' thought processes and strategies, stimulus plays a key role in which the collected data, such as video-taped or audio-taped data, or written products rely on participants recalling a previous event. As Gass and Mackey (2000, p.17) note, there is an assumption that 'some tangible (perhaps visual or aural) reminder of an event will stimulate recall of the mental processes in operation during the event itself', which is theoretically based on an information-processing approach.

A limitation of the non-participant observer role is that the researcher may fail to understand the perspective of the participants under observation. Therefore, to overcome the shortcomings of the observations, the semi-structured post-lesson VSR interview with each teacher enabled me to analyse the perceptions and attitudes of the English teachers about student learning and assessment during a particular lesson, and more specifically, their opinions, beliefs and judgement about their own choice of formative assessment strategies. It also allowed me to establish the relationship between their expressed ideas, understandings and their actual classroom practices. Hence, I was able to capture the complexity and range of formative strategies in each classroom observation captured on film.   The major concern, even with stimulus such as video or tape recordings, is that researchers need to be aware that stimulated-recall should be conducted as soon as possible after the teaching episode to maximise accuracy (Polio at el., 2006). Bloom (1995, cited in Gass and Mackey, 2000) found as high as 95 per cent accurate recall within two days of the original event, whereas the accuracy rate decreased to about 65 per cent after an interval of two weeks. However, for this study, it was not possible to conduct interviews immediately after each lesson observation or even after two days due to the teachers' time availability. Thus, I had to discuss and fix a suitable date and time to conduct the interviews with them. Even if VSR interview has the limitations as mentioned above, it has the significant advantage of accessing human cognitive processes that are unavailable by other means. Furthermore, conducting VSR interview permits data triangulation and is one means of mitigating researcher biases (McKay, 2006), thereby providing more complex and multilayered perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation (Silverman, 2006).

The stimulated recall interviews in the present research took place after each teacher was observed twice. The participants were given the option to be interviewed in English or Bahasa Malaysia. They all chose Bahasa Malaysia to facilitate more in-depth expression. The writers were provided with instructions on how to participate in the recall interview. The duration of the interviews varied from twenty-five minutes to one hour and the interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission.The teachers were encouraged to stop the tape at any point to make comments on his/her teaching. The researcher can also stop the tape to elicit further comments from the teacher. The main aim is to help the teacher recall his/her thought processes and reflect on what was happening during his/her teaching (Gass and Mackey 2000). The participants were given plenty of wait time to reflect on the unedited video segments and the researcher's questions. Providing an unrushed environment allowed participants to engage in the task of remembering, reflecting and expressing their views. All of these interviews were recorded using a video recorder.

5.6.1.4 Follow-up Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted after all data had been analysed. The aim was to follow up issues that emerged from the data. Transcripts of interviews were returned to participants for further clarity.

5.6. 2 Classroom Observations

According to Gibson and Brown (2009), observation is usually conducted when the focus is understanding practice and the rationale for that practice. Robson (2002) explains that the primary advantage of observation is its directness; it tells researchers what goes on in the classroom, and enables a close, rigorous examination of interaction; the researchers are able to watch what people do and listen to what they say, as distinct from what people say they do. As Robson (2002) states, real life in the real world would be shown within the natural settings of the classrooms.

Deploying this method enabled me to gather authentic data in situ, with direct relevance to Research Question 2. It is believed that collecting such authentic data, i.e. data not mediated by others (Cohen et al., 2007), contributed to ensuring that the findings of the study reliably represented the phenomena studied.There were altogether six classroom observations: two lessons of 60 minutes each were

observed per teacher. Data from classroom observations enriched the interview data by enhancing the interpretation of the experience of the participants and identifying their assessment practice for formative purposes. Observing without being involved in classroom activities helped me gain a focused comprehensive picture of the assessment practices of the three English teachers in their ESL classroom and see things that might otherwise be missed during interviews.

The challenge of conducting non-participant observation is that the presence of the researcher may cause a change in the behaviour of the participant during the observation (Creswell, 2009). This was addressed by establishing a good rapport with the participants beforehand to help them feel less self-conscious during the observations. As discussed, introduction and orientation sessions were held prior to my observation sessions so that teachers and students were assured that the video recording was not intended to evaluate or make judgements on their performance. Each teacher participant was able to choose when and where the recording would take place, how the equipment would be set up and the way in which it would be done. The observations focused on the following aspects of the class session:

- The sequence of learning and assessment activities that occurred during the class session;

- The classroom atmosphere and tools used (e.g. materials, supplies, what was written on the board), and how students were physically arranged during each activity;

- Teacher interaction with students as part of formative assessment episodes, including what may not be evident through the video or audio recording such as when a teacher referred to student work;

- The formative assessment episodes evident during each activity (for example, ways in which teachers used feedback, peer and self-assessment, questioning, and sharing learning intentions and success criteria).

In order to capture these elements, a video camera was used to record prominent episodes of instruction and assessment practices. All the participants gave consent to be recorded. Video recording assisted me to gain rich information and a more

comprehensive picture of what transpired in the primary ESL classrooms. Furthermore, it allows repeated observation of the same lesson to share with the teachers and to be able to check findings and reinterpretation (Miller and Zhou, 2007).

5.6.3 Observation Schedule and Field Notes

An observation schedule (see Appendix I) and field notes were used to describe the teachers' actual classroom instructions and to complement the recorded data. The observation schedule was developed from the conceptual framework of formative assessment (see Chapter 4) and comprised of five sections with a range of items in each: questioning, feedback, clarifying criteria and learning intentions, peer assessment, and self-assessment. As a researcher, I had to search for the ways in which teachers made meaning, while observing the interaction and taking field notes (Henning, 2004). Therefore, the observation schedule helped me to focus not only on one specific aspect of the lesson but also on what was happening in the whole class, which helped to generate deeper insights on how teachers' interpretation of formative assessment played out in the classroom. The observation schedule proved to be a key data source for providing an initial list of the sequence of activities occurring during each class session, identifying the tools that were used during each activity, capturing students' undertakings that were not captured on the video recording and establishing the context needed by the researcher to conduct post-lesson video stimulated recall (VSR) interviews. While the observation schedule frequently indicated that a formative assessment episode may have occurred, these notes did not capture the details of the interaction between and among students and the teacher that constituted many of the formative assessment episodes identified in the notes.

Bogden and Biklen (1998, p.108) define field notes as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in qualitative study". Field notes were used in this study to record a description of the setting and researchers' own feelings and ideas about what was observed. The field notes assisted me to familiarise myself with each setting. When there were interruptions during the observations, I was able to work on the field notes. Also, because the video recording equipment was placed in an unobtrusive place and could not be moved, I noted the classroom plan and described how the pupils moved around the classroom.

5.6.4 Documents

Another invaluable source of data is document analysis. Documents are often understood as written texts that can be seen as "a ready-made source of data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 104). The analysis of documents was not the analytical focus of this work but played a useful "subsidiary or complementary role" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 354) and was used as triangulation to the interviews and the classroom observations. It also provided evidence of the context and showed how stakeholders' definitions were being translated into practice.

Two sets of documents were analysed. The first set comprised formal documents such as the MOE's assessment policies, SBA guidelines and procedures, SBELC, related newspapers, the Malaysian Ministry of Education's (MOE) website, and the Malaysian Examination Syndicate's (MES) website. The second set comprised documents collected from the teachers' lesson plans, lesson book, any hand-outs or teaching materials used during the observed lessons, marking guidelines and rubrics, assessment tasks and students' work. These documents illustrated some of the functions and values of assessment in the participants' schools, relating to the participants' assessment practice. These materials were used not only as prompts for the interview to delve more deeply into teachers' understandings of assessment but also as information on how teachers' understandings were reflected in their instruction and assessment practice.

5.7 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using an interpretive inquiry lens. Data analysis is the systematic process of breaking data into significant and manageable units that can be broken down in stages (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). The qualitative data analysis involved organising and interpreting data, in short, making sense of the data through the teachers' definition and context. Key features such as inter relationships, patterns, themes and categories were identified (Cohen, et al., 2007).

In addition, the analysis was inductive in nature (Bryman, 2008), simultaneously conducted with data collection and interpretation through an interactive, recursive process (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 1994). As the researcher is the significant instrument in the analysis process, this study used a constant comparative analysis approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Simons, 2009), which requires the researcher to make constant comparison of incidents with others obtained from different data

sources. The comparative analysis of identified themes was first completed in one case. The identified themes from the constant comparative analysis then involved a cross-case comparison. There were four main sets of data to analyse: audio recordings, video recordings, field notes, and document analysis.

Before the actual analysis began, I organised all the data into manageable formats to allow for easy access when needed (Creswell, 2009). Then, I immersed myself in the data by rereading notes, listening and watching audio and video recordings to become familiar with and gain a general understanding of, each case. This process was followed by the transcription of the interview and observation data. Much of the data was collected in two languages, namely, Bahasa Malaysia and English. Initially, I transcribed the audio-recorded encounters in the language my participants used and translated the same into English later. I found these practices both daunting and time-consuming. I therefore resorted to combine transcriptions and translations at the same time. Transcribing the interview and observation data was an important stage in the data analysis process as it resulted in obtaining a written record, which was subsequently coded to identify themes.

After transcribing all data, segments of data were coded. Coding is a key process in approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012) whereby data are broken down into component parts and names and categories generated from the participants' context bound information in the process (Bryman, 2012). Attempts to code the data did not occur in a discrete phase but was an ongoing process both during and after fieldwork, as it aimed to identify 'what was going on' in the case study contexts. Following the observation of such instances of repetition, I initially employed open coding. Open coding involves an analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions discovered in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This was done by examining each piece of text from the transcripts, line-by-line, to segment the data into units of meaning. Subsequently, selective coding was used, which involved integrating and refining categories representing the main theme of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). At this point, I used Black and Wiliam's (2009) conceptual framework regarding formative assessment, outlined in Chapter 4 as an inductive tool, which helped to pool the categories to form a descriptive whole. This analysis involved developing a coding system called 'coding categories', in which the transcripts were read to look for regularities and patterns, and words or phrases were written down to represent the pattern. Finally, I drew out the themes and patterns in the data that would shape my

study. The three cases were developed as a portrayal within each case, and then comparisons of emergent themes were made across the three cases.

5.8 Trustworthiness

Four primary criteria were used to ensure the trustworthiness of data in this study; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Ary et al., 2010; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility is the ability of the study to measure what it is intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). Credibility in qualitative research concerns the truthfulness of the inquiry's findings (Ary et al., 2010). To address this issue, two main strategies were used. The first was triangulation, usually understood as seeing a case from different perspectives and sources to deepen understanding of that case (Simons, 2009). I collected data to investigate a phenomenon from different sources to see if the findings would be aligned across sources (Cohen et al., 2007; Miles and Huberman, 1994), through interviews, classroom observations, field notes, and documents. Triangulation also decreases the likelihood of misinterpretation (Stake, 1995).

Another strategy I used was member-checking (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which involves giving participants the opportunity to confirm or challenge the transcriptions of what they have said. Recorded transcripts of responses were openly shared with all three participants to check for accuracy of perceptions. I also sent copies of transcribed interviews to all the participants and requested clarification of any perceived misrepresentations. This step was not only necessary to increase the trustworthiness of the data but also to counter my own perceptions and albeit subconscious but possible bias.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or generalised to other contexts or to other groups (Ary et al., 2010). Two main strategies were conducted to address this. The first was to provide thick description through detailed analysis of the interview transcripts, observations, documents and use of purposeful sampling to allow the possibility of applying the process to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I also compared my findings to previous, related studies carried out in different contexts (reviewed in Chapter 2 and discussed with reference to my findings in the discussion chapter).

Confirmability is the "extent to which the data and interpretation of the study are grounded in events" rather than the researcher's personal construction (Lincoln and

Guba, 1985, p. 324). In this study, the issue of confirmability was addressed by a thorough description of my whole research process, and by clearly linking my method of data collection to my method of analysis, particularly in the findings section (see Chapters 5 to 8). Extensive appendices are provided as supporting evidence. Researcher bias is minimised by giving detailed description of the criteria and procedures undertaken in the selection of participants, justification and explanation of the methods employed in the data collection, and the means of the analysis used to interpret the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). My interpretation of the data was double-checked by my academic supervisors to reduce bias and ensure consistency with the data. Another way to ensure confirmability is to provide detailed methodological description, which enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Dependability indicates the stability of results over time (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Dependability requires an audit trail of clear documentation of all the research decisions and activities in a chain of evidence from the time of data collection to the conclusion of the research (Bryman, 2001). The issue is addressed through a clear explanation of the methods used. In this chapter, therefore, a justification of the methods, the research design, the data gathering process and the process of analysis (Shenton, 2004) were discussed in detail. Another way to ensure dependability of data is triangulation (Simons, 2009), already discussed in this section.

5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research paradigm and methodological framework that guided the conduct of the current study have been presented. In alignment with recommendations for interpretative case study research, I have sought to ensure flexibility and rigour, as well as the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The fieldwork, which was carried out over a period of three months, yielded interview, classroom observation data and field notes, complemented by some useful documents. The issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Ary et al., 2010) has been addressed by seeking to adhere to four evaluative criteria (credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) which are used for judging the trustworthiness of research and findings. It is to the findings from this qualitative intrinsic multiple-case study that this thesis now turns.

CHAPTER SIX

RACHEL AND HER CLASSROOM

6.1 Introduction

As noted, the purpose of this multiple-case study was to investigate ESL teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in a primary ESL classroom. In the next three chapters, I provide a comprehensive description of each participant teacher in their own context. Each case description in chapters Six, Seven and Eight starts with a profile of the teacher, the school where they teach, their observed English class, and their understandings of formative assessment. This is followed by a discussion of their observed assessment practices. The data that inform these three cases have been collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, field notes, and documents analysis with a view to providing detailed, 'thick' description of the participant teachers and their classroom. This chapter focuses on research question one (RQ1): How do the teachers understand formative assessment, its purpose and what is required of them to implement it when teaching English to primary ESL students? And research question two (RQ2): What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom?

6.2 Bayu Primary School

Bayu Primary School, established in 1940, is a national school where all subjects are taught in Bahasa Malaysia with the exception of English and Pupils' Own Language (POL)[1] subjects. At the time of the study, the school had 1,209 pupils on roll with the majority being local native pupils. The teaching staff comprised 75 teachers. There were 6 classes for each level, starting from Primary 1 (7 years old) to Primary 6 (12 years old) with a total of 36 classes. This school also has a pre-school class open for pupils from the ages of 4 to 6 years old. For each level, the pupils were streamed into two 'good' classes, two 'weak' classes and two 'average' classes, based on their performance in

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[1] Pupils' Own Language (POL): Mother tongue Language (Other language besides Bahasa Malaysia and English)

Mathematics, Bahasa Malaysia and English. The average number in each class was 40 pupils.

Most urban schools in the country have a high pupil enrolment, thus two sessions are needed to accommodate all the pupils. At Bayu Primary School, the pre-school and Level Two (Primary 4-6) classes are in the morning session which begins at 6.50 a.m. and finishes at 12.10 p.m. The Level One (Primary 1 – 3) are catered for in the afternoon session starting at 12.50 p.m. and finishing at 5.30 p.m. Both sessions are made up of 10 thirty-minute lessons each day with a 20-minute break in the middle of the school day. Pupils gather for an assembly in the school hall every Monday before lessons begin.

A visitor may be struck by the attractive appearance of the school, despite its small and compact area, the first impression suggesting that it is well resourced. At the main gate, there is a security system which includes security guards. The large administration building part houses a medium reception area with tables and chairs, fresh flowers on the table and attractively draped curtains. The school has a school office, a staffroom, 36 classrooms, a resource centre, a computer room, a hall and specialist subject rooms. The specialist subject rooms include a science room, a living skills room resembling a wood workshop, and a room for Islamic religious lessons. The resource centre has a library, an audio-visual room and a teaching aids room. The library is well-stocked with books in Bahasa Malaysia and English. Unfortunately, due to the limited space, there are no playing areas or sports field.

Except for the Head Teacher and his three Deputy Head Teachers who have their own offices, the rest of the academic staff are accommodated in the staffroom. The staffroom is air-conditioned, a facility enjoyed by teachers of very few schools throughout the country. Each teacher's workspace in the staff room consists of a table and a chair, and with 75 teachers, there is little space to walk in between these tables. Upon entering the school, it is apparent that safety and security measures are in place and that there is discipline at the school.

The school's assessment policy is made up of two tests and two examinations in an academic year. Details of the dates, the topics to be assessed and the teachers responsible for setting each of the test or examination papers are set in the scheme of

work for the various subjects. Subject teachers are required to follow the scheme of work as laid down by the respective heads of the standard concerned.

6.3 Rachel's Background, Experience and Professional Development

Rachel received a Bachelor degree, but not in the field of education or English language (see Table 5.1). She started to work as a teacher several years after she completed her Diploma in Education, specialising in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), a one-year primary school-oriented teaching qualification, which she obtained from one of the local Teachers Training Institution (formerly known as Teachers Training College). Rachel had about ten years' teaching experience, eight of which in Bayu Primary School, by the time she participated in the present study; Bayu Primary School was her third school and also her first-year teaching level two pupils (Primary 4-6).

Rachel is responsible for two English Year 4 classes. Besides teaching English, she also teaches Music Education and Kadazandusun (local native language). According to the Standard-based English Language Curriculum (SBELC), ten teaching and learning periods should be conducted a week (Ministry of Education, 2011a). This means that Rachel has to teach English for twenty periods in a week, or the equivalent to 600 minutes. Overall, in a week, Rachel had 29 periods, which is equivalent to 870 minutes of teaching. In her teacher training, much emphasis was put on the basics of learning how to teach, with a specialisation in teaching methods and teaching practice. She took one or two classes on assessment during her graduate study, yet rated her training in assessment to be minimal.

6.4 Year 4 ESL Classroom

Rachel's classroom is situated in the first row of a wooden block near the school hall. The classroom is equipped with 42 plastic chairs and 42 wooden tables for the pupils, and two large tables and two chairs for her located at the front of the class (see Figure 6.1). It is approximately 15 x 20 metres, with a three-metre whiteboard occupying almost the entire front wall. On the right side of the whiteboard is a bulletin board that is used to post the class timetable, classroom cleaning schedules, important and latest news from the school administrator and other curriculum-related documents. The back wall of the classroom is fitted with a bulletin board, which is divided into various sections for display

of pupils' work in the various subjects.

The classroom is well ventilated, with almost the entire wall consisting of louvre windows. Around the walls are posters, pictures, wall charts and teaching and learning aids, arranged according to the different learning areas. This typical primary classroom in Malaysia may be considered unusual as an English language teaching classroom by those who would expect a small class, arranged in a less formal way in order to maximise pupil talk. In the classes observed (which took place at between 6.45 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. on Mondays through to Thursdays and from 6.45 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. on Fridays), I noticed that pupils tended to arrive before the teacher and sit silently or, to a limited extent, engage in common chit-chat before the teacher came in.
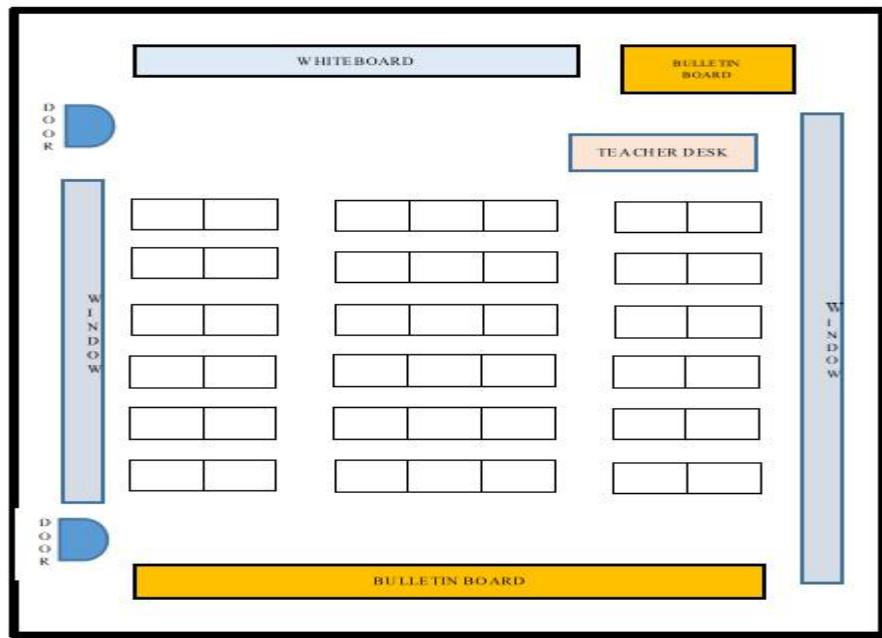
Figure 6.1: Overview of seating arrangements in Rachel's Year 4 ESL classroom

Rachel's classroom provided an interesting mixed level of pupils. Her class was a multi-racial classroom with a combination of male and female students from different races, religions and with varying literacy levels. The majority of the pupils' first language was Bahasa Malaysia.

6.5 Interpretations and Understandings of Formative Assessment

Rachel's prediction in relation to the new assessment policy implementation was that formative assessment would make a difference to the way pupils are taught if teachers understood it well. She stated that the policy was important because it *"specifies guidelines to be followed in assessing the pupils" (PI/TR/2015)[2].* Rachel seemed to understand that formative and summative assessment are different and distinctive and confirmed the incorporation of both forms of assessments within her assessment practice but understood and defined formative and summative assessment differently. Rachel claimed that summative assessment is used because it is an institutional requirement of the school and Ministry of Education and that the school's emphasis is on examination results. The pupils were continuously assessed both for formative and summative purposes, but summative assessment was emphasised at the end of the year.

> *"I use summative assessment at the end of the semester because I have to and the school and government require so". (FUI/TR/2015)*

Rachel further explained that the feedback that they gave the parents were the examination results and not the formative assessment results. She elaborated that teachers are asked to prepare a report slip and the school organised parent meetings where these were handed out. She further added that parents were not familiar with the band system. She explained:

> *"But this year we give them the exam marks. Compared to last year, we gave them the Band. So, they don't understand and they don't know how to tell their children. Because got one incident, they thought that Band 1 is better than Band 6. So, they thought 1, 2, 3 is good while 4, 5, 6 is bad". (PI/TR/2015)*

This seems to suggest that due to the demand for grades from the authorities and parents, teachers have no choice but to put the emphasis on summative assessment. Rachel understood formative assessment as a tool to check students' understanding

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[2] All the audio recordings were fully transcribed, and in translating her interview to English language, I aimed to maintain the original meaning as far as possible. Coding of the interview: (Type of interview/ participant's initial/ year of the interview) [PI = Preliminary Interview; PTLI = Post lesson Interview; FUI = Follow-up Interview; TR = Teacher Rachel].

during the learning process. She further emphasised that assessment for formative purposes should be integrated into the teaching and learning process, with teachers involved at all stages of the assessment cycle, from planning the assessment programme to identifying or develop appropriate assessment tasks:

> *"Formative assessment is the assessment that we do in the class…it is ongoing". (PI/T1/2015)*

Rachel agreed on the rationale for incorporating formative assessment as intended, to do assessment across the learning process continuously rather than conducting it only at the end of the learning period. This change, according to Rachel, had the *"potential to enhance learning" (PI/T1/2015)*. As such, formative assessment was, from her perspective, used as a tool to provide teachers with useful information about students' progress in learning and make changes to teaching and learning. Formative assessment also serves as a guide that teachers can use in making decisions about future instructions or giving space for improvements and as a way to fill in the gap that occurred in the lesson. Although difficult and time-consuming, she emphasised that, as a continuous process, formative assessment enhances pupils' learning and is important for teachers' accountability:

> *"Well, actually it helps me too in a sense that we can identify the drawbacks, I mean assess our teaching skills, improve them if needed". (FUI/TR/2015)*

The interview data revealed further that Rachel considered formative assessment as an advantage for her to assess her pupils because she believes teachers know their pupils well. She also thought that formative assessment is especially beneficial for pupils of low language proficiency as: *"somehow we don't see us failing them. If they can speak and able to communicate, they should get some marks" (PTLI/TR/L1/2015)*. She emphasised that it gave pupils the chance to demonstrate their best, making it a 'fairer' form of assessment:

> *"…because I'm the examiner and my students have their chance to prepare, I think that is fairer than the exam. Exam is one-off. So, I think this is fair, yes, fair to the students because I know if they have tried their best, and then I know their standard". (PI/TR/2015)*

The statement above suggests that Rachel considered the aspect of 'multiple opportunities' in formative assessment as fairer than the one-off public examination. The further potential of incorporating formative assessment in the teaching and learning process, according to Rachel, was that it helped prevent the use of test-wise skills, sustain the degree of pupils' effort throughout the learning process and keep the pupils motivated. She also agreed that formative assessment could assess aspects of speaking and listening that could not be assessed in the public examination. All these were considered to be positive for learning:

> *"I think its aim is to reduce pressure on the pupils, who were usually keen to achieve high scores". (PI/TR/2015)*

> *"Yes, um....it does have its benefit you know. For example, speaking and listening skills. You cannot test that in the exam. it would be difficult". (PI/TR/2015)*

She indicated that by introducing formative assessment, more professional control had been handed to teachers, which in turn made it possible for teachers to conduct assessment rather than solely rely on test and examination. However, Rachel claimed that the change was not as substantial for some teachers. For example, Rachel pointed out that *"the policy is still the same. I do not see much change over these years" (PI/TR/2015)* and claimed to have been doing assessment as she thought it was best. She added, *"this has been the same case for many years we did like this all along. Only now it is put forward and regulated in documents" (PI/TR/2015).* This seems to suggest that the incorporation of formative assessment in the SBA policy had not impacted significantly on Rachel's assessment practices.

As reported in Chapter 3 Section 3.2, it was the policymakers' intention to give teachers a certain amount of autonomy in the assessment process in terms of text and task selection and the timing of assessment. Rachel agreed that the *"teachers are given considerable freedom in the decision-making" (PI/TR/2015)* in relation to, for example, the assessment tasks, timing and location. Rachel's point above also shows her understanding of the policymakers' intention. However, the concerns that Rachel reported above might suggest that the degree of flexibility of the new assessment policy and the autonomy that teachers have in the assessment process caused ambiguity and put the reliability and fairness of the assessment results under question. Rachel had this kind of reaction probably because she was used to the uniformity that is emphasised in

the public examination, which has been a long tradition in the educational system in Malaysia.

The data further revealed that Rachel seemed to understand formative assessment more in the light of its administrative functions. The improvement of learning function was recognised, but primarily from the view of increasing pupils' motivation and encouraging pupils' effort in the learning process. The important aspects of formative assessment such as teacher feedback and the involvement of pupils in the assessment (Sadler, 2007; Black and William, 1998) appear to be missing (further discussed in Section 6.6.4). She also pointed to difficulties in putting formative assessment in practice in primary ESL classroom due to the number of students and heavy workload:

"It's hard to do in a class with 42 students". (PI/TR/ 29.07.15)

6.6 Key Classroom Assessment Practices

This section presents emerging themes related to what, and how, formative assessment strategies are enacted in Rachel's primary ESL classroom. Building on the discussion of what she understood as formative assessment in the previous section, this part presents the findings that address research question 2 (RQ2): What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom?

6.6.1 Clarifying and Sharing of Intentions and Criteria

I observed two lessons in Rachel's Year 4 English class. Both classroom observation data illustrated that Rachel informed students about what they were expected to do but she did not explicitly explain the learning objectives and criteria. How Rachel explained learning intentions in the observed lesson are presented in Snapshot 6.1 below.

SNAPSHOT 6.1

RACHEL'S SHARING OF LEARNING INTENTIONS WITH STUDENTS

English Lesson 1: The Future of Malaysia

The teaching session began with Rachel asking students questions about their race. Students were responding to her questions. Rachel then explains the different types of races found in Malaysia and emphasised on the importance of living harmoniously. Rachel took out two posters which she made herself and showed them to the students. She then introduced the lesson and asked them if they remembered what they were asked to do in the previous lesson. Rachel had instructed the students to prepare and present a poster entitled "The Future of Malaysia". Rachel raised some questions about the two posters. Subsequently, she spoke about her learning expectations for the students in this lesson.

As revealed in Snapshot 6.1, the learning outcomes and assessment standards were implicitly informed. In order to share the learning objectives and criteria, she showed a poster as a model of what the students were expected to do. In other words, instead of listing the criteria or learning objectives the students are expected to achieve, Rachel modelled to the students the learning objectives and criteria of the lesson. This practice of modelling the learning objectives was also evident in the second observed lesson, as seen in Extract 6.1. Rachel began by informing students that they would play a guessing game and reminded the class that they needed to ask questions in order to guess the types of insects their friends were acting out. She then wrote some sample questions that the students could use during the game.

Extract 6.1 (CO/TR/L2/2015)[3]

Turn	Exchange	
1	T	Okay, and then we will be playing a guessing game.
2	PS	Yeah!
3	T	You need to ask questions okay! (picks a marker pen). You need to ask questions (picks up the textbook). Okay, so you need to ask questions okay (writes the word 'do' on the whiteboard) for you to know what is the insect (continues writing 'you sting' on the whiteboard).
4	P	Do you sting? (a student reads aloud what the teacher wrote on the whiteboard)
5	T	(circles the questions 'Do you sting?' and writes 'do you have wings? How many? and circles them too). Okay, you just sit in groups okay? (pause) (writes down 'where do you live', 'what do you eat?', 'Are you a/ an _____?', 'How big/small are you?', Are you poisonous?', 'Do you make sounds?' and circles all of them).
6	T	Okay, group one. So, this is one, two, three, four, five, six *ya* [okay]? (writes six columns on the board). Please class, don't make noise! (pause) So, this will be a competition among you okay? So that… (pause). Okay, now send your (signals group one to send two of their members to act out the insect). Okay, from group one, who will act out the action? (picks up the pictures). Come here! I will give you the picture. Okay, two persons only.
7	PS	(two volunteers from Group 1 moves to the front of the class)
8	T	The rest of you sit down but you just keep quiet when they act out. You cannot give the answer okay (gives instruction to Group 1 members). The rest of you have to ask and answer the… (pause) I mean to know, to determine what is the insect. (shows a picture to both the volunteers from Group 1)

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[3] Coding for classroom observation: (type of method/participant's initial/number of observation/ years of observation) [CO = Classroom Observation; TR =Teacher Rachel; L2 = Lesson 2].

		(pause)
		(Teacher helps the pupils by showing them how they should act out)
		Yes, because I showed them the picture and they have to act out. Okay! The rest of you please sit down! Each group will have turn to ask questions okay. Okay, one, two, three (looks at both the volunteers from Group 1 signalling them to begin).

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Generally, both lessons observed were characterised by active interaction between Rachel and the learners. When she presented the lessons, she did not explicitly communicate the purpose of learning but instead used modelling as a way to specify the learning objectives.

6.6.2 Oral Questioning: *"…to see if my students can give correct answers to my questions"*

Oral questioning is the most common strategy that Rachel used to stimulate student thinking and to understand pupils' current level. These questions occurred as a part of the teaching and played an important role in assessing pupils. I took the indication that oral questions in her two lesson plans had been planned as a sign of her having an understanding that assessment does not only take place after instruction but also during instruction. Using questioning to establish the level and extent of learners' previous knowledge was evident in Rachel's lesson. Both observed lessons started with a review session, conducted through oral questioning. This review session centred on the previous lesson or on some vocabulary deemed important to the pupils' understanding of the lesson. She stated the reason for the review at the beginning of the lesson was to identify their prior knowledge and evaluate whether the pupils understood what she had taught in the previous lesson:

"Most of them are continuations of what we did in the previous lesson. I first take them back to what we did before I continue with the lesson. […] Maybe there are some definitions that they need to know before we continue with the next topic. I make them recall what they learned before".
(PTLI/TR/L1/2015)

"I ask questions to see if my students can give correct answers to my questions. If they can give me the correct answers, this means that they understood my lesson and what I am teaching". (FUI1/TR/2015)

"I think I also wanted to know what they can see from the picture because I was showing them the poster during this time right? […] it's because I wanted to generate their ideas". (FUI2/TR/2015)

She appeared to value this process of establishing pupils' prior knowledge, especially with regards to what she had taught in previous lessons. She was not only interested in establishing what pupils knew but she also in checking the depth of their knowledge. For instance, in her lesson on 'The Future of Malaysia' she asked questions to ascertain learners' prior knowledge on the races and traditions in Malaysia. During the lesson, she checked and reminded the learners about what they had learnt in previous lessons. The focus was on whether learners could remember the previous knowledge. This seems to reveal her knowledge of how topics progressed across the lessons. Although the focus was on establishing what learners knew about the races and traditions in Malaysia, what was evident was the use of questioning to allow a number of learners to respond within a short time period. Learners' answers revealed their understanding of the different races and traditions found in Malaysia. In this way, questioning was used as an effective teaching and learning strategy and as a form of formative assessment.

Rachel used questioning to ascertain learners' understanding of the new knowledge. She pointed out that information gathered through questioning helped to determine learners' level of understanding of what had been learned in class and the problems they encountered during the lesson. Rachel stated:

"I always ask questions. The purpose of teaching is for the learners to understand, I believe that it would be difficult to carry on teaching without assessing them by asking questions all the time to make sure they understand". (FUI2/TR/2015)

Despite claiming that questioning was important to help understand pupils' learning, the observation findings revealed that Rachel posed more closed questions during classroom interactions as compared to open questions. The pervasive use of closed questions suggests that Rachel aimed at having pupils recall facts without having them express their (pupils) personal thoughts. This also suggests that Rachel was 'seeking the right answer', leaving little room for the development and nourishment of classroom dialogue. Most of the questions asked were responded to with mainly one-word, two-word, or 'Yes/No' answers. When asked about the reasons why she used these types of questions, Rachel seemed satisfied when the pupils actively responded to her questions. She explained:

> *"I didn't realise I asked those type of questions but for me, I*
> *am fine with it as long as they respond to my questions […]*
> *better than being quiet". (FUI2/TR/2015)*

During the lessons, Rachel had the opportunity to elicit more thoughtful responses from the pupils but she did not take the opportunity to probe the pupils' response, even though this could have helped her to establish the pupil's understanding further (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005). For example, in Turn 5 in Extract 6.2 below, the question *'so, what will you think will happen to all of us…what will happen to our future in Malaysia?'* was an unclear question which had caused confusion among the pupils. As a result, there was no response from the pupils. The answers to this question might vary and any logical answers referring to what will happen to the country if there were no help from the firemen or fire department, for example, could have been accepted. Although this question could have been used to elicit more extended responses where Rachel could have elaborated, by for example, describing the roles of firemen, or relating the topic to the pupils' experiences of visiting a fire station or encountering a fire, she did not take the opportunity to probe the pupils' response or go beyond merely repetition and acceptance of pupils' answers to encourage interaction in the classroom.

Extract 6.2 (CO/TR/I1/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Okay, this is the picture (showing the first poster). What can you see in the picture class? Who can tell me? What can you see? What is the first picture?
2	PS	Snakes!
3	T	Snake? Yeah! That is a python. So, who are these people?
4	P	Firefighter!
5	T	Yes! Firefighter, fireman! (looks at the picture) Rescue Department. This was taken in Lahad Datu. (pause) Okay, so this picture was taken in Lahad Datu with a very long snake near one of the building near Telecom in Lahad Datu. So, these are the people in our country. So, what will you think will happen to all of us…what will happen to our future in Malaysia? (looks at pupils)
6	PS	(Silence)
7	T	Do you get what I mean?
8	PS	No!
9	T	No? (laughed) Okay, and then the other picture. What do you think is this? 'Decision on track up on Mount Kinabalu soon' (reads the newspaper headlines). Okay, when they talk about Mount Kinabalu, what comes into your mind?

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Turn 12, 20 and 24 in Extract 6.3 below shows a similar sequence. Rachel accepted the answers based on what the pupils saw in the poster and immediately ignored the question by changing the topic or question when there was no response from the pupils (see Turn 26 and 28).

Extract 6.3 (CO/TR/L1/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
12	T	Earthquake! Yes! So, what happened to Mount Kinabalu after the earthquake? Aza?
13	Aza	*Runtuh* [Collapsed]
14	T	*Ya, runtuhkan*? [Yes, it collapsed right?] Okay, so do you think people will still climb Mount Kinabalu after this?
15	PS	No!
16	T	Yes! Actually, they have opened up a new what^…? (looks at the pupils)
17	PS	(silence)
18	T	Trail. So that the people will get (pause)…go and climb Mount Kinabalu again. And the third picture here is about? (looks at the pupils)
19	PS	(silence)
20	T	*Merdeka!* [Independence] Because this is the month of *Merdeka* [Independence]. So, this is showing the *Datuk Bandar* [Mayor] preparing for the *Merdeka* [Independence] cele^bration. Okay, and the second one (shows the second poster to the pupils). What are these? (points to the picture)
21	PS	Ethnics in Malaysia! Dusun! Murut!
22	T	*Ya* [Yes] di^fferent celebration that celebrated in^… (pause and looks at pupils) Malaysia. So, this is just a drawing so, you can see that they are wearing different kind of^ … (pause) costume. Okay, what about this one? (points to the second picture on the second poster).
23	PS	Dancing! Action song!
24	T	Yes! This is a picture of your friends. This is found in the newspaper because they won the action song competition and their performance was about Sabah. We live in multi-racial right? The third one is also from other school. So, do you think that preserving the … (pause and looks at pupils) Uh, mmm...I mean uhh… (pause) among us in Malaysia, do you think that living in harmonious is good or not?
25	PS	Yes!

26	T	Yes. What is… (pause) Why do we have to live harmoniously?
27	PS	(Silence)
28	T	Okay, never mind. Um...mmm…I will ask some of you who have done this to go in front and share about your poster that you have made. Okay? Can you please do that?

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Rachel also used questioning as a strategy for ensuring pupils' engagement and selection of pupils. She seemed to value the process of asking questions during the lesson to ensure that learners took part in the learning process. She believed that it would help encourage pupils to be more attentive during her lesson:

> *"I will select students. I just choose randomly. I call out their name. If I do this, they will focus more [..] They are afraid I will ask them to answer my questions. If they don't listen or pay attention, then they can't answer my questions".*
> *(PTLI2/TR/L2/2015)*

How Rachel used questioning to nominate a particular pupil to respond to her question is presented in Extract 6.4 below (see Turns 4 and 12). She also used questions to challenge low levels of participation, especially among passive pupils and those sitting at the back of the classroom (see Turns 10 and 16). This questioning practice might suggest that Rachel is aware of a need to provide equal opportunities to other pupils to participate in the lesson. However, many pupils did not take advantage of this. This may have resulted from a 'face-saving' habit that is part of the Malaysian culture, or the historic practice of being a passive learner. In response to such a learning culture, Rachel used choral response, brainstorming and showed respect for the pupils' answers.

Extract 6.4 (CO /TR/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
4	T	Okay, other people again (stands up and looks at the students). Okay, Zana! (points to Zana)
5	Zana	Do you have wings?
6	P	Yes!
7	T	Yes, we do! (corrects student's response)
8	P	Yes, we do! (made immediate correction based on teachers' feedback)
9	PS	(Pupils stand up while raising their hands and calling the teacher simultaneously)
10	T	Okay, other students please. Okay, Haziq, do you want to ask a question?
11	Haziq	(shook his head)
12	T	Okay, Nora? (looks at Nora)
13	Nora	Where do you live?
14	T	Where do you live? (repeats Nora's question)
15	P	In the park.
16	T	In the park (repeats student's answer) Please, give chance to other students.
17	PS	(Pupils standing up while raising their hands and calling the teacher at simultaneously)
18	T	Okay, Nurul! (points at Nurul)
19	PS	Teacher! Teacher! (Pupils standing up while raising their hands and calling the teacher at simultaneously)
20	T	Wait! Wait! Wait! (looks at the pupils) Okay, Nurul what is your question? Faster!
21	Nurul	(mumbled)
22	T	Okay, ask again!
23	Nurul	Are you a praying mantis?
24	P	Yes!
25	T	Okay, very good! Okay, what group are you?

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

The data also revealed that whole class reply or choral response accounted for the largest proportion of pupils' input as compared with other types of response and was the dominant method of responding to teacher initiations. Choral responses were often brief and usually took the form of repeating the teacher's utterances or completing her cued elicitations, statements or answering 'Yes/No' questions, which resulted in one- or two-word answers. Extract 6.5 below illustrates the frequent practice of choral responses in replying to the teacher elicitations, for example, in Turns 4, 10, 20, 22.

Extract 6.5 (CO/TR/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Okay, what else do you think (pause) are the features of an insect? Polly? (looks at Polly)
2	Polly	It has wings!
3	T	It has^…(pause)
4	PS	Wings!
5	T	Yes, it has wings! (writes the word 'wings' on the whiteboard). Okay, give me the last one. What else? Roslan? (looks at Roslan)
6	Roslan	It has abdomen
7	T	Yes? (came near Roslan because she couldn't hear what he said)
8	Roslan	It has abdomen (repeats his answer)
9	T	Yes, it has an abdomen. But, actually, all of us also got an abdomen. All the animals, as well as the insects. (Writes the word 'abdomen' on the whiteboard under the word 'wings'). Okay, so these are the features of an insect. So, today I am going to show you some pictures of insects (Shows students a picture of a house fly). What do you think this is?
10	PS	*Serangga* [insect]! House fly! *Lalat* [house fly] (Students shouting their answers simultaneously)
11	T	Debra, what is this?
12	Debra	House fly
13	T	Okay, house fly. What do you know about house fly? What is the food of this insect?
14	Debra	(kept silent and look at the teacher)

15	T	What do you think is the food of this insect? (shows the picture to the class)
16	PS	(silence)
17	T	What does a house fly eat? Yes, Iman? (looks at Iman)
18	P	(kept silent and look at the teacher)
19	T	What is a house fly? (looks at the class)
20	PS	*Lalat* [fly]
21	T	*Lalat kan?* [It is a fly, right?] So, what do you think the house fly eat? You don't know?
22	PS	Any food! (laughed)

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Rachel noted that chorus response *"help ensure student engagement" (FUI/TR/2015)* and provided *"opportunities for all the students to take part in the lesson" (FUI/TR/2015).* She explained that the prevalent practice of choral responses was due to the large class size. She stated that, with the teacher-pupil ratio of 1: 42, it would be difficult, indeed impossible, for her to attend to and assess each individual pupil in one lesson. A limiting factor here is that when questioning in a group setting, Rachel claimed that she would only be able to learn about the pupils who responded. As a result, the understanding of those who were not chosen or did not volunteer remain unknown to her. This suggests that she appeared to be aware of the disadvantage of choral response, especially when it comes to assessment. On what could be done to overcome this situation, Rachel said she could not easily think of any measures:

> *"Frankly, it does not help, especially the weaker ones who do not usually answer. Yes, it does give you the impression that everyone understands and is motivated but if you really watch carefully, you will see that there are some who did not answer in the chorus". (FUI/TR/2015)*

6.6.3 Observation and Gathering for Information

The data revealed that Rachel seemed to value information gained from observation as feedback on her teaching. She claimed to use observation to recognise what was happening in her class and how her students participated and developed knowledge:

"I use observation...I observe my students if they understand my lesson and if they are doing the work which I asked them to do. If they can complete the task without any difficulties, this means that they achieve the objective of the lesson". *(FUI/TR/2015)*

During the observed lessons, I observed Rachel going around the class while the learners were carrying out tasks, observing and looking at their work. I asked her about the purpose of observing her learners and she replied:

"If I don't move around, some of them will not be the work I give. They might be chit-chatting or doing other work instead of the work I asked them to complete. Besides, I can also identify any problems the students might encounter while completing the task given". *(PTLI/TR/L1/2015)*

Rachel's statement above seems to suggest that she used observation as a way to control students and at the same time, check their understanding of what had been taught. However, there was no indication in her comments that she also used observation for the purpose of formative assessment. During the two lessons I observed, Rachel did not use any registers or make notes about her learners' assessment progress. Following the official procedure of using an informal record to keep track of the learners' progress probably was not a priority in Rachel's assessment practice and might indicate that Rachel relied on her memory as the most probable source for filling in the assessment KSSR Students' Learning Development Record Module (SLDRM) (see Appendix J).

6.6.4 Feedback: *"…they can identify their weaknesses and improve"*

Rachel seemed to be aware of the importance of providing feedback. This was emphasised in her statement below:

"Of course, feedback is important for students. I think if feedback is given, both students and teacher can benefit. If feedback is given, they can identify their weaknesses and improve […] It is also important for effective teaching". *(FUI/TR/2015)*

She also claimed that her role in the classroom was as a facilitator and spoke of the importance of giving feedback to the students regarding their performance. She stated:

> *"Teachers are supposed to be a facilitator, that is our main
> role during the lesson". (PI/TR/2015)*

She further indicated that feedback helped weaker pupils to identify their mistakes. While giving feedback she identified pupils who needed assistance and created time for further explanation. This was evident in what Rachel said:

> *"Feedback is important for effective teaching and learning
> and can help students identify their weaknesses".
> (FUI/TR/2015)*

Rachel stated her belief that feedback provided both learners and teachers with information about pupils' level of understanding and helped her to use that information to adapt teaching and learning. In addition, she said that she used feedback to provide information about the learners' mistakes and how to correct them:

> *"Usually, I give feedback after marking or while they are
> answering questions in class so that they know whether they
> are wrong or right and for them to make relevant corrections.
> Feedback tells them where they made mistakes. By giving
> feedback, we (teachers) can help assist students who are
> facing problems or those who need help". (PI/TR/2015)*

The data revealed that Rachel often gave oral feedback about pupils' performance in the form of 'evaluative feedback' and mostly task related, simple and short. Her feedbacks were in the form of an acknowledgement of the answer, very commonly, affirming the answers, by the use of expressions such as 'okay' and 'yes'. She also gave evaluative feedback like 'good', 'very good' or asking the class to clap, as illustrated in the following extract (see Turns 3 and 7 in Extract 6.6).

Extract 6.6 (CO/TR/L1/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Okay Alia. Okay, tell the class what is in the picture.
2	Alia	(reads through the notes she had written on her poster) (inaudible)
3	T	Okay, very good! (claps her hands)
4	PS	(clap their hands)
5	T	Okay, so what did Alia said about Mount Kinabalu?
6	P	A 6.3 hit earthquake hit Mount Kinabalu.
7	T	Yes! She talks about the earthquake that happen in the month of June. Okay, very good Alia. Okay, you can go back to your seat. Okay, now let's hear from Ali!
8	PS	(clap their hands)

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Rachel accentuated the importance of praise in building close relationships between the teacher and the pupils, increasing their self-esteem and encouraging them to learn better. She explained this was part of motivating them to learn. She acknowledged that as she always valued student effort, her feedback tended to be positive to promote learning:

> *"The students find it difficult to learn the language. The only way for me to motivate them is by praising them. By praising them it not only makes the teacher-students relationship close but most important it makes the students more motivated to learn". (FUI/TR/2015)*

She further added:

> *"…to be able to speak the language is a big achievement for them, so if we always criticize the students or don't even praise their achievement, students will be demotivated to learn". (FUI/TR/2015)*

Another evident feedback practice in Rachel's lesson was took the form of repeating students' responses to affirm or accept an answer. The repetition patterns in Extract 6.7 focus on forms and contents. In this exchange, Rachel repeated the exact structure of the response given by the student. This pattern can be seen as confirming or accepting what the student said. Examples of this type of feedback can be found in Extract 6.7 in

Turns 5, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, and 25 below.

Extract 6.7 (CO/TR/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Yes, the caterpillar doesn't have sound (puts down the paper) and then (picks up another paper) this one (points to picture 1 on the paper) Oh, this one is another ladybug. What about this one? (points to picture 2)
2	PS	Dragonfly!
3	T	Why is it called dragonfly? Is it a dragon?
4	PS	No!
5	T	No. So, look at the picture here (points to the dragonfly picture). Can you see the fire coming out from its mouth?
6	PS	(laughed) (some answered yes, some answer no)
7	T	But this is just actually an illustration because the name is^ …. (pause)
8	PS	Dragonfly!
9	T	Dragonfly. Because we also don't know why is it called a dragonfly. Why is it called a dragon? Maybe, it's because of its^…. (pause)
10	PS	Body!
11	T	Body. It looks like a^… (pause)
12	PS	Dragon!
13	T	Dragon. But does it have fire?
14	PS	No!
15	T	No. There is no fire coming out from the^…(pause)
16	PS	Mouth!
17	T	Mouth. Okay, so what colour do you think the dragonfly is?
18	PS	Green!
19	T	Green. And then…. what else?

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Evaluative feedback can take the form of rejection or negation of pupils' answers to show disagreement. This type of feedback was also found in her teaching practice. For

example, in Extract 6.8 below, she rejected incorrect or unacceptable answers by using expressions such as 'no' or 'wrong'.

Extract 6.8 (CO/TR/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Six. Do you think ladybugs make sounds?
2	PS	No!
3	T	Yes or no?
4	PS	No!
5	T	(smiled and made her eyes bigger - indicating that the students' answer was wrong)
6	PS	Yes! No! (some pupils shouted yes and some shouted no)
7	T	Yes! It makes a sound.

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

In Extract 6.8 Turn 5, Rachel refused the pupil's answers but provided clues or feedback using facial gestures in order to prompt the pupil to change their response. Her responses show that she did not engage in lengthy discussions with her pupils. She explained this was due to the language barrier in other words, students' linguistic proficiency. Rachel also used written feedback in her assessment practice. She collected students' work such as homework or worksheets and marked them by placing ticks and crosses and providing the total number of points or grade at the end of the piece of work.

Rachel described her experiences in giving written feedback to her students as 'difficult'. She explained that it was difficult for her to provide accurate, detailed and fair comments that support student learning. She explained this was due to shortage of time and workload. As a result, the findings from the observed lesson revealed that Rachel's feedback to each student or group that promoted further learning was limited. In response to overcoming the limited written feedback, Rachel noted that she preferred to *"point out problems face-to-face, especially for those pupils who did very poorly" (PTLI2/TR/L2/2015)*. She added that if she identified any problems with the pupils' work,

she would *"definitely let them do it again" (PTLI2/TR/L2/2015)*. She attributed her rationale to her view that attitude was very important. This is in-line with what has been prescribed by the assessment policy, whereby pupils should be given the opportunity to redo their assignments or tasks until they achieve the specified criteria or standards (Ministry of Education, 2012). Overall, despite stating the importance of feedback for the improvement of the pupils' learning, Rachel provided little feedback in her two lessons.

6.6.5 Peer Assessment: …as peer marking

Rachel did not support peer assessment, her main reservation being that it was not objective. She said that she had tried it once but was convinced that it did not work for her and her specific level of students. She had given learners some written work as an activity they were supposed to write, after which she asked them to swap the books and mark each other's work. She explained how to mark the activity, which was to read the work, check for spelling mistakes, return it to the owner to correct. When she finally checked what they had done, there were many mistakes and spelling errors. This resulted in upsetting many learners in the class, leading to Rachel's decision not to use peer assessment again for formal purposes. She also claimed that she had to redo the checking herself:

> *"There were many mistakes done by the students and I have to double check and redo everything. Extra work for me".*
> *(FUI/TR/2015)*

It is clear from this related experience that Rachel believed peer assessment to be subjective and a waste of her time. The findings further revealed that Rachel seemed to have a limited understanding of peer assessment, in that she associated the term 'peer marking' as a form of peer assessment, as illustrated in Snapshot 6.2 below.

SNAPSHOT 6.2

RACHEL'S UNDERSTANDING OF PEER ASSESSMENT

ENGLISH LESSON TWO: INSECTS

After completing the 'Guessing Game', her next activity was spelling activity. She instructed the students to take out their exercise books and introduced the next activity. She explained to the students what they are expected to do.

T: We will do the dictation okay. You have to listen carefully and then write down the words which I am going to say aloud. Okay, everyone must close their textbooks! Only your exercise books should be on the table and please do not copy. Listen carefully and write the correct spelling.

Rachel asked the students to spell 10 words. All the 10 vocabularies are name of insects which the students have learned in the first activity (Guessing Game).

List of words: Mosquito, spider, praying mantis, grasshopper, stick insect, millipede, cricket, cockroach, beetle and ant.

Once the students finished their spelling, Rachel instructed the students to exchange their exercise book with their peers.

T: Now, I want you to exchange your exercise book with your friend sitting next to you. Your friend will help you check your spelling and see if you managed to spell all the words correctly.

The students immediately followed the teacher's instruction. Then, Rachel wrote all the 10 correct spelling on the whiteboard and instructed the students to mark their friends spelling. While the students were marking their friend's spelling, she instructed the students to sum up the correct spelling.

T: Please tell how many did your friends get. If your friend gets 8 correct out of 10, write 8/10 (demonstrates how to write the sum on the whiteboard).

Alongside these negative views, Rachel seemed to contradict what she said as she further explained that 'peer marking' created an opportunity for her students to gain judgement practice by evaluating their friends' work. She stated that her students are very competitive and enjoyed the activity. She explained that the main reason for this was rooted in the Malaysian learning culture. Rachel also added that this activity helps save time and lessens her workload in terms of marking students' work.

> *"I do implement peer assessment in my class. I sometimes ask my students to exchange their books with their friends and mark their friends work. My students like doing this because they can compare with their friends. The students here are very competitive because they like to compare with their friends. Usually, I will always double check what the students have marked. This is to make sure that they marked correctly […] Anyway, this helps to save my time also. Less work". (PTLI2/TR/L2/2015)*

Rachel claimed to use this strategy with some activities. Peer marking would provide a supplementary indicator in the assessment process, and also teach her students how to assess. However, Rachel's reasoning did not explicitly link peer assessment to student learning, and this revealed challenges in both the teacher's perception and students' practices of peer assessment in Rachel's ESL classroom. Despite her understanding of peer assessment as being similar or even synonymous with peer marking, she appears to believe that peer assessment is essential and has significant pedagogical value. She stated, *"it (peer assessment) provides self-confidence and makes students become responsible towards their own learning" (FUI/TR/2015).* However, she explained that there are two potential challenges for incorporating peer assessment into the ESL classroom, namely age and affective disposition. She associated age with affective disposition in that some students would dislike the idea of peer assessment as the assessors are also their competitors. Rachel explained:

> *"I don't think that would work because students at this age are very sensitive to each other and they wouldn't accept such a technique. The reason might be that they don't like it if their work is assessed by their friend, especially if they are competitors". (FUI/TR/2015)*

In line with this, Rachel pointed out that peer assessment is not feasible in her classroom in that, if students were given the opportunity to assess each other, *"they wouldn't do the assessment task and wouldn't take the assessment seriously, especially if they work in pairs" (FUI/TR/2015).* Furthermore, she claimed that in the policy *"there were no proper statement or guidelines on how teachers could incorporate peer assessment in the teaching and learning session" (FUI/TR/2015).*

6.6.6 Self-assessment: …as self-marking

Having a misconception towards the term 'peer assessment', it was not surprising that Rachel understood the term 'self-assessment' as self-marking. This was evident in her definition below:

> *"A process where students assess themselves, their learning progress. They need to look back over what they have done or achieve and identify how they can improve". (PI/TR/2015)*

She believed she had integrated student self-assessment into her teaching practice but wasn't sure if those activities could be considered as self-assessment:

> *"When the students present something to the class, read out their work, give an opinion, discuss a topic, in pairs or in groups, and report back to the class, I see that as a self-assessment. But I don't know, I might be wrong?". (PI/TR/2015)*

Rachel has a positive attitude toward self-assessment. She explained, *"when students assess their own performances, they become aware of their mistakes and this helps them to perform better (PI/TR/2015).* However, like peer assessment, she considered student self-assessment to be inappropriate in the ESL primary classroom. Her perception was based on the premise that *"the students wouldn't confess that they made a mistake in order not to lose marks or lose face" (PI/TR/2015).* In addition, she asserted that she could ask students to mark their own work but to properly and to effectively implement self-assessment would be challenging due to the language barrier and the limits of students' linguistic proficiency.

6.7 Conclusion

Analysis of Rachel's interpretation and understanding of the new assessment policy and formative assessment reveal a lack of understanding about formative assessment. She seems to be conscious of the function of assessment for improvement. However, there was a mismatch in her understanding and what she really practised in the classroom. Rachel's teaching portrayed considerable awareness and use of aspects of formative assessment. However, her use of formative assessment strategies (Black and Wiliam, 2009) was limited. Although she used many activities in different phases of the lessons,

strategies that invite and support pupil dialogue were limited. Oral questioning continued to be used as the main assessment method. Feedback was generally oral and evaluative. Rachel could be doing more to provide constructive feedback that would help pupils take the next step towards their learning goals. The data also revealed that the pupils were not given opportunities for self and peer assessment as these two strategies were deemed not suitable because of the students' age, level of proficiency and lack of policy guidelines. Despite Rachel's attempt to introduce a more learner-centred approach, her assessment practices seemed to be mainly teacher directed and controlled.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KEN AND HIS CLASSROOM

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the case of Ken, the second teacher in my study. As was the case with Rachel, this chapter focuses on RQ1: How do the teachers understand formative assessment, its purpose and what is required of them to implement it when teaching English to primary ESL students? and RQ2: What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom? A detailed description of Ken is provided set in his context. As in the previous chapter, the description is based on interviews, classroom observation, documents and field note analysis. This chapter begins with an introduction to Ken's school and then moves on to providing background information about Ken's teaching experience, qualifications and professional development and a description of his English classroom. This is followed by an analysis of his understanding of formative assessment and his assessment practices.

7.2 Desa Primary School

The journey from Kota Kinabalu, the coastal capital of the state of Sabah, to Desa Primary School, took 4 hours, and the last 120 kilometres were over a hilly, muddy, bumpy dirt road. The scenery I traversed through the village road was quite beautiful. There were hills and green fields alongside the roads. The paddy fields on either side of the roads were covered with green crops. Desa Primary School is located in a rural education district. Primary schools in this education district are typical of Malaysian rural schools, with some remote and others situated close to small towns. The distance between Desa Primary School and the Education District Office (EDO), situated in a small town, is 50 kilometres. Desa Primary School is accessible by car and motorbike but is difficult to reach during rainy seasons. There is no public transport system and very few vehicles run on the roads. There are no school bus services in the villages. Students either walk or use bicycles.

When I finally arrived at Desa Primary School, I was surprised by the appearance of the school. It merely consisted of three old rustic wooden buildings, situated on a hill facing the river and the lush green fields.

Desa Primary School, established in 1940, is a national school, classified as a Low-enrolment School (LES) or locally known as *Sekolah Kurang Murid* (SKM). At the time of data collection, the school had 30 pupils on roll, with the majority being local pupils. The staff comprised 12 teachers. All the subjects are taught in Bahasa Malaysia except for English and the pupils' own language subjects.

Desa Primary School has a pre-school class open for pupils from the age of 4 to 6 years old. The school day begins at 8.30 a.m. and finished at 1.30 p.m. except for Friday when school ends early at 11.30 a.m. There is a school office, a staff room, 6 classrooms (one for each level), school canteen, a science room, library, a small hall and a room for Islamic religious lessons. The resource centre has a library and teaching aids room. Education in Desa Primary School is constrained and limited by poor infrastructure. The source of electricity in this school is through solar panels. The school has an assessment policy that includes two tests and two examinations in an academic year.

7.3 Ken's Background, Experience, and Professional Development

At the time of the study, Ken was teaching English for the Year 1 until Year 3 at Desa Primary School and had ten years of teaching experience. A local to the area, Ken has lived in the community ever since he was born. He attended school within the district and graduated from the local high school. He earned a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and a Bachelor's Degree in Education Management. Ken has taught in two rural primary schools throughout most of his 10 years of teaching. Both schools are classified as a Low Enrolment School (LES). Desa Primary School was his second school and it was also his second year of teaching in Desa Primary School during the course of this study. Overall, Ken delivers 30 teaching periods in a week, which is equivalent to 900 minutes of teaching sessions. Besides teaching and as a class teacher, he also holds an important position (school administrator) in the school as one of the three senior assistants.

7.4 Year 1 ESL Classroom

Ken decided to conduct his first observed lesson in the resource room and the second in the school library. The resource room is situated beside the administration office and is equipped with 7 plastic chairs, 6 wooden tables, and 1 wooden teacher desk. One of the tables was used as a teacher's table located at the front of the class. The desks were arranged as shown in Figure 7.1. It is a small room, approximately 9x14 metres, with no whiteboard or bulletin board. There was only one poster about 'Animals and their name' stapled at the back of the class.   Meanwhile, the school library was double the size of the resource room, equipped with tables and chairs but with few story books or resource books. The seating arrangement for both lessons was less formal although he sat in front of the pupils during most of the time during the lesson.
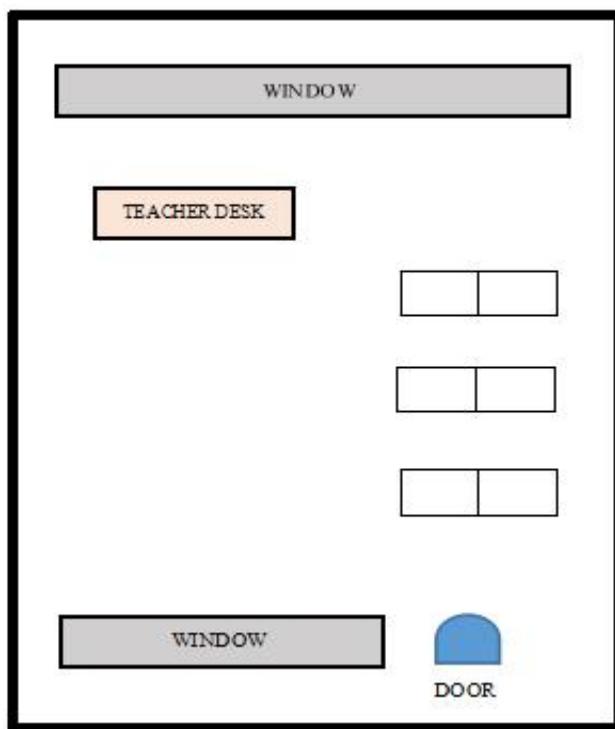
Figure 7.1: Overview of seating arrangements in Ken's Year 1 ESL classroom

There were only 2 pupils in Ken's class. The pupils in Ken's Year 1 class are both local and range in age from 6-7 years old. Ken maintained a controlled environment in which pupils worked consistently at their desks, listening to his explanations and watching his

demonstrations, then mostly working individually on workbook exercises. Ken described his class as low proficiency.

7.5 Interpretations and Understandings of Formative Assessment

A major challenge highlighted by Ken was the interpretation of policy. This was a major area to explore as the assumption is that the manner in which a teacher relates to and practices assessment depends to a large extent on his or her understanding and interpretation of the policy on assessment. Ken expressed his understandings of assessment as follows:

> *"I would say assessment is a way of determining where the students are…their level. We (teachers) can identify what they have learned. Where they are now and also how much they grasped of what has been taught and learned. Hence, it gives the teacher direction of where the students are, what knowledge they have acquired, and that guides you as to what you still need to do. In other words, you assess to see what they have gained and how far they have progressed along the way".   (PI/TK/2015)*

When asked to describe what he understood with regards to the implementation of formative assessment in the new assessment policy, Ken focused mainly on the policy requirements laid down by the authority, expressing that in his view, the policy was designed to reduce pupils' stress in examinations:

> *"They (the government) finally realise. Like I said again, exam-oriented, our students learn to pass the exam. Not for the sake of learning". (PI/TC/2015)*

Ken attributed formative assessment as a means through which a variety of assessment styles are applied to assess pupils' achievement of outcomes. He stated:

> *"I feel that formative assessment is very good because you can assess your pupils in different ways. It is good because you can assess them in all different skills, not only on one particular skill. Formative assessment is ongoing so we can assess them (pupils) using different types of technique". (PI/TK/2015)*

He further added:

> "It's like a way to assess in detail. It is a process to assess the students learning development whether they have mastered each of the required skills prescribed". (PI/TK/12.08.15)

Ken's statements above seem to suggest that he defines formative assessment as a tool for systematic assessment. Clarifying what he meant by 'in detail' and 'mastered each of the required skills', he told me:

> "Whether the pupils have mastered or not because now everything is already provided by the government, especially the specific skills, compared to the previous ones, we were unsure and lost. The government has already bracketed out the specific skills required for the pupils, so then we can measure them. It actually makes our teaching and learning process easier". (PI/TK/2015)

> "The KSSR learning standards in the DSKP, the SBA specific criteria. They have standards and if they pass those, we mark up and means they achieve them". (PI/TK/2015)

He also explained that "assessment criteria given (in the SBELC) are more "specific" which "helps to systematically assess the students" and "to identify their level of performance". Ken continued to explain what he meant by 'we mark up' by stating that they (teachers) have to mark pupils' performance to establish whether they had managed to achieve the criteria. Ken said that implementing formative assessment had made lesson planning and teaching much easier and more systematic. He expressed that he had learned to understand more about his students' learning, which made it easier for him to approach them and for them (students) to approach him. He explained:

> "When we conduct assessment right, I feel like I know the students more. I am able to know their weaknesses and can see just where their weaknesses are. We can see where the weaknesses are for each student. So, it is easier, you know, to help them and find ways to help them". (PI/TK/2015)

He believed that the implementation of formative assessment was more beneficial for the pupils than the teachers because attention now focused more on them. He further explained that formative assessment helped improve pupils' language skills:

> *"We want to learn more about skills, not just to pass for examination. Like the problems nowadays, our students get 'As' in English but they cannot speak English. Now it is getting better […] it is more improved". (PI/TK/2015)*

Ken considered it an advantage and fairer for English teachers to assess their pupils as teachers know their pupils better:

> *"I believe their (policy-makers) intention is to provide every student with the opportunity to demonstrate their actual ability instead of answering test and exams. This (test and exam) can't measure their skills, for example, speaking skills. I think they (policy-makers) understand that each student is unique and learn differently so that's why teachers are given the power to assess their own students". (PI/TK/2015)*

> *"Who would be better to assess the students if not the teachers themselves? Teachers know their students better. I see that this is one of the advantages of SBA. The teacher is given the role and responsible for assessing their own students". (FUI1/TK/2015)*

He further added that it was especially beneficial for the low-proficiency pupils as *"they don't have to compete with their friends"* (PI/TK/2015).

He asserted that formative assessment is an ongoing assessment, conducted during teaching and learning, on a daily basis. At the same time, he also stated that it was impossible to complete the skills to be assessed on one particular day or lesson; it could take several days, depending on how well his pupils coped with the lesson:

> *"I assess students continuously every time during my lesson to see if they achieved the required skills". (PI/TK/2015)*

> *"SBA is different than exam because SBA is on-going where you conduct the assessment during your lesson. It helps you to identify if the pupils understand what you have taught in the lesson, whether they understood or not". (PI/TK/2015)*

Ken agreed that assessment and teaching should go together to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning. As he put it:

> *"In teaching, there must be a way of assessing the teaching and learning process so you get to know whether the students are learning or not and whether the material or approach is suitable so you can adjust to improve your lesson". (FUI2/TK/2015)*

I asked if teachers were provided with a fixed time and modes of assessment in implementing formative assessment. He responded:

> *"No, we are given the flexibility to use any types of assessment methods as long as the students can achieve the learning standards". (PI/TK/2015)*

As Rachel, Ken reported that assessment and teaching were already a part of his professional responsibility and therefore did not see the introduction of formative assessment in the new assessment policy as contributing anything new to this responsibility:

> *"Actually, we have been doing this type of assessment all this while but it's only now that the government decided to have them formalised in black and white". (PI/TK/2015)*

According to him, the only thing new was that he had extra work to do which was to record pupils' learning development in the KSSR Students' Learning Development Record Module (SLDRM) (see Appendix J). However, he pointed out that present conditions of limited time and teaching workload meant it was not possible to use assessment to contribute directly to the teaching process. He expressed that his major concern was on *"how to complete the syllabus" (PI/TK/2015)* with the least amount of interruption:

> *"It is a good idea actually, but you know…we just can't really follow exactly what is expected. There, you have to finish your syllabus…there you have to do other clerical jobs…meetings". (FUI2/TK/2015)*

7.6 Key Classroom Assessment Practices

In order to gather more information about Ken's formative assessment practices, two classroom observations were conducted. This section presents emerging themes related to what, and how, formative assessment strategies were enacted in Ken's Year 1 primary ESL classroom. Building on the discussion of what he understood as formative assessment in the previous section, this part presents the findings that address RQ2: What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom?

7.6.1 Oral Questioning: *"It helps me to identify if they understand what I have taught…"*

The results of the data analysis showed that questioning technique was one of the main instructional and assessment strategies Ken used in his classroom. He asked plenty of questions during his lessons and it was the central feature of his lesson. When asked how much class time he normally spends on question-and-answer exchanges in the classroom, he responded:

> *"It depends on the topic I am teaching. Normally, all through the lesson". (PTL1/TK/L1/2015)[4].*

Ken appeared to be aware that formative assessment strategies such as oral questioning had the potential to help him recognise pupils' level of understanding:

> *"It helps me to identify if they understand what I have taught in the lesson and at the same time help me assess my own lesson. If they cannot answer my questions, this will indicate that they don't understand what I have taught. So, I need to do something about it if they don't understand". (PTL2/TK/L1/2015)*

The above statement seems to suggest that Ken employed questioning to gauge pupils' understanding of each topic. If pupils could answer the questions correctly, this gave him a signal that the pupils had learned. He also added, *"for weak classes, questions can be considered as valuable tools for instructions" (PTL2/TK/L1/15.09.15)*. According

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[4] Coding of the interview: (Type of interview/ participant's initial/ year of the interview) [PI = Preliminary Interview; PTLI = Post lesson Interview; FUI = Follow-up Interview; TR = Teacher Rachel].

to the SBELC, teachers need to help their pupils promote higher order thinking skills and become the owners of their own learning (Curriculum Development Centre, 2011). To achieve these objectives, Ken seemed to formulate his questions based on the topic he planned to teach as well as the objectives emphasised in the curriculum specification. Ken explained:

> *"In implementing the lesson, I will look at the curriculum specifications and then based on that I look at the textbook. I usually ask questions based on the topic in the textbook to achieve the learning objectives". (PTL2/TC/L1/2015)*

When asked further on how questioning affects primary ESL students' language development, he answered that questioning enhances learning since questions result in the development of grammar awareness and consequently, language performance:

> *"If students answer the questions, it pushes them to produce language and this causes language development". (PTL2/TC/L1/2015)*

Although the level of Ken's students in terms of performance standards were low, there were salient features in Ken's delivery of the lesson and assessment practice that are worthy of consideration. Classroom observation data revealed that Ken used different types of questions to assess pupils' understanding as a practice of formative assessment. From the lesson observation, it is evident that the majority of questions were devoted to 'Yes/No' and closed questions. Generally, questions of this type do not instigate any discussion. Of significance was the question-answer session which was one-way communication. It was found that Ken asked all the questions: pupils never asked him any questions. The 'wait time' allocated to students to answer such questions seemed very short and the two students mostly answered using one or two words. Extract 7.1 is an example of how Ken asked closed questions in his classroom.

Extract 7.1 (CO /TK/L1/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Okay, let's change *ini* [this] into character *lah* [okay]. Okay, *ini kita panggil*^ [this we called]
2	Ben	*Ketiga* [third]
3	T	No! Thumb is^ (shows his thumbs)
4	Ben	*Ibu jari* [thumb]
5	T	Ah! This is the pointer. Point^ er. Amat! (looks at Amat)
6	Amat	Pointer!

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

In Extract 7.1, the pupils needed to remember the name of each digit to answer the teacher's questions. Questions of this type often require very short specific responses and do not provoke thoughtful reflection. This particular question had one specific answer and did not help pupils to improve their higher order thinking skills as expected in the curriculum. Based on Bloom's (1956) classification of question types, the questions asked by Ken in the above extract were lower cognitive level questions that only determined the pupils' level of knowledge. Ken also reported that he asked questions when he is teaching stories to help them improve their listening and speaking skills and recall what they have learned:

> *"I ask questions if I teach a story from the textbook. I will ask the pupils to read the story and at the same time, I will ask questions related to the story. Asking them question helps them to recall what I taught...for example in the story 'Tiny Thimble', I ask them questions about the girl and the old lady, here they can easily recall the story if I use WH- questions".*
> *(PTL1/TK/L1/2015)*

Ken used 'yes/ no' questions mainly to get feedback from students and to check whether they had understood what had been taught. These included questions like "Did you get it?", "Do you understand?", "Okay?" When the teacher asked such questions, he expected to receive affirmative answers from the two students. Furthermore, Ken used a

number of general questions that were not directly addressed to any of the students present in the classroom.

Most of the questions asked during the two observed lessons were from the lower level of the cognitive domain, more specifically from the knowledge sub-domain, which assess pupils' recall ability, as illustrated in Extract 7.2. This was as expected, since the students were young (7 years old) and beginners. While teaching the story 'Tiny Thimble', Ken asked questions about the story. He asked recall questions to ensure pupils' understanding. Based on Bloom's (1956) classification of question types, these questions only assessed pupils' knowledge and required them to recall the information to answer the questions.

Extract 7.2 (CO/TK/L1/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	She held the thimble in her ^ (pause)
2	Ben	Hand!
3	T	Hand!
4	Ben	*Dia punya tangan* [her hands]
5	T	Yes! At home, *di rumah* [at home], she told it to her mother with joy. *Dia sangat* [she was really] joy… ah (acts out joy). Mother, here is a thimble. An old woman gave me this thimble. Told *dia punya* [her] mother with joy. And she put the thimble on her mother's finger. There, her mother began to sew. Ah, when the thimble touches the cloth *apa jadi* [what happened]? (looks at the pupils) *Bila tu* [when the] thimble *sentuh itu* [touches the] cloth, *apa jadi* [what happened]?
6	Ben	*Jadi emas* [turned to gold]
7	T	Ha! *Terus tukar* [then changed] into^ *apa* [what]? (pause)
8	Ben	Gold!
9	T	Gold! Turns into gold. Ah! Amat, what happened to the cloth? Hmmm…it turns the cloth into^ (pause) *emas* [gold]!

10	Amat	*Emas* [gold]
11	T	*Apa emas dalam* English [What is gold in English]?
12	Ben	Gold!
13	T	Gold! Okay, good. Now, this is only about the tiny^
14	PS	Thimble!
15	T	Thimble. Who do you think the old woman is? *Sepa kamu rasa* [who do you think]? *Sepa tuh* [who is she]?
16	Ben	*Tidak tau* [don't know]
17	T	Hmm (pause)
18	Ben	Old woman!
19	T	Old woman? *Sepa tuh* [Who is] witch? *Dia* [is he/ she] angel ka [an angel]?
20	Ben	*Orang tua!* [Old people!]
21	T	Hmm...*orang tua* [an old people]. Okay, now you know the story about tiny ^
22	PS	Thimble!

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

In Extract 7.3, code-switching was used to check students' understanding. In the extract, Ken used the Malaysian word '*emas*' (Turn 9) and '*orang tua*' (Turn 21), which mean gold and old women respectively. The use of code-switching in Extract 7.3 by the teacher is used mainly to facilitate students' comprehension and knowledge of the target language grammar. It is also used to mitigate the students' learning anxieties. Ken explained that it is normal and appropriate for him to use code-switching in his class to compensate for their limited competence in the target language:

> *"I always use both English and BM (Bahasa Malaysia) in my lesson. They are weak students, and just learning English. We need to translate some words during the lesson in order for them to understand and learn". (PTL1/TK/L1/2015)*

In terms of ensuring learners' engagement in the lesson, Ken tended to nominate pupils to answer questions. What was noticeable was that his questions were sometimes addressed to both of the students and at other times to an individual student. For example, in Extract 7.4, he selected and identified the pupil before he asked questions while in Extract 7.5, he asked the questions before he selected the pupil.

Extract 7.4 (CO/TK/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Elephant! Ah! (pause) You can see there are many people here walking around looking at the animals. The little girl here (points to the girl in the textbook) says look at the big elephants. Emmmm…look at the big^ (pause) elephant. What is the meaning of big? (takes out a pencil from his case) Emm? Amat? What is the meaning of the word big?
2	Amat	(looks at the teacher)
3	T	B.I.G (points to the word big) Amat! What is this?
4	Amat	(looks at the word) Big!

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Extract 7.5 (CO/TK/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Ah! Says…she said the parrots can talk. Hmm...(pause) Okay, how many parrots do you see here? Ben! How many parrots do you see here?
2	Ben	Three?
3	T	Three? One?

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

7.6.2 Observation and Information Gathering

Ken stated that he usually observes his pupils closely to gauge the effect of his teaching strategies as well as pupils' attitude to learning. For example, during one of the lessons, he observed one student reading a storybook during his lesson and demanded that he stop doing what he was doing and pay attention during the lesson. (FN/TK/L1/2015). He insisted that he valued observation as *"the fast and sensible way" (PTL1/TK/L1/2015)* to obtain feedback on his teaching strategies. When observation was combined with questioning, he said that it helps him to know if his students are motivated to learn or not. I observed that Ken was very active in assessing his pupils through observation. He walked around the class and, during his observational assessment, provided individual feedback to both of his pupils.

Ken did not use or keep any informal records to track his learners' performances. During classroom observation, Ken did not make any notes about his learners' performance. Furthermore, Ken did not provide any documents, besides his lesson plan, that indicated he collected information for formative purposes. Hence, the absence of assessment records seems to suggest that Ken probably did not make an assessment of his learners' overall achievement through the ongoing, systematic gathering of information. He appeared to rely on his memory for filling in the KSSR Students' Learning Development Record Module (SLDRM) that the Ministry requires.

7.6.3 Feedback: *"telling the pupils what they have done wrong…"*

The interview data shows that Ken has a positive attitude towards feedback. He defined feedback as *"telling pupils what they did wrong and what they need to do next to improve" (PI/TK/2015).* He stated that feedback should be *"specific and clear" (PI/TK/2015)* about the learning, and be precise enough that they (students) can use it to inform their learning. He also expressed the belief that feedback is beneficial to help inform and guide pupils on how to improve their learning, as shown in the following statement:

> *"I believe feedback is important and something good for my class. I always give feedback in my class because I think it can help the pupils to improve. Well, feedback tells the pupils what they have done wrong and by giving feedback they make correction and improve themselves". (FUI2/TK/2015)*

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Ken stated that he did not view pupils' errors as failures or as particularly negative. Rather, he considered mistakes or errors as being natural, inevitable and unavoidable in the language learning process, especially among the Year 1 pupils.

> "Mistakes and errors are expected in the learning process. It's normal. If the pupils don't make any mistakes, there's no way of preventing errors. The teacher should help them to minimise their mistakes and errors by allowing them the opportunities to learn. Thus, this is where the feedback comes in. [...] It's normal for mistakes to occur among these group of students, they are just starting to learn". (FUI2/TK/ 15.09.15)

This statement seems to indicate that Ken sees feedback as an integral part of assessment practices in that it helps to increase pupils' academic achievement (Black and William, 1998). In this regard, Ken appeared to be active in assessing his two pupils by means of observation. He approached both students individually, during his observational assessment, and provided feedback to the students when needed. The analysis also shows that explicit correction was the most common feedback type provided by Ken (see Extract 7.6). Ken gave precise information about student errors and offered correct information, as in the following examples:

Extract 7.6 (CO/TK/L2/2015)

Turn	Exchange	
1	Amat	Stripes!
2	T	No! Stripes is *belang-belang* [stripes]. What is this? (acts out claws) this is a^
3	Ben	Nail!
4	T	No, not nail. Claws.
5	Amat	Claws!
6	T	Ah! It can, *dia boleh* [it can]?
7	Ben	Roar!
8	T	Roar! Okay, good!

Based on the two classroom observations, Ken also gave evaluative feedback in the form of praise. In fact, most of the time, Ken gave positive feedback to the pupils and praised them. He explained that he gave praise to motivate his students to learn and perform better:

> *"I don't know why actually. But I think maybe because I want to motivate them to learn. Yes, I think it's because of that".*
> *(PTL1/TC/L1/2015)*

He explained that giving praise is suitable as a form of feedback to this particular age of language learners as *"when students are praised, they become more confident to learn and use the language" (PI/TK/2015).* During classroom observation, Ken praised the pupils whenever they gave correct answers to the questions. Extract 7.6 (see Turn 2 and 9) shows how Ken praised his pupils in the classroom when they provided the correct answer.

Extract 7.6 (CO/TK/L2/ 15.09.15)

Turn	Exchange	
1	Ben	Hands!
2	T	Hands! Okay, good! It can? (points to the turtle)
3	Ben	It can (pause)
4	T	The turtle can *apa*? [what] (acts out swimming)
5	Ben	Swim!
6	Amat	Swim!
7	Ben	Swimming!
8	Amat	Swim!
9	T	Swim! Okay. Very good!

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

No matter how simple the answer and contribution of the student was, he ensured that he acknowledged the student's effort, arguing that this would encourage the student to be active in the discussion. This positive reinforcement strategy that, as Chiu (2009) states, utilises social and affective support.

Overall, Ken opined that *"feedback should be given to the pupils regularly" (PI/TK/2015)* because feedback would motivate them to learn. Yet, despite stating the importance of feedback, the class observations data showed that he provided limited feedback. The findings also showed the feedback he did provide was brief and evaluative. I observed him providing mainly oral feedback to the pupils and did not engage in any lengthy discussions. The feedback given was task related, simple and short enough for pupils to understand. He reported that feedback moves his pupils forward to *"what they need to do next" (PI/TK/2015)* but the classroom observations revealed that what they needed to do next involved supplying correct answers so pupils could complete the classroom task. This seems to suggest that there are some inconsistencies between Ken's reported understanding and his feedback practices.

7.6.4 Peer assessment and self-assessment: *"not suitable"*

Ken defined peer assessment as peer correcting where "*each student corrects their friends work" (PI/TK/2015)* while he defined self-assessment as *"correcting own work". (PI/TK/2015)* He did not have a high opinion of peer and assessment though he did not reject it completely.

> *"Peer assessment and self-assessment are not a normal practice in my class because the students don't understand. Both are not good in the language so, how can they help each other? I know it has its own benefit but I just simply can't implement this in my class". (PTL1/TK/L1/2015)*

The classroom observation revealed that pupils worked individually on exercises from the textbook. There was no pair work allocated. Ken stated that conducting group work was *"not suitable"* in his class as there were only two pupils and both had very low proficiency. He added that if he were to ask the pupils to do pair work, he worries that they would do something else and not complete the task given:

> *"Cannot do group work. How can? Not suitable. There is only two of them. I think they won't be doing the work but will be playing and talking". (PTL1/TK/L1/2015)*

Due to this belief, Ken did not report involving peer assessment in any aspect of teaching. In addition, he stated that the pupils did not have sufficient language proficiency to provide constructive feedback to each other:

> *"They won't know their mistakes and they still need me (teacher) to tell and show their mistakes". (PTL1/TK/L1/2015)*

7.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of Ken's understanding and assessment practices during the two lessons I observed and from his comments in the interviews. My findings on Ken's understanding and practices of assessment suggest noticeable gaps and variations between Ken's understanding of formative assessment and his actual assessment practices. Although he expressed a positive view towards the new assessment policy, particularly formative assessment and was aware of the potential benefits of formative assessment for better learning, he still appeared to lack a theoretically comprehensive and profound understanding of the real importance of formative assessment processes. Furthermore, in practice, he appeared to have an authoritarian view of assessment, in which he focused on "fixing" what needed to be taught rather than focusing on creating opportunities for his pupils to reflect on their learning, identify what they don't know and what they need to do to improve their learning. This seems to suggest a view of assessment consistent with the behaviourist conceptions of stimulus and response: Ken used assessment to motivate his pupils to complete the learning tasks rather than using assessment to engage the pupils in a search for meaning. Ken's commitment to content coverage, his distrust in his pupils' capability and responsibility to work collaboratively, led him to believe that he did not have enough time for scaffolding his instruction to create collaborative learning opportunities for his pupils. Although he believed in the contribution of peer and self-assessment to pupils' learning, this belief was not formally integrated into his lessons. He seemed to believe that these two strategies were not suitable with this particular age and level of proficiency.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAYA AND HER CLASSROOM

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the case of Maya, the third teacher in my study. As for all the teacher participants, this chapter focuses on RQ1: How do the teachers understand formative assessment, its purpose and what is required of them to implement it when teaching English to primary ESL students? And RQ2: What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom? The chapter begins with a description of the primary school in which Maya works and then introduces Maya's background, experience and professional development. The subsequent section describes her Year 5 ESL classroom, description of her understanding and practice of formative assessment. The analysis draws on data collected from non-participant observations of two of her English lessons. A total of ten semi-structured interviews were held with the teacher prior to and after each of the two observed teaching sessions. Documents such as the teacher's lesson plans, students' work and assessment policies and regulations, pertaining to assessment and learning, were also collected for analysis in the development of this case.

8.2 Indah Primary School

Indah Primary School, established in 1991, is a national school where all subjects are taught in Bahasa Malaysia apart from English and pupils' own language. Indah Primary School is in the suburban centre of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. It is among one of the largest primary public schools in the district in terms of number of pupils. At the time of data collection, the school had a total of 1718 pupils, both local and from the surrounding villages. Most of the pupils are from farming and blue-collar worker families. The staff comprised 11 pre-school teachers, 66 teachers, and 7 non-teaching staff. The organisation of this school, conforming to the national curriculum, consists of three levels: Pre-school, Level one and Level two. The Level 1 pupils are pupils from Year 1 until Year 3 while Level 2 pupils are from Year 4 to Year 6. The ages of the pupils at pre-school are between 4 – 6 years old; level one around 7 – 9 years; and level two, around 10 – 12 years. There were 6 classes for each standard with a total of 36 classes.

For each standard, the pupils were streamed into 'good' classes, 'weak' classes and 'average' classes, based on their performance in the diagnostic test. The average number in each class was 40 pupils.

Due to the large number of pupils and limited infrastructure, Indah Primary School conducts classes in two sessions to accommodate all the pupils. For Indah Primary School, the pre-school pupils and Level Two (Primary 4- Primary 6) classes run in the morning session which begins at 6.50 a.m. and finishes at 12.10 p.m. Level One (Year 1 – Year 3) are catered for in the afternoon session, starting at 12.50 p.m. and finishing at 5.30 p.m. Both sessions consist of 10 thirty-minute lessons each day with a 20-minute break in the middle of the school day. The school has a school office, two staff rooms, 36 classrooms, a school canteen, a science laboratory, a library, a computer room, a resource centre, and a room for Islamic religious lessons. The resource centre has a library, an audio-visual room and a teaching aids room. The library is well-stocked with books in Bahasa Malaysia and English. To accommodate physical education, there is quite a large field within the school grounds.

8.3 Maya's Background, Experience and Professional Development

At the time of the study, Maya was an English language teacher with 22 years of teaching experience. Both her diploma and undergraduate degrees were earned from local institutions. She earned a diploma and Bachelor's Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). She has taught extensively within a range of primary schools. She had taught English to Year 1 until Year 3 pupils for twenty years before shifting to Year 4 and Year 5 two years ago. Maya has 30 periods in a week, which is equivalent to 900 minutes of teaching sessions. Of these hours, 10 periods are with Year 4 English class (one classroom), 20 periods with Year 5 English class (two classrooms). In addition, she was appointed as a class teacher and teacher advisor for the school's English club. This duty took some of her time every day.

Maya believes that 'accuracy is everything' in language teaching and learning and, therefore, much lesson time needs to be devoted to instruction in grammar. She does not tolerate errors and will correct all spoken and written errors. Since practice in the target language is important, Maya does not believe in the use of L1 in class. According to Maya, a teacher should be flexible in their approach, to suit the diverse needs of

students. She also mentioned the value of collaborative learning activities among students and of students working independently outside the classroom.

8.4 Year 5 ESL Classroom

As the learning environment is an important part of the teaching and learning process, this section describes the setting of Maya's Year 5 English classroom (see Figure 8.1). and outlines Maya's assessment practices and provides a thorough description of the learning environment.

Maya's Year 5 classroom was on the second floor of the third concrete building in Indah Primary School. The classroom was equipped with 41 small wooden desks and 41 plastic chairs for all the pupils, and the teacher has a big desk positioned in the side corner of the class. It had a three-metre long whiteboard occupying almost the entire front wall. On both sides of the whiteboard was a bulletin board that was used to post the class timetable, classroom cleaning schedules and important and latest news from the school administrator, along with other curriculum-related documents. The back wall of the classroom was also fitted with a bulletin board divided into various sections for the display of different sizes of posters, charts, teaching and learning aids and pupils' work for different subjects. Different areas of the bulletin board behind the class are designated for different subjects. Maya, who worked in the morning session, shared the classroom with another 10 teachers who worked the morning session and another 11 teachers who worked in the afternoon session. This was because, due to the number of pupils and limited classrooms, all the classrooms in Indah Primary School are shared between two different classes. The Year 5 classroom was shared with a Year 3 class. There were forty-one pupils in the class, of whom twenty-four were female and seventeen were male.
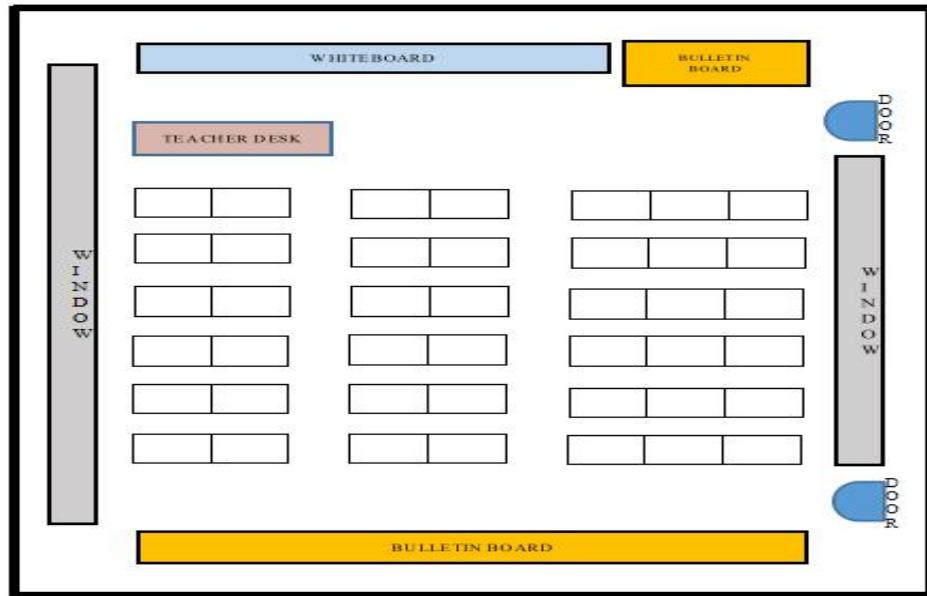
Figure 8.1: Overview of seating arrangements in Maya's Year 5 ESL classroom

8.5 Interpretations and Understandings of Formative Assessment

This section discusses the interview data collected in relation to Maya's understandings of assessment. According to Maya, the new assessment policy has offered a possibility of reducing pupils' stress because assessment now focuses both on formative and summative assessment, enabling teachers to have more flexibility in lesson planning and assessment methods. However, this understanding of formative assessment did not seem to be completely aligned to Maya's classroom practice as observed in this study (see Section 8.6).

The English curriculum (SBELC), the national policy on assessment and the assessment guidelines were the only sources that Maya consulted, and seem to have played a significant role in her understanding of assessment. When asked to describe the rationale of the new assessment policy, Maya noted that the main objective of the policy was to reduce pupils' stress regarding examinations:

> *"The main purpose is to improve pupils' learning performance from this level to this level. Its main aim, I think, is to reduce their (pupils) stress, so they don't have to do it only once in the public exam and then this is their final grade". (PI/TM/2015)*

Maya viewed changes in the assessment system as 'hopeful'. She stated that earlier language assessment had been very much summative, but that recent assessment focused on both formative and summative assessment, which she welcomed. She further explained that earlier assessment had only encouraged memorisation whereas recent assessment also accorded importance to the four skills:

> *"Previously, we gave no importance on assessing the listening and speaking skill, but now all the skills are assessed". (PI/TM/2015).*

She saw herself as possessing limited knowledge of the assessment policy, as it was her first year implementing the policy despite it being in its fifth year of implementation (during the course of this study):

> *"I am not sure about SBA because this is my first year implementing it. I had just attended the course last year…once". (PI/TM/2015).*

She also reported having limited training in assessment and acknowledged that her understanding about assessment was primarily in terms of examinations and tests:

> *"...we were sent to English course but not courses specifically on assessment. It's more on marking scheme, methodology". (PI/TM/2015)*

> *"This assessment reform is new. I'm still learning. Besides, all this while we have been doing tests and exams and we are used to these type of assessment". (PI/TM/2015)*

Concerning the relationship between formative and summative assessment, she saw them as different. Summative assessment was *"an assessment done at the end of a lesson, topic, or year like exams and test" (PI/TM/2015)*. She also saw tests and examinations as tools that only had a summative function and therefore could not be used for formative purposes:

"Exam is summative because you sum what they have learned […] No, it doesn't have the formative function". (FUI1/TM/ 24.08.16)

Maya found it hard to express her understanding and knowledge of formative assessment. When asked to define it, she stated that formative assessment was *"done continuously until the end of the year and to obtain information about pupils' learning performance" (PI/TM/2015).* The overall assessment, as she saw it, was largely product-oriented and designed to direct pupils towards the ends rather than the means. She stated that the new assessment policy was introduced to measure pupils' learning outcomes against prescribed learning standards. This allowed her to identify the pupils' level of performance and at the same time allowed her to compare pupils' ability levels with the learning standards:

"...in the new assessment, we have to assess them based on the learning standards. We have to see if they (students) achieved it or not'.   (PI/TM/2015)

She also explained that the learning standards and performance standards were important assessment elements in the implementation of formative assessment. The new assessment policy instructed teachers to teach the national curriculum that had been developed based on a theme, topic or skills for subjects that pupils must master, after which they would assess the pupils' learning development based on their own observations and evaluations with reference to the guide (Curriculum Development Centre, 2011). She viewed the new assessment policy as helping teachers to distinguish between low-achieving and high-achieving pupils:

"I think the new assessment policy is an important way of assessing pupils' learning. If we use it, we can tell which pupils are bright and which ones are not (…) I can also identify which concepts or topics my pupils are struggling with and who needs my support". (FUI1/TM/2015)

Maya's responses above suggest that she valued formative assessment as an 'assessing tool', and so the means to verify if the pupils had achieved all the learning standards. Although she perceived formative assessment as a means of gathering pupils' performance level as part of evaluating and making decisions about the pupils' learning achievements, she did not elaborate on the evaluative strategies needed to ascertain how effective teaching strategies would assist pupils to achieve the learning

standards. This suggests that measurement still dominates Maya's understanding of the purpose of assessment.

Contrary to the principles of formative assessment, Maya claimed that if the aim was to assess the students, as she formulated it, *"to find out what they [the students] could do,"* *(PI/TM/2015)* then students should not be told in advance that they will be assessed. She asserted that she does not normally inform the students that they will be assessed because *"we (teachers) would not be able to know their (students) level" (PI/TM/2015)*. She further explained that if students were told in advance that they were to be assessed, *"the assessment would not be valid because they already knew that they will be assessed and they would be prepared for the assessment" (PI/TM/2015).*

Maya was vocal about the value and benefit of formative assessment, convinced that they could yield better results for students' learning. She saw assessment as essential both for teachers' and pupils' development and saw it as a crucial means of identifying what pupils know and do, an important educational tool that enabled her to find out pupils' existing knowledge and skills and improve her lesson planning:

> *"I think it can also help the teachers in their teaching…It is an important evaluative tool that allows us to measure the pupils' learning besides our own teaching". (PI/TM/2015).*

Maya asserted that formative assessment gives teachers freedom to determine their own lesson structures, methods and timing, provided they follow the curriculum and cover the full course content. In addition, she stated that teachers are also given the flexibility to choose the types of assessment methods to be used during assessment. This was also emphasised in the assessment policy and SBELC.

8.6 Key Classroom Assessment Practices

To provide an account of Maya's practice of assessment, this chapter now discusses observation data and fieldnotes. The classroom assessments carried out by Maya in the two observed lessons are a small snapshot of assessment tasks over an entire academic year. However, considering that the procedures by which she taught and evaluated pupils in each lesson were quite routinised, the data can tentatively demonstrate some of the patterns in her implementation of assessment for formative purpose. As seen in the previous case studies, observational data is not always

consistent with what teachers asserted they do or understand when interviewed. So, these data highlight gaps between understanding and practice in relation to formative assessment. Classroom observations of Maya's assessment practices yielded rich data about how learners might be typically assessed during their English lesson.

8.6.1 Lesson Presentations

Based on the two observed lessons, there seems to be a similarity in how Maya conducted her lessons. Maya's English sessions was divided into three phases: the introduction, the main phase and the conclusion. At the start of the English lesson, Maya beckoned pupils to sit down at their specified chair quietly while she stood up in front of the class facing the students. After glancing around to ascertain that everyone was seated comfortably, she announced the topic of the session. This was followed by an activity. For example, Maya asked pupils to look at the pictures on the worksheet and asked questions based on it and then assigned students to complete the task individually. In this phase of the lesson, she was the one in control as she guided the students through her step-by-step instructions. The students needed to be active listeners as Maya often called upon them randomly and asked them to explain the subject under discussion, in their own words.

At the end to this phase, Maya gave instructions about the tasks that students were required to perform in their respective groups. Before the students moved to their respective desks to begin work, the teacher gave them an opportunity to ask questions in case anything was not clear. During the main phase of the lesson, students appeared to have more autonomy as they worked in their respective groups. The teacher visited them periodically to check on their progress, for instance, by asking them if they had any problems in completing the task. Students appeared to use the teacher as an accessible resource person, because they often approached her to ask for guidance or support. Maya gave some verbal feedback to students on their work and praised them for their effort. She also responded to students' queries by either furnishing the required information or posing questions that encouraged students to seek the answers themselves. For the final phase of the lesson, the students went back to their respective seats and looked at the teacher who was standing in front of the class. In this concluding phase, the teacher's purpose was to discuss the answers together with the students. Using the whiteboard, Maya selected a few students from different groups to write their

answers on the board. She then discussed and corrected the answers together with the whole class.

8.6.2 Clarifying and Sharing of Intentions and Criteria

Although in both observed lessons Maya informed the students what to do, she did not explicitly explain the learning objectives and criteria to the students. How she explained learning intentions in the observed lesson are presented in Snapshot 8.1 below.

SNAPSHOT 8.1

MAYA'S SHARING OF LEARNING INTENTIONS WITH STUDENTS

English Lesson 1: A visit to the amusement park

The teaching session began with Maya introducing the lesson. She then asked students to look at the picture in the worksheet. She instructed the students to make up five sentences from the picture given. Students responded to her questions. During this activity, Maya prompted the students how to construct their sentences. Subsequently, she spoke about the learning expectations for the students in this lesson. She emphasised:

"So, you can make 5 sentences from the picture …Okay, 5 sentences, I told you already. The 1st one as a whole, the second one the clown with the balloon, the third one maybe people lining up buying tickets, the fourth one the merry go round and the last one is the^"

Maya explained to me that when she talks to the pupils during their work periods, she repeats the instructions, explains the process and deals with problems as they come up rather than after the lesson. This is seen in Extract 8.1 and Extract 8.2 below.

Extract 8.1 (CO/TM/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Please refer to the picture okay? Please refer to the^ picture (looks at the pupils) It is very important that you refer to the picture! Understand?
2	PS	Yes!
3	T	Okay! I will give you ten minutes (pause and looks at the pupils) to make 5 sentences. Why 10 minutes? Because *ala* teacher, maybe we cannot finish, right? But I already told you, right? The first one as a whole, second sentence, third, fourth and fifth. So, it is easier for you to write the sentences, right? Okay, you may start now. 10 minutes from now, faster! After that, we will ask some students to present their sentences. (moves around the class) Faster! Faster! Discuss with your friends.

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

Extract 8.2 (CO/TM/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Yes! You can refer to your dictionary. But not direct translation, please! (moves around the class looking at pupils' work and offering help if needed) And please if possible, try to use adjectives, try to use an adverb. (continue moving around the class) Okay, you can add in adjectives and adverb. (stops next to a group and ask them) Can you give me an example of an adverb?

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

8.6.3 Oral Questioning: *"…identify if they understand the lesson or not"*

Oral questioning stood out as the dominant assessment method used in both lessons observed. Maya asked her pupils many questions. According to Maya herself, she employed questioning as a powerful tool to assess students learning and to recognise learning difficulties. The data she collected from questioning was later used to inform her teaching and to support learning. Maya explained her use of data from questioning as follows:

> *"It's my way of transmitting the information, attract their attention, motivate them and identify if they understand the lesson or not". (PTL1/TM/L1/2015).*

Furthermore, Maya used questioning to engage students' participation and to check their understanding. For example, she asked *"Are there any more questions? Do you have any questions or different ideas?"* Students' first reaction to these questions was usually silence. Maya had to repeat her question three or four times to elicit students'

participation. Maya often answered the questions she asked herself, as a final confirmation of the correct answer (see Extract 8.3 in Turns 1, 3, 4 and 5).

Extract 8.3 (CO/TM/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	The boy in the cap is picking a balloon (reads the sentence while underlining the article 'a') So, this means the balloons here is plural and spelling mistake. Class, how do you spell balloon? (makes correction on the whiteboard) No 's' because there is only one balloon, right? (looks at group 1). Right class? (looks at the class)
2	PS	Yes!
3	T	Yes! People are lining up to ride a roller coaster (reads the sentence and capitalise the letter P in the word people). There are (makes the correction and adds up the words 'there are') the (corrects the article a to the).
4	T	Okay, next, the little girl is waving happily to her parents while riding the roller coaster (reads the sentence). Any mistakes? No! (puts a tick next to the sentence).
5	T	Okay, the last one. The passengers are screaming loudly while riding the fast roller coaster (reads the sentence) any mistake? Okay, puts a tick next to the sentence).

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

In Maya's observed classroom, pupils displayed different characteristics: some were self-assured, some withdrawn, quiet, or even loud. Some of them (pupils) whispered the replies softly while others loudly expressed their ideas and thoughts whenever they had the opportunity to do so. Thus, many times it was noisy in the classroom and pupils'

individual voices were difficult to hear (FN/L1/TM/2015). Consequently, Maya's questioning seemed to dominate and control the lesson. Sometimes the questions were not directed at any particular individual. On these occasions, many pupils shouted their replies in unison and Maya was unable to make out who had answered correctly or incorrectly.

I observed Maya using different questioning strategies. For example, she sometimes did not affirm the answers straight away and stood still with a firm face or eyed the students for a while. When asked about her purpose in employing this approach, she reported that she was trying to find out the pupils' level of understanding by strategically taking a pause. I noted that this strategy was similar to Black et al.'s (2003) suggestion of 'wait time'. She also purposefully did this to make her pupils think before they answered. 'Wait time' is considered the time provided after a question is posed and prior to a response (Black et al., 2003). She stated that she tends to wait for a while without affirming the answers, to allow pupils' eagerness to respond to grow and to give them to think and to provide the answers themselves. This seems to suggest that Maya used questioning to lead pupils to a better understanding of her lesson.

8.6.4 Observation and Gathering of Information

Observation was also an assessment strategy used by Maya to adjust her teaching, as she said, *"during the teaching, I observed all students in the class and only intervened accordingly" (PTL1/TM/L1/2015).* This occurred in the two observed lessons. During the lessons, I saw her moving around the class while the learners were completing the tasks given, observing and looking at their work. I asked her about the purpose of observing her learners:

> *"...it's our responsibility to check if they understand what they are asked to do…I have to monitor them and go through the students and see…are they doing it in the right way or not…are they having difficulties to complete the tasks or not…or simply to check if they are doing other work besides the one I asked them to complete. Besides, some of the students are shy…they cannot speak in public so I go through them and help them to complete the work".*
> *(PTL1/TM/L1/2015)*

Maya's statement above indicated that the purpose of observing her learners was to check their understanding of what had been taught. However, there was no indication in her comments that she saw observation as having a formative assessment function.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the new assessment policy requires teachers to keep informal records of the information they gather about their learners for purposes such as planning for formative assessment, tracking learners' performances, providing regular feedback to learners and making decisions on awarding marks. During the two lessons I observed with Maya, I did not see her making notes about learners or using any assessment registers. This emerges clearly in the next extract, where she stated that she selected one specific learner to check his reading ability, even though she did not plan for it in her assessment records:

Extract 8.4 (PTL1/TM/L1/2015)

Interviewer	:	*Did you have any assessment purpose for choosing that particular student?*
Maya	:	*Firstly, I wanted to know if he is following us or not. This was the idea.*
Interviewer	:	*For that particular student, the one you chose deliberately, did you have in your assessment register that you need to know more information about that student?*
Maya	:	*No.*

To find out whether Maya complied with the official policy of keeping formative assessment records during the lessons, in the interview I asked her the following question:

Extract 8.5 (PTL1/TM/L1/2015)

Interviewer	:	*Regarding the assessment records, the informal ones, do you think they are necessary for following-up the process of assessing students? Do you think it is necessary to be with you in the class and to use them during the lesson?*
Maya	:	*Do you mean the formal one, the records with bands?*
Interviewer	:	*No, I mean the informal ones, the ones that can be used to make some comments about your students' progress during the lesson.*
Maya	:	*Yes, I think they are very important. Having a record or checklist helps us to identify the overall idea about students' progress, what kind of improvement they are having, and then you can help them according to their strengths or weaknesses. We can also know their interest and level.*
Interviewer	:	*So, you can diagnose, for example, their weaknesses and their strengths and the use of these records helps you to have a clear idea about each student in the class?*
Maya	:	*Yes, of course…it helps. When you have an overall idea about the student, you understand their level. You will know how to approach this particular student based on their proficiency level.*

Although I did not see evidence of the informal assessment records, as illustrated above, Maya did show an awareness of the value of such informal records during the interviews. Her prompt clarification in response to my first question is probably due to being asked about an approach she does not normally use to gather information about her learners. One possible factor that may explain why she did not use informal records for information gathering on individual learners' progress is her large class size of 41 students. Maya's comments above (see Extract 8.5) indicate her awareness of the process of gathering information to identify learners' overall progress and then to inform decisions about supporting strengths or remedying weaknesses. This awareness seemed to be aligned with her views on formative assessment, in that she viewed formative assessment as helping to enhance students' learning (reported in Section 8.5). However, the absence of ongoing record keeping reflects a mismatch between her stated understanding of the policy and her actual practices.

In both observed lessons, Maya tended to move around the class after assigning tasks to the pupils. She observed the pupils doing their work and at certain times, talked to them and asked questions. Sometimes, while the rest of the class worked, Maya sat with a pupil or group of pupils and gave oral feedback. In the interview, Maya explained in detail what usually happened in her class:

> *"At first, I will teach and explain the topic of the day. Then, I give them a task to complete, usually an individual work. Then I walked around the class and check how they are doing. If the pupils have a problem, I will try to give them more guidance and explanation". (PTL1/TM/L1/2015)*

Similarly, in a study by Black et al. (2003) the teacher walked around the classroom as the written work was being completed, stopping at each table and checking that pupils were clear about what they needed to include in their learning activity. When I asked Maya to explain her motivation, she responded:

> *"I wanted to find out if they are doing the task given correctly. If they (pupils) have problems I can help them". (FUI1/TM/2015)*

This suggests that Maya values observation as a fast and sensible way to obtain feedback on her teaching strategies as well as students' attitude to learning. Combining observation with questioning helped her identify students' attitudes and understanding of the lesson.

8.6.5 Feedback: *"showing pupils their mistakes and help make corrections"*

Maya was well aware of her role as facilitator in the class and considered giving feedback about her students' learning an important facilitator skill. Her attitude towards feedback was positive and she seemed aware of the importance of providing feedback, whilst acknowledging that she had limited knowledge and understanding about how to give feedback. She agreed that feedback was beneficial to pupils' learning and that pupils' errors or mistakes were natural and unavoidable in the language learning process. When asked to define feedback, she stated: *"showing them (pupils) their mistakes and help make correction" (PI/TM/2015).* However, she asserted that "*giving*

feedback was difficult to implement" (PI/TM/2015) in the classroom as she was *"still learning"* (PI/TM/2015) and pupils' linguistic ability and behaviour were hindering the process.

Evaluative feedback using praise was the main type of feedback used in her lessons. Maya gave feedback in the form of praise every time pupils produced a correct answer to her questions. For example, "very good" (Extract 8.6: Turn 5) was used to praise Jim (pseudonym) for his correct response.

Extract 8.6 (CO/TM/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Okay, everybody…no writing, no talking, look at me! Okay, sit down! (waits for all the pupils to sit down). Okay, let's look at ...which group is this? (pause) Two, okay. Let's look at the first sentence. 'there are many people in the large circus', any mistake there? Any mistake? Any error? There are many people in the large circus (reads the first sentence). In the or in a?
2	Jim	A
3	T	A (cross the word 'the' and changed to 'a') Okay, the... (underlines the word 'large') can you see the^
4	Jim	Adjectives!
5	T	Adjectives, very good!

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

She stated that when students responded well to her questions, she usually acknowledged this by saying: "correct", "yes", "good/excellent". Although this kind of feedback is quite general and consequently has been argued as unhelpful for learning (Hattie, 2009), Maya believed that it encouraged her students to actively engage.

Maya took on the leading role in the teaching and assessment processes, which always involved the whole class (see Extract 8.7). Maya explained that she often gives

feedback to pupils as a whole class *"so the rest of the pupils would not make the same mistakes and would learn from it as well" (FUI1/TM/2015).* She asserted that providing feedback individually and at the same time, addressing the whole class, helped other pupils in their writing as well.

Extract 8.7 (CO/TM/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	P	What is an adjective teacher?
2	T	Can you give me examples of adjectives class?
3	PS	Large!
4	T	Large. Any more?
5	PS	Small!
6	T	Small (pause) Handsome, pretty, beautiful are all examples of adjectives (pause) Even shapes, triangle, also adjectives *ar* [okay]. Black, white.

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

The practice of repeating pupils' responses to affirm or accept an answer was also observed. Examples of this type of feedback can be found in Extract 8.8 (see Turns 3 and 5). The repetition patterns in the extract below focus on both the form and the content. In this exchange, Maya repeated the exact structure of the response given by the pupils.

Extract 8.8 (CO/TM/L2/2015)

TURN	EXCHANGE	
1	T	Can you give me an example of an adverb?
2	PS	Joyfully!
3	T	Joyfully! What else?
4	PS	Actually!
5	T	Actually! Ah...yes! (moves to another group of pupils). Can you tell me what is the example of an adverb? Give me an example. Yes, happily.
6	Ayu	Playing!
7	T	No, that is not an adverb. Playing is a verb. Action alright. (looks at the group of pupils) Happily, angrily, sadly, what else?
8	PS	Nicely!
9	T	Nicely! Ah, okay. Try to put in adverb in your sentence *ar [okay]*

(T = Teacher; PS = Choral Response; P = Individual Response; ^ Indicates Rising Intonation)

The feedback given by Maya was task related, simple and short enough for pupils to understand. As seen in Turn 7 in Extract 8.8 above, Maya provided 'on the spot' feedback on Ayu's (pseudonym) grammatical errors as she felt they were *"not capable of correcting themselves" (FUI2/TM/2015)* through feedback. She explained that her 'on the spot' corrections were a positive way of preventing pupils from spending too much time pondering on grammar or spelling and encouraging them to concentrate on completing the task given.

Maya's feedback was not exclusively verbal. As part of this study, various documents such as pupil exercise books and workbooks were analysed. These documentary data revealed that Maya regularly corrected pupils' errors and mistakes and gave written

comments. Maya informed me that: *"When I mark the pupil's book, I will correct the mistakes and give comments such as 'please make correction', 'well done', 'excellent', 'practice more' and so on. This is to motivate them to improve" (FUI1/TM/2015).* The comments in pupils' books show that in terms of her criteria for marking, there was no rubric used but only a mark breakdown, that is, global marking. The system of notations used to mark pupils' work is shown below:

Notation	Meaning
_____	Underlines inadequate words/ crosses out incorrect words
√	Ticks correct answers
O	Circled what is out of context

Furthermore, discursive comments such as 'good', 'poor', 'can do better', 'well-done' were used to assess pupils' performance but were not accompanied by explanations. Maya used ticks to indicate correct work and crosses for incorrect work. In some cases, she circled or underlined work without providing a reason for making those inscriptions. The mark/scores that appeared on the pupils' scripts were based on a 'holistic judgement' and the feedback was brief and not constructive. This might suggest that Maya lacked the skill in providing written feedback to her pupils. In fact, the school administration encouraged teachers to keep the pupils' books marked well on a regular basis. Maya added that this was largely because of parental pressure.

8.6.6 Peer and Self-assessment: *"pupils mark their own work or their friends' work"*

Maya understood the term 'peer assessment' and 'self-assessment' as similar to peer or self-correction, where peers mark each other's work or mark their own work, as shown in the following statement:

> *"It depends on the topic and types of assessment, I think. Besides, I think I have been doing this all this while. For example, asking other pupils to mark their friends work. Well, I've been doing this all the time. I think I do this because I wanted to save time marking and at the same time discuss the answers with the pupils". (PTL2/TM/L1/2015)*

During the two observed lessons, Maya instructed her pupils to exchange exercise books, after which she gave instructions on how they could mark and make corrections. For example, in her first lesson, pupils exchanged their exercise book and she directed them to put a tick if the sentence was correct and to make corrections if it was incorrect.

According to Nikolov (2011), in a classroom of young language learners, self- and peer assessment play an essential role in the establishment and development of learning strategies, one of the main aims of early language learning. However, Maya was not comfortable with the idea of applying self-assessment because she saw it as subjective and 'unrealistic':

> *"Sometimes I ask them to exchange and mark their own books and worksheets but now I do not give them to mark their own work because they will tend to erase the mistakes and correct them themselves. Therefore, mostly now I ask them to exchange with their friends who are sitting next to them or with someone in their own group".*
> *(PTL2/TM/L1/2015)*

In the preliminary interview, when asked about formative assessment, Maya did not mention the concept of self-assessment or peer assessment. Furthermore, the analysis of the SBELC and the new assessment policy found that there was no statement or information regarding the importance of self, peer or group assessment or any instructions on how to implement these assessment types. Maya emphasised that peer or group assessment had not been mentioned during the SBA training.

8.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of Maya's understandings of formative assessment and how she implemented assessment in her primary ESL classroom. This chapter has sought to develop a holistic representation of what happens in Maya's English classroom showing her understanding of the new assessment reform and her assessment process. Based on the interviews and observation, there is some inconsistency between what she understood and what she did in her classroom practice. Her understanding of assessment appeared to be firmly rooted in her interpretation of the new assessment policy. The policy was the only source that she consulted, and as such played a significant role in assisting her to deal with assessment-related challenges.

Questioning and feedback were interwoven in Maya's formative assessment practice. She used questioning extensively to tap into pupils' prior knowledge and extend their learning. The limited use of formative assessment strategies observed during the two observed lessons indicate that Maya is yet to develop a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the importance of formative assessment.

CHAPTER NINE

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AS AN INNOVATION IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY ESL CLASSROOM: OBSTACLES TO CHANGE

9.1 Introduction

As explained in the introductory chapter, the overall aim of this study was to investigate the understandings and practices of primary teachers of English with regard to the introduction of formative assessment in the assessment system in Malaysia. The aim of the current chapter is to interpret the findings reported in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, discuss their implications and consider how these findings relate to and develop the current knowledge base presented in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework explained in Chapter 4. The present chapter also evaluates the extent to which the findings address each research question. The three sub-questions guiding this study include: (RQ1) How do the teachers understand formative assessment, its purpose and what is required of them to implement it when teaching English to primary ESL students? (RQ2) What formative assessment strategies do Malaysian primary ESL teachers currently use in the primary ESL classroom? and (RQ3) What are the factors that affect the implementation of formative assessment in the primary ESL classroom context in Malaysia?

This chapter is divided into five sections. Section 9.2 discusses the findings on teachers' understandings of formative assessment (RQ1). Section 9.3 focuses on the teachers' adoption of formative assessment strategies (RQ2). Section 9.4 discusses the degree of alignment between the teachers' understandings and their formative assessment practices in the classroom. This is followed by a discussion of the factors affecting teachers' understandings and assessment practices (RQ3) in Section 9.5. Section 9.6 concludes this chapter by summarising the salient points and key findings from the cross-case analysis of Rachel's, Ken's and Maya's understandings and practices of formative assessment.

The aim of the present study has been to examine how formative assessment is understood and used by ESL teachers and what observable impact it has on interactions in the primary ESL classroom. It is important in that it responds to calls for

research into formative assessment (e.g. Bennett, 2011; Rea-Dickins, 2001), assessment of YLLs (e.g. McKay, 2006) and intends to extend understanding of how assessment can facilitate learning in primary ESL contexts by contributing much needed empirical evidence of how formative assessment can facilitate learning (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009). The current section synthesises the findings relating to each research question in turn.

9.2 Teachers' Understandings of Formative Assessment

Despite the attention that formative assessment has received from governments and researchers since the 1990's (Klenowski, 2009; Swaffield, 2011), it lacks a firm theoretical model (Davison and Leung, 2009). Bennett (2011) refers to this lack of an established theoretical framework and its associated inconsistent use of terminology as a definitional issue. In the attempt to answer the first research question, this research drew on the understanding of formative assessment as discussed by Black and Wiliam (2009). This framework focused on generic, i.e. non-domain specific, characteristics of formative assessment. This section examines teachers' understandings of formative assessment by comparing it to this framework. This method was adopted in order to identify similarities, which may indicate generic characteristics of formative assessment, and differences, which offer the opportunity to gain insights into aspects of formative assessment that are specific to a primary ESL context. In doing so, the discussion extends the current body of knowledge about formative assessment.

The findings reported in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 indicate that primary ESL teachers' understanding of the notion of 'formative assessment' appear to be somewhat vague. The participants seemed to lack a comprehensive, profound understanding of the vital importance of formative assessment and its potential for facilitating learning. There were noticeable gaps, variations and confusions in their articulated understanding of formative assessment. Table 9.1 summarises how the three case study teachers understood formative assessment and summative assessment.

The data suggests that Rachel, Ken and Maya were aware of the terms 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment' and each spoke in some detail about the differences between the two. According to the teachers, summative assessment is an overall evaluation of students' academic achievement and is used to evaluate how well

learning objectives have been met in a major educational period. In terms of timing, summative assessment is administered in the final stage when a chapter is completed or when a semester is over.

Table 9.1: Teachers' reported understandings of formative assessment and summative assessment

Formative Assessment policy and strategies in the Malaysian primary ESL context	Rachel's reported understanding of formative and summative assessment	Ken's reported understanding of formative and summative assessment	Maya's reported understanding of formative and summative assessment
Definition	Formative assessment is conducted in the class and an on-going process.	Formative assessment is an on-going process - integrated into the teaching and learning processes	Formative assessment is assessing pupils in the classroom.
	• Summative assessment is an overall evaluation of students' academic achievement • Tool used to evaluate how well learning objectives have been met • Examination or test		
Purpose	• A tool to check students' understanding during the learning process and make changes to teaching and learning during the lesson. • To reduce stress on examination	• A process to assess students learning performance in a detailed and systemic way.	• To improve and monitor pupils learning performance • To reduce stress on examination
	Motivate students to learn		
Timing of assessment	• Formative assessment is to be conducted by the pupils' own subject teacher, integrated into the teaching and learning process; with teachers involved at all stages of the assessment cycle, from planning the assessment programme, to identifying or develop appropriate assessment tasks • Summative assessment is conducted at the end of lesson/ chapter • Transparency- the students should not be told in advance or informed that they will be assessed		

Meanwhile, the teachers seemed to understand formative assessment as an ongoing process as opposed to a series of one-off tests. They associated formative assessment with continuous assessment practices, which according to them are carried out as a tool to check students' understanding during the learning process but do not contribute to students' final term grade. As such, formative assessment is used as a tool to provide teachers with useful information about students' progress in learning and to make changes to teaching and learning during the lesson.

Additionally, the data suggests that the teachers considered formative assessment to be compatible with the teaching methodology that they were using in their primary ESL classroom. The compatibility was interpreted by the teachers in two ways. The first was that practices similar to formative assessment techniques were already being used by the teachers in the study. However, the terminology they might use to describe them differed from the formative assessment terminology. The second explanation about the compatibility of formative assessment with their existing teaching methodology indicated that formative assessment was easy to incorporate as activities that were typically used with YLLs. However, a lack of compatibility between formative assessment and the school's policy to report summative grades to parents also emerged.

The three teachers appeared to understand formative assessment as a type of classroom-based assessment that is integrated into the teaching and learning processes. They stated that deploying formative assessment strategies in their classrooms informed them about the effectiveness of their teaching and the learning process which, in turn, helped them to make necessary instructional adjustments such as revising lessons. It also served as a guide that the teachers used in making decisions about future instructions or improvements and as a way to fill in the gap in students' understanding noted during the lesson.

The data also revealed that the teachers understand the purpose of implementing formative assessment as creating a fun and interesting learning environment for the pupils, particularly weaker learners. Ken and Maya talked about incorporating formative assessment in their lessons to make learning more 'fun' and 'authentic', in line with the recommendations set out in the English curriculum. Rachel claimed that when the lesson was fun and interesting, *"pupils became more motivated to learn, especially among the weak students".* Rachel highlighted that *"formative assessment plays a vital*

role in the learning process of students. It motivates students, makes them eager and willing to do their work, enables them to be active and interested in their classroom activities, and helps students to be committed to their work". Ken and Maya also agreed that formative assessment can play a significant role in stimulating students' intrinsic interests. This finding is consistent with the current literature on classroom formative assessment and motivation (Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Clarke et al., 2003).

Similarly, based on the research by Stiggins et al. (2006) and Clarke (2005), Rachel, Ken and Maya perceived formative assessment as beneficial to both teacher and students, stating that it informed both the teacher and students about any adjustments that needed to be made in the learning and teaching process to improve students' understandings and achievements. Several scholars (Black et al., 2004; Leahy et al., 2005) have reported that assessment for formative purposes involves using assessment in the classroom to raise students' achievement. It is based on the idea that all students will improve most if they understand the aim of their learning, where they are in relation to this aim and how they can achieve the aim (or close the gap in their knowledge). Furthermore, formative assessment was reported by Rachel, Ken and Maya to be used in order to provide feedback and to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and the students' learning strategies. This perspective echoes Black et al. (2004) who discuss its role in narrowing the gap between what has been learned and what still needs to be learned and to plan the specific next step required to improve learning and achievements.

The data also revealed that Rachel's, Ken's and Maya's understandings of formative assessment were overshadowed and distorted by an overarching emphasis on summative assessment. Their confusion may in part result from the definition given in the new assessment policy, which defines formative assessment as:

> 'an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It is used to provide the student with feedback to enhance learning and to help the teacher understand students' learning. It helps build a picture of a student's progress and informs decisions about the next steps in teaching and learning' (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 8).

This broad definition does not identify what dimensions of formative assessment are being discussed, without which it is hard to implement the new assessment policy. As such, the term may lead to a wide range of different interpretations among the teachers. Thus, tension appeared to exist in the teachers' understandings of formative assessment and this intended function because of conflicting messages from the national policy documents (also discussed in Chapter 3).

The teachers also seemed to understand formative assessment as an approach to make judgements and evaluate students' achievement of the English language curriculum goals and objectives. Based on this understanding, the teachers seemed to use assessment mainly for summative purposes, as evidenced in their lesson planning, which was focused mainly on syllabus coverage. They also referred to formative assessment as helping students through evidence of assessment. In other words, the Bands were seen as the organising framework for learning, serving as a source of external motivation to promote learning. Scholars in the field, by contrast, state that even though the information gathered can be used for both formative and summative purposes, it should mainly be used to improve learning and guide teaching (Black and Wiliam, 1998b).

The teachers in this study noted that formative assessment is a directive from the authority that all teachers are required to integrate into their teaching. The teachers also agreed that formative assessment was an important component of the new assessment but did not seem to associate formative assessment with students' progress in learning. For example, they explained that deploying formative assessment in practice was for the sake of carrying out the national policy. Such limited understanding of formative assessment, combined with a tendency to comply with the policy, may affect the effective implementation of formative assessment in practice. This particular way of understanding and deploying formative assessment suggests that these teachers may regard formative assessment as just another administrative chore that they need to implement, as instructed by the Ministry of Education.

Thus, there needs to be continuous support for these teachers to implement formative assessment in their lessons. Support can come in the form of providing specific regular contact time with colleagues and experts to discuss issues pertaining to the implementation of formative assessment. In this way, teachers could openly discuss

uncertainties, share experiences and come up with solutions to ensure the effective implementation of formative assessment in their lessons.

9.3 Teachers' Adoption of Formative Assessment Strategies

Although there were significant differences in teaching styles among the three teachers, there were notable similarities in the ways they practised and recorded assessment; despite teaching different levels and ages of English learners, the teachers used similar formative assessment strategies but approached these areas in individual ways. Table 9.2 summarises the similarities and differences in their practices of formative assessment. As can be seen from Table 9.2, the teachers seemed to make greater use of some of the formative assessment strategies (sharing learning intentions and success criteria (except for Ken), observations, questioning, and feedback) than others (peer/self-assessment).

It seems especially valuable to examine whether the findings of the current study confirm that the aspects of formative assessment proposed by Black and Wiliam (2009) can be identified in the primary ESL context and whether any differences exist. Such a comparison may offer insights into the stages of learning and the roles of the participants. The findings about the teachers' understandings of formative assessment in the primary ESL context have been mapped out against the five aspects of formative assessment discussed in Chapter 4 Section 4.3. The outcome is reported in Table 9.2 below. Table 9.2 suggests that some crucial methods of formative assessment were poorly established. These are explored in the following sections with reference to the primary ESL context.

Table 9.2: Teachers' observed formative assessment practices

	Rachel's observed assessment practice	Ken's observed assessment practice	Maya's observed assessment practice
Modes of assessment in the classroom	Implements both formative and summative assessment		
Modes of assessment in the classroom	Final exams, Individual presentations, group project presentation, tests, midterm exams	Final exams, tests, midterm exams	Final exams, Individual presentations, group project presentation, tests, midterm exams
Sharing learning intentions and success criteria	Modelled learning objectives	Not evident during practice	Modelled learning objectives
Questioning	- Close-ended questioning and verification to ESL students - Elaboration and verification depended on student ability - Lower-order questions where learners were expected to recall knowledge	- Close-ended questioning and verification to ESL students - Lower-order questions where learners were expected to recall knowledge	- Close-ended questioning and verification to ESL students - Elaboration and verification depended on student ability - Lower-order questions where learners were expected to recall knowledge
Observation	- Assessment results were mainly reported in the form of comments or grades - Show no evidence of formative assessment records		
Feedback	- Feedback was task-specific - Simple, short and instantaneous oral feedback comments - Evaluative feedback - Teacher as main source of feedback - Favour oral feedback over-written comments	- Feedback was task-specific - Simple, short and instantaneous oral feedback comments - Evaluative feedback - Teacher as main source of feedback - Favour oral feedback over-written comments	- Feedback was task-specific - Simple, short and instantaneous oral feedback comments - Evaluative feedback - Teacher as main source of feedback - Favour oral feedback over-written comments - Vague written feedback
Peer Assessment	- Peer assessment was seen as difficult for students who were viewed as not having the skills to assess each other - Understood peer assessment as peer correction		
Self-assessment	- Understood self-assessment as self-correction		

(Left vertical header: Adaptation of aspects of formative assessment strategies in the classroom)

In the teachers' lesson plans, opportunities for formative assessment as recommended by the assessment guidelines were not noted. Furthermore, during the lessons, none of the teachers seemed to regularly observe their learners for the purpose of formative assessment. Although it could have been difficult in large classes, such as Rachel's and Maya's, the size of Ken's class could have facilitated a systematic focus on student progress.

9.3.1 Sharing Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

The data shows that Rachel and Maya did not explicitly explain and provided students with the learning objectives and criteria at the beginning or throughout each learning task (see Snapshot 6.1 and 8.1). Furthermore, they did not focus their feedback on these learning objectives and criteria. Meanwhile, Ken, from the observation, did not inform his students of the learning objectives and criteria, nor did he base his feedback on any learning objectives and criteria. His feedback was brief and he could have provided his students with more constructive feedback; however, he claimed that his feedback was suitable for the cognitive ability and language proficiency of his Year 1 ESL pupils. It is indeed important to match feedback to the student's proficiency level as much as possible, as feedback is only useful if the student understands it (Brookhart, 2008).

The findings of the current study indicate that teachers are the predominant sources of the learning objectives and success criteria. This provides an interesting insight into the nature of a primary ESL class by suggesting that teaching is organised according to the objectives decided upon by the teacher, presumably based on the curriculum, and do not appear to incorporate child-initiated objectives. A number of reasons for this finding can be inferred from the context in which the study was based. These include the limited number of preparation hours combined with the necessity to teach a prescribed target language within one academic year; or alternatively the explanation could be found in the low language level of the learners that inhibited a more child-centred approach. Either one of those or a combination of both could indicate that contextual factors play an important role in what happens in the primary ESL classrooms. When we consider the curricular context of the present study, i.e. English as a school subject, the finding does not seem surprising. It seems to suggest that in contexts where language is the target content and the means of teaching, it may not be appropriate or possible to engage children actively in deciding the learning objectives and success criteria.

9.3.2 Questioning

Black and Wiliam (2009) cite questioning as an example of a strategy that may be employed within the second formative assessment strategy which is 'engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding' (see Chapter 4, p.84). As can be seen in Table 9.2 above, brief conversational exchanges in the form of question-answer were found to be the most frequent form of formative assessment taking place in the three observed ESL primary classrooms. These incidences happened in the form of conversations exchanged between the teachers and students. As discussed in Chapters 6-8, the teacher participants used questioning to assess learners for different purposes: to monitor the students' understanding of the lesson, to encourage the participation of students who were weak learners, and to bring the students' attention to the lesson if they were found to be distracted. This seemed to assist the teachers in checking whether their lesson objectives were fulfilled or not and to ascertain learners' understanding of the new knowledge during the lesson.

Rachel, Ken and Maya acknowledged that learners came with different kinds of knowledge and backgrounds. They asserted that questioning is a suitable strategy in the primary ESL classroom due to the students' proficiency level and age. They also noted that they could easily adjust the questions based on the students' cognitive level, which eventually would help students to learn. However, most of the questions asked by the teachers were lower-order cognitive questions that did not provoke student reflection. Most of the questions that teachers asked were display questions or questions that were used to prompt the learners to display comprehension and/or command of accurate English (Thornbury, 1996). Studies by Noor, Aman, Mustaffa, (2012) and Sardareh (2014) reported similar findings where most of the questions asked by the primary ESL teachers were display questions.

However, as Cullen (1998) argues, these types of questions, if excessively used, do not have any communicative value. In second language classrooms, asking display questions deprives the learners of the opportunities to play a more active role in the conversation. Instead, it is most likely that they will repeat the information that is already available. Referential questions were also underemphasised by the teachers, although this type of question elicits longer and more authentic responses than display questions do. Referential questions involve the exchange of information and negotiation of meaning among all class participants, which can help teachers get the

necessary feedback for eliciting more information from students (Thornbury, 1996). These findings are important as they provide an awareness of the questioning techniques adopted in the classroom and the significant effects on students' language learning. Therefore, referential questions could be used more often in lessons with a communicative focus, as expected by the ESL curricula in Malaysia.

Another important finding is that the three teachers mostly asked closed questions rather than open-ended questions. Most of the questions asked in the observed lessons were factual questions that required very little or no thinking on the student's part. This implies that the teachers may think that the students are unable to provide their own answers since they are non-native speakers of English. The teachers might be hesitant to ask more open questions because these questions are time-consuming and more difficult to evaluate. Another reason could be that teachers are inclined to assign students grades more than probe or negotiate answers because grades are privileged in the final evaluation of students' achievement in Malaysia. Furthermore, the teachers seemed to rely heavily on yes/ no questions. Yes/ no questions are helpful for beginners who are not competent enough to produce language as well as for those who emotionally do not feel ready to talk. However, this may deprive students of the pleasure of providing approximations that show their own interpretation, their ability to process information and express themselves more freely as independent learners. Because open questions provide the respondent with the greatest opportunity to participate, teachers should use them more often.

Despite the teachers' efforts, Malaysian cultural values such as respect for the teacher, still underpinned the questioning practice, leading to students' restricted participation in their learning. A supportive and collaborative learning environment was not provided for the students and hierarchical unequal patterns of participation were observed during the discussions. During whole class discussions, the students rarely asked questions and most of the time, the teachers themselves were the only ones who talked and posed questions. The field notes suggest that students did not raise their hands to contribute to classroom talk without being nominated by the teacher nor did they ask follow-up questions to clarify concepts either during or after the lesson was completed. This suggests the need to develop appropriate pedagogies for use within specific educational traditions, rather than assuming that Western ideas must be right for every context. This is a central point within

sociocultural theories of learning that closely link learning to its context (Rogoff, 2003).

hen commenting on their use of questioning, the teachers expressed their concern about not being able to give an equal opportunity to every student to answer. The data shows that the discussions were dominated by certain students and highly controlled by the teachers. Most of the time, it was the better performing students who volunteered to answer. When some students dominated the discussions, others preferred to become more peripheral and some of them may have developed an identity of non-participants. This kind of practice is also cited by Walsh and Sattes (2005) who found out that teachers frequently called on better-performing students to respond due to three reasons: time constraint, making the teachers' job easy and the teachers' loss of patience. Walsh and Sattes (2005) explain that frequently calling on better-performing students may have a positive impact on their learning, but such practices also have a negative impact on weak students. Rachel stated that most of the time it was the better performing students who volunteered to answer and due to time constraints, she allowed them to answer. Rachel cited that volunteer students are usually better performing students and giving them opportunities to answer the questions could be interpreted as enabling other students to learn the concept being taught. Maya appeared to recognise the importance of giving the chance to the weaker students to answer. But she claimed that by not giving the chance to better performing students to answer, she ran the risk of them becoming demotivated.

The teachers practised a range of questioning techniques. For example, the teachers sometimes did not affirm the answers straight away and hence stood still with a firm face or observed them for a while. When asked about the rationale behind this particular behaviour, the teachers reported that they were trying to find out the students' level of understanding by strategically taking a pause for a while. This strategy resonates with Black et al. 's (2003) suggestion of 'wait time'. These teachers also appeared to purposefully do this to make the learners think before they answered. 'Wait time' is considered the time provided after posing a question and prior to response and there are many benefits according to research (Black et al., 2003). In some parts of the observed lessons, the teachers focussed on questioning individual learners, using 'wait time' to enable students to think carefully before they answered the target questions. In a similar circumstance, Black et al. (2003), while investigating the effect of increased 'wait time', found that wait time made more

students become involved in question-and-answer discussions and as a result, the length and quality of their responses improved. However, it is also important to make a note of how much time a teacher allows a student to respond before evaluating the response and the types of questioning, such that factual recall does not need much time (Wiliam, 2011).

9.3.3 Observation

As can be seen in Table 9.2, the teachers seemed to utilise observation as a strategy to store detailed assessment information in checklist form and mainly used it to report students' assessment information in the form of comments or grades. There appeared to be a lack of commitment among the teachers to keeping records of assessment during teaching and during their observation of their learners. They claimed in the interviews that they depended on their memory to keep the information gathered about their learners. Rachel stated that it was unnecessary to record every step of each student's learning, because primary teachers spend a lot of time with their students and knew each student as they have been teaching the same students since in Year 1. She also seemed to believe that teachers should have adequate information about students to set their individual targets. Rachel's description of her knowledge of students was similar to findings by Hill (2003). Hill (2003) investigated primary teachers' assessment knowledge and practices and found 'head-noting' by teachers as a familiar process where the teachers relied mainly on their memories of what students could do. Ken and Maya seemed to share the same belief with Rachel, as they did not use the statement of attainment and therefore relied on implicit norms in relation to ranking children (Gipps and Stobart, 1993).

9.3.4 Feedback

Working within the Black and Wiliam (2009) framework, Wiliam (2011) argues that good feedback is crucial to moving learning forward and that 'the use of assessment information to improve learning cannot be separated from the instructional system within which it is provided' (p. 4). He defines feedback as "information generated within a particular system, for a particular purpose (...) but [feedback] requires an additional condition, that it actually improves student learning, for it to be counted as good" (p. 4).

As is evident from Table 9.2 above, the three teachers' feedback in the observed lessons was typically brief and evaluative across the three cases. There were incidents where the teachers gave evaluative feedback in the form of grades or they used short non-specific comments such as 'Well Done', 'Very Good', and 'Keep it up'. This practice is in contrast to the literature findings that feedback should be specific to the task at hand and students should be provided with detailed information about how to improve (Clarke, 2005; Black and Wiliam, 1998a). Black et al. (2003) argue that feedback given as rewards or grades generally enhances the ego of the students rather than task involvement. A negative consequence of this is that might result from this is that it can lead students to compare themselves with others and focus on their image and status, rather than encouraging the students to think about the work itself and how they can improve it. Wiliam (2011a) also discourages the use of grades stating that "as soon as students get a grade, the learning stops" (p.123). Thus, Black and Wiliam (1998b) recommend feedback during learning to be in the form of comments rather grades. The teachers should provide current, accurate, and focused feedback, with examples and reasonable directions for the students to progress (Earl, 2013). In this way, feedback allows students to see the gap between their actual production and some reference point that makes sense to them.

The data collected in my study also suggest that all three teachers shared a preference for positive feedback during interaction with students, providing feedback in the form of praise to students as approval of accepted answers. The teachers appeared to relate it to the purpose of motivation. They seemed to believe feedback in the form of praise was effective, especially among the young and low proficiency students, as it validated and rewarded their successful responses, and encourages them to engage further. This is supported by Fisher and Frey (2007), who state that feedback in the form of praise is something that has to be offered to students. The study by Sardareh (2014) reported similar findings where most of the teacher feedback was in the form of praise. However, while this kind of feedback supports further engagement, it does not specifically progress learning, because of the lack of explanation and advice about what to do next (Earl, 2013). Hattie and Timperley (2007) go further, insisting that this kind of feedback is ineffective, as praise can shift attention from the task to the self, and promote surface learning that is performance focused.

Contrary to the practice of the teachers, the scholars (reviewed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) state that simply showing the right and wrong answers provides little help for student improvement. Nitko (2005, p.17) confirms this point by saying that

"teachers may give feedback with marks or with grades, but that type of feedback is not what is needed. Teachers need to use specific feedback to help students improve their learning." Thus, it may be concluded that the teachers' way of giving feedback did not help the students to improve their learning. To enhance its effectiveness, feedback should be positive and constructive. Negative feedback does not give students an opportunity to learn, rather it demotivates them. Plessis et al. (2003) assert that "negative feedback does not help learners and it should be avoided. Negative feedback makes learners feel unsuccessful, ashamed and unable to do the work. Instead of motivating learners, negative feedback tends to push learners away from accomplishing the desired tasks" (p.12).

It is understandable in many cultures that teachers are the experts in their field and consequently, their feedback is valued. However, if students rely too heavily on a teacher's feedback, the authoritative role of the teacher is maintained and students' independence in thinking, autonomy and self-assessment are limited. The data from Table 9.2 suggests that teachers believed feedback should be solely provided by the teacher. This might suggest that the teachers considered themselves as the expert providing feedback to learners. However, it is more likely to be the influence of the behaviourist approach to teaching language and the traditional role of teachers within it, visible in the three observed classrooms (Buhagiar, 2007). Within this perspective, students are viewed as passive recipients in the learning process, with teachers playing the more prominent role. Hence, the teachers' beliefs about assessment and their role within it may have been shaped by behavioural and language proficiency issues.

Rachel, Ken, and Maya seemed to be aware of the importance of feedback as they frequently provided oral feedback on students' work. The teachers employed simple, short and instantaneous oral feedback during observations of students doing their work or of work in progress. The teachers seemed to affirm that immediate correction was the best in correcting students' spoken errors. It was also argued to be an effective and efficient feedback mode as students became aware of their errors. They appeared to believe that students must be corrected and helped to identify their mistakes in order for them to learn. Since it appeared to benefit students and have a positive effect, the teachers favoured oral feedback over-written comments, because in an active communication there exists the possibility to check the meaning of misunderstood statements and ambiguities can be adjusted. This is in consonance with Brookhart (2008), who claims that oral feedback is appropriate

as a formal response to finished products completed by students of any age, where feedback leads to a conversation between teacher and student, while formal feedback on finished products is more suitable for older students as written feedback has the advantage of being more permanent than oral feedback, so students can review and use it as needed.

Giving feedback within any sociocultural environment is complex, including the primary ESL context. Its effectiveness also depends on a student's own identity and preferences (Shute, 2008). This study suggests that non-directive feedback does not always bring about benefits for learning. For example, Rachel used her body language and facial expression to remind the students about the limitations in their responses (see Extract 6.8). Although this would help the students to identify their weaknesses, it is still important to give students direct and explicit feedback so that they know their weaknesses to focus on for future learning. Furthermore, this suggests that feedback is shown to be a 'soft' manner, but Brookhart (2008) states that its message about students' learning must be expressed explicitly to support learning.

The findings also indicate that feedback giving practices in primary ESL contexts are complex and may depend on the age related characteristics of young learners. Of importance to the discussion of the teachers' understanding of formative assessment is that teachers consider feedback an important aspect of formative assessment in the primary ESL context. This suggests that teachers recognise that young learners benefit from receiving feedback and/or that it is appropriate to enable conditions for providing feedback in the primary ESL classrooms. Feedback provision occurs during a task and is implemented to monitor learning, which includes providing feedback on elements of the task or on the process or completing it. This implies that children are expected to focus their attention on the task at hand for a certain amount of time before they receive feedback. As discussed in Chapter 2, young learners' attention span develops as they mature. It seems plausible to infer that introducing diversity in technique type may be appropriate when working with young children, as it helps to address the issue of their short attention span.

The use of appropriate and quality type feedback can be viewed as a significant tool in enhancing student learning (Hatie and Timperly, 2007). When teachers provide feedback, Black and Wiliam (2009) note that it has to relate to the needs of the subject taught and that it has to be an immediate intervention in the flow of classroom discussion. It is also important for teachers to make sure that students get

the right feedback that encourages their learning and that brings their learning forward. What happens is that when feedback is vague or faulty, some students make inappropriate modifications to their work or sometimes become demotivated to learn more or make any adjustments to their work (Earl, 2013). Herschell, Greco, Filcheck and McNeil (2002) recommend that the nature of feedback should be planned and specific rather than haphazard and general. Attending to these forms of feedback would facilitate teachers in identifying students' needs and more likely to see positive outcomes from their students.

9.3.5 Peer and Self-Assessment: *'too young to assess'*

The learner-centred aspects of formative assessment proposed by Black and Wiliam (2009) focus on the role of learners and peers. Based on Table 9.2, the data revealed that the three teachers opposed learners taking a role in assessment due to their age and cognitive level. There is one significant discrepancy between Black and Wiliam's (2009) framework and the understanding of formative assessment as reported in the findings of this study: the teachers in this study did not recognise the young learners' roles in sharing the learning objectives and criteria for success, self and peer assessment. They seemed to perceive their students as too young and had limited knowledge of assessment, especially when using the target language (English) in assessment. This finding does not seem surprising given the low levels of language proficiency of the learners in the study. It suggests that perhaps if the learning objectives and criteria for success are connected with the new language in a given lesson, then young language learners cannot offer peer feedback, simply because they did not know the new language.The three teachers did not believe that students in their class were ready to take control of their learning and as a consequence, they expressed the belief that their current learners did not have any degree of autonomy.

The data from the classroom observations also suggest that the teacher participants supported L1 (Bahasa Malaysia) use in the L2 classroom, especially for the following situations: translation, giving instructions, error corrections, responding to students' use of English, and classroom management. This resonates with Atkinson (1987) suggestion that using L1 is beneficial for L2 learning beginners since L1 could assist them to express exactly what they wanted to say. These preferences were confirmed in practice, as the class observations from all the three ESL classroom demonstrated that the teachers used Bahasa Malaysia (L1) during the observed lessons. The participating teachers seemed to recognised that Bahasa Malaysia is useful for

various pedagogical and social functions meant to facilitate L2 learning (Macaro, 1997; Mohebbi and Alavi, 2014) by helping students to better understand L2 instructions and by creating a supportive and enjoyable environment in the classroom.This opinion does not differ from that of other scholars, as several studies (Al Shammari, 2011; Bruen and Kelly 2014; Copland and Neokleous, 2010; Mohebbi and Alavi, 2014), conducted in various foreign language contexts, have largely found that L2 teachers generally support L1 inclusion in the classroom (Tian and Macaro, 2012). Cook (2001) states that utilising methods that require the teachers to use both the L1 and the L2 at the same time creates an authentic learning environment because the influence of the L1 on the target language (TL) is recognised. With respect to students' proficiency level, De la Campa and Nassaji (2009) elaborated on the impact of students' L2 proficiency on L1 use in L2 classrooms and reported that students' low proficiency in German (L2) was an important factor that prompted teachers use English (L1) in their classes.Consequently, this suggests that students' proficiency level may be an influential factor for the amount of L1 use in the L2 classroom. Similarly, the data also suggest that students proficiency is one of the factors affecting teachers implementation of formative assessment, particularly peer and self-assessment.

As discussed above, the participating teachers seemed to perceived L1 use to serve numerous functions in the L2 classroom, functions which may ultimately enhance the L2 teaching and learning process. Despite having a positive attitude towards the use of L1, the data also suggest that when completing tasks, the teachers seemed to expect and instruct the students to use the TL (English). This might suggest that the teachers believed that L1 overuse could limit L2 development by minimising the amount of exposure to the L2 and thus restricting the students' opportunities to practice it. The teachers seemed to be cognizant that L1 overuse can hinder the L2 learning process, and were aware of the fact that when students have more exposure to the L2, they learn the L2 better (Turnbull, 2001).Hence, it can be suggested that the teachers' decision regarding whether to involve students in assessment seemed to be influence by this belief. In terms of peer assessment where students are expected to use the TL, they seemed to believe that the students are not able to perform peer feedback due to their age, proficiency and cognitive level. This was confirmed from the classroom observation where peer and self-assessment was not evident.

From an affective perspective, Cook (2001) states that it is more motivational to use the L1 so the students know the classroom is an open communicative environment,

which relieves the anxiety of speaking exclusively in the TL. Hence, to enhance learning in the context of primary ESL classroom, due to their age, cognitive and proficiency, it can be suggested that the use of L1 is suitable in enhancing students learning or L2.The issue of using L1 in the language classrooms is still a source of debate. Although the opponents of L1 use assert that L2 teaching and learning should not involve the L1 use in the classroom, however, it would be impossible for students with lower L2 proficiency to use L2 exclusively (Harbord, 1992). Hence, it is suitable to support the moderate purposeful use of L1 in L2 instruction (see, for example, Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007). This is because, planned deliberate use of students' own language can reduce anxiety, provide a safe environment for students and help in raising students' motivation and enhancing their performance (Cook, 2001). According to Cole (1998), teachers will find for themselves when L1 is genuinely needed and beneficial. Regularly considering when and how to use L1, and the circumstances under which it will facilitate student learning without making it a difficult experience, teachers can provide a safe and stimulating environment for language learning (p.95). Hence, teachers should use English where possible and L1 where necessary (Atkinson 1987, p. 243).

The data also revealed that there was a lack of conceptual clarity with regards to peer and self-assessment. Peer and self-assessment are two forms of classroom assessment that involve students' participation to a great extent. In peer assessment, students judge the work of their peers whereas students judge their own work in self-assessment (Falchikov and Goldfinch, 2000). Peer assessment by no means indicates "what students have learned; instead, it helps students realise what they have not learned and how their peers and teacher can help them develop more critical-thinking skills" (Davis et al., 2007, p. 125). The teachers in this study claimed that the practice of peer assessment was taking place in their ESL classrooms. However, the practice observed was that of peer marking, whereby peers mark each other's work based on the correct answers provided by the teacher. The important aspect of peer assessment, i.e., exchange of feedback, is absent in peer marking. Similar to the practice of peer assessment, the conceptual understanding of self-assessment was found to be quite weak. The teachers mentioned practising self-assessment, though, in fact, the practice was that of self-marking where, like in peer marking, correct answers were provided by the teacher.

Shepard (2000) claims that student involvement in assessment, particularly self and peer assessments by and between students is an inevitable feature in the

assessment process for continuous improvement and lifelong learning. However, as revealed in the findings of this study, the teachers, though aware of the importance of students' central role in learning, did not seem to realise an equivalent role for students in assessment. It could be argued that the reason behind the absence of peer and self-assessment in the classroom was the fact that students were mostly seen by teachers as background players and teachers do not feel confident letting students actively participate in the assessment practices. Furthermore, the teachers seemed to believe that self-assessment could only be achieved by certain learners, particularly advance learners. Furthermore, it has been recognised that self-assessment is time consuming (Schunk, 1996). It requires extensive self-questioning, hence, less able students might find it more difficult to self- or peer-assess compared to more able students (Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling, 1997; Sullivan and Hall, 1997).The teachers also referred to the lack of pupils' motivation and interest in their class and students' low level of English language proficiency as the reason why they had not implemented peer and self-assessment in their classrooms. This finding may be linked to the cognitive development of children in the younger age group. Learners, therefore, were seen as one of the constraints hindering the adoption of peer and self-assessment.

Black and Wiliam (2003) suggest that in order to help students become better learners, they should be given the opportunity to play an active role and talk about their learning and engage in peer-feedback activities. Similarly, Clark (2012) states that students can improve their understanding of their learning when they discuss the learning process with their peers. By providing concrete pieces of work for pupils to discuss through formal and informal conversations about their learning, pupils get the opportunity to develop more collaborative relationships with their fellow peers and teachers. Hence, peer assessment allows mutual understanding through a collaborative process about the progress that pupils are making, and giving them the opportunity to demonstrate what they are capable of doing.

Teachers can improve their teaching practices by supporting students in developing the ability to monitor their own learning (Schildkamp et al., 2013). Harris and Brown (2013) discuss the benefits of self-assessment, claiming that self-assessment helps students take responsibility for their own learning. Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) affirm that "student-involved classroom assessment opens the assessment process and invites students in as partners, monitoring their own levels of achievement" (p. 13). Therefore, pupils' meta-cognitive strategies such as individual goal planning,

monitoring and reflection on their learning can be achieved through deep engagement of learners by giving "the power to oversee and steer one's own learning so that one can become a more committed, responsible and effective learner" (Black and Jones, 2006, p. 8).

In a similar vein, Fullan (2007) argues that appreciating student opinions and involving students in the change process are key elements contributing to successful educational change. Because teachers in the current research had not been given proper training in how to implement formative assessment and help students develop self-assessment and peer assessment, they lacked recognition of the need to develop and implement formative assessment in their classrooms. It may be that their educational background and the teaching environment in Malaysian schools hindered their adoption of formative assessment in the primary ESL context.

The following section discusses the alignment between teachers' understandings of formative assessment and their assessment practices.

9.4 The Degree of Alignment Between Teachers' Understandings and Actual Practices

The data revealed that Rachel, Ken, and Maya knew about the changes to the assessment policy and were aware of the policy's expectations. Notwithstanding the disjuncture between their understandings and actual classroom practices, they attempted to incorporate elements of formative assessment in their practices, although not consistent with their espoused understandings. The data revealed that the teachers had limited knowledge and understanding about how to adopt formative assessment strategies as a pedagogical method in their English classrooms. What the teachers did was to articulate their knowledge of the recommended changes and the discourse of the new assessment policy but this articulation was often limited to a verbal rendition of the policy expectations, perhaps as reflected in the departmentally-led assessment training sessions. However, the understandings articulated in interviews did not seem to inform the practices in the lessons observed as part of this study. It is possible that the three teachers' understandings of formative assessment were superficial and, as a result, more nuanced applications of formative assessment did not occur in class. The danger of teachers enacting a superficial understanding of formative assessment lies in the lost opportunity for a truly 'transformative' (Torrance, 2012) practice that could deliver the profound change that the policy seems to espouse.

On the whole, the three teachers appeared to have little inclination to consistently implement formative assessment or, indeed, little awareness of how formative assessment could be embedded in their practice. English teaching in the three observed classes in the three different primary schools in Malaysia was mainly teacher-centered. The data in the current study also indicates that teachers' understandings and practices fell short of fully implementing formative assessment in their contexts even though the policy was mandated by the government and their educational institutions. What can be inferred from this is that there is a gap or a lack of connection between policy and individual teachers' practice. This, in turn, suggests, that more could be done to address this gap, particularly in relation to enabling teachers to develop a better understanding of formative assessment. In this regard, a more thorough and sustained professional development could partly address this gap.

In a context where teachers are faced with shifting paradigms and expectations in terms of pedagogy and assessment while faced with other factors, it is unlikely that they will engage with new assessment policies in a profound way. Teachers' choice of practices is, however, not influenced by their understanding of the policy expectations only. Understandings are mediated and likely to be influenced negatively or positively by other factors. As the three cases explored in this study suggest, teachers interpret and implement the educational policy within the specific contexts of a school organisational structure and environment. Therefore, their practices are shaped by contextual factors operating from within and beyond the school and classrooms.

This divergence between teachers' understandings and actual assessment practices found in this study can be attributed to a number of factors evident in the data, as well as to a complex interplay between these factors that influences the extent of implementation of formative assessment in day to day practice. In the following sections, I discuss the factors emerging from the study that may have contributed to the mismatch between teachers' understandings and their actual practice.

9.5 Factors Affecting Teachers' Understandings and Assessment Practices

Based on the findings, a number of obstacles were identified as influencing the teachers' understandings and assessment practices, discussed here in six broad themes: 1) Conceptual constraints; 2) Traditional means of language assessment; 3)

Lack of professional development; 4) Contextual constraints; 5) Conflicts between rooted beliefs and ideals of effective teaching, learning and assessment; 6) Conflicts between formative assessment principles and Malaysian culture: an examination-oriented culture and difficulties related to system accountability.

9.5.1 Conceptual Constraints

One of the major challenges in the implementation of formative assessment was the teachers' limited knowledge and lack of adequate understanding of the key concepts and strategies that underpin formative assessment. This resonates with findings by other researchers (see for example, Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Shepard, 1998). Consequently, the teachers' views and their practices often did not align (Black and Wiliam, 1998b). In particular, new, formatively focussed assessment reforms are not easily understood by the teachers (Cormack, Johnson, Peters and Williams, 1998) or are misunderstood (Black, 2003). For example, the teachers in this study appeared to think that providing students with their test results constituted feedback. However, according to Black (2003), "any test or assessment at the end of a piece of learning is too late for formative purposes, precisely because it is at the end, so there is no opportunity to use its results for feedback to improve (the) performance of the pupils involved" (p.3). This confusion may lead to the idea that a newer form of assessment such as formative assessment would be something extra for the teachers to do (Neesom, 2000).

Of concern to a number of researchers has been the lack of clarity about the distinctions between formative and summative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). This lack of clarity was also evident in official curriculum and assessment documents (see Chapter 3 Section 3.4) developed to support the recent educational reforms in Malaysia, which confused and blurred the difference in these functions and their relationship to each other (Harlen and James, 1997). As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.4, the essential difference between formative and summative functions is not clearly specified in the policy documents. Within the official documents, great importance and emphasis have been placed on timing: formative to occur during instruction and summative at some endpoint, thus implying that timing is the key difference. Significantly, the real features that differentiate the two, purpose and effect, have been given scant attention and have not been articulated clearly. Moreover, the two functions have been presented as unproblematic, with policymakers assuming that formative and summative assessment are well

understood by teachers (Harlen and James, 1997). As a consequence, there seemed to be a confusion in all the three teachers' accounts about these two kinds of assessment.

This seems to suggest that the unclear distinction made between formative and summative assessment in the policy documents has a significant effect on teachers' practice (Harlen and James, 1997). The three teachers who participated in my study struggled to implement assessments, and the purpose of those assessments were confused. As a consequence of the conflation of summative and formative purposes, little genuine formative assessment was evident among Rachel, Ken and Maya's assessment practices. Significantly, when formative assessment did occur, teachers appeared to be unaware of it. Conversely, when teachers believed that they were assessing formatively, in reality, they were completing continuous summative assessment that they then used primarily for reporting purposes. Studies by Bell and Cowie (1997) and Nitko (1995) have reported similar findings.

As Shepard (1995) has maintained, the introduction of an innovation such as formative assessment will not necessarily improve learning. She has argued that to move formative assessment from rhetoric to reality, every effort must be made to gain the support, cooperation and commitment of teachers. Of significance, are findings from other studies that show that while teachers want help in translating assessment principles into practice (Gipps and James, 1996), generally they have been expected to implement them with little support and few additional resources to assist them in the process (Broadfoot et al., 1996). This is also the case among the three teachers in this study, who claimed to have had limited training on assessment, particularly formative assessment.

Due to this lack of understanding and training, the observed lessons did not seem to promote opportunities for students to engage in, or to practise the language. Besides, the opportunities for students to experience using the language and to be creative with it were hampered when the language used in the communicative tasks was not authentic or produced 'naturally'; rather, it was pre-determined by the teachers, and involved drilling, repeating and copying, rather than self-expression or creativity. Moreover, the focus of the activities observed was more on form rather than on communicating meaning, clearly at odds with communicative purposes. Due to misconceptions and misunderstanding about what constituted assessment for formative purposes, the classroom teaching practices were characterised by the

teachers having tight control of the classroom discourse through teacher-led recitation and question and answer sequences, thereby limiting students' involvement during interaction. This resulted in a less communicative and less interactive classroom.

The lack of comprehensive explanation and information on the concept of formative assessment in assessment policy documents and the lack of practical guidance, including specific training on assessment, suggests that the Ministry may assume that teachers are well-informed and knowledgeable, since they were sent for training when the policy was launched.

Moss and Brookhart (2009) assert that misunderstandings are the inevitable result of misinterpretation and often cause teachers to question the process of formative assessment. This is supported by the findings of this study. The lack of consistent use of the terminology, for example, is not only problematic from a research perspective but more importantly, may inhibit the understanding and effective implementation of formative assessment by policymakers and teachers (Swaffield, 2011). As a result, the possible benefits for learning that formative assessment offers might not be capitalised on. Although some attempts at clarifying the theoretical framework and the terms associated with it have been made by the teachers in this study, the definitional issue (Bennett, 2011) seems to persist. In addition, the much-needed professional support to the teachers so as to clarify the above-mentioned misconceptions and to provide guidance with regards to integrating formative assessment practices in their teaching, seemed to be absent. Besides, the empirical data does not provide any evidence that the system supports professional development activities such as teachers collaborating with other colleagues to discuss their experience and receive feedback on their formative assessment practices. So, each individual teacher practices formative assessment according to their understanding, which may or may not be correct.

What also emerged from this study is that although teachers seemed to be aware of the changes in teaching and assessment in English language learning, their understanding was limited and there appeared to be no deep-level cognitive shift (Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Brookhart, 2008). This leads to the general conclusion that a conceptual misunderstanding about formative assessment influenced teachers' assessment practice. Indeed, the formative aspect appeared to be mostly absent and when present, was minimal and generic in nature. The focus was more

on grading and ensuring that the work assigned was done on time. This finding is not surprising considering the confusion that exists with the general definitions and explanations embedded in the Malaysian assessment policy documents.

9.5.2 Traditional Means of Language Assessment

Another possible obstacle to implementing the full range of formative assessment strategies (Black and Wiliam, 2009), in addition to a limited understanding about the nature of formative assessment discussed above, is that English language teaching practices seems to be centred on traditional approaches to assessment. As shown in Table 9.4, all three schools implement monthly tests and midterm and final exams. The prevalence of summative tests thus contradicts the general principles regarding primary ESL assessment as promoted by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Assessment results were mainly reported in the three schools in the form of comments or grades, as all the teachers seemed to believe that this was the most suitable way of delivering results to young learners. However, as Earl (2013) states, when students consistently fail, they lose their motivation to learn and go to great lengths to avoid the pain of failure, the possibility of public embarrassment and further confirmation of their ineffectiveness. The practice of testing and grading may thus be an obstacle to learning, particularly in the case of less able pupils. As students start schooling in Malaysia, the school is "already socialised by the long-standing history of schools as places where they are judged and marked, often with important consequences (from parental reactions to entry to further and higher education)" (Earl, 2013, p. 85). In particular, these reasons may focus both students' and parents' attention on meeting such demands rather than on other benefits of learning. Earl (2013) argues that when teachers' focus in assessment is on marking and grading, there is a strong emphasis on comparing students, and there is little room for improvement. Similarly, when the classroom culture focuses on rewards, grades or class rankings, students will look for ways to achieve the best marks rather than to progress their learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998b). In addition, as Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) point out, marking or grading is a traditional practice that may be interpreted by students as the teacher's approval or disapproval of student performance. As such, Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) criticise "grades, those traditional coded symbols, and markings 'B', 71 percent, 4/10, Satisfactory, 'F' actually communicate even less about what students have done well or need to do to improve" (p.2). As has been argued in this thesis, formative assessment offers an alternative, which is to provide feedback that focuses on work and not on individual

student characteristics so that it can increase students' motivation and desire to learn.

As noted by Earl (2013), breaking old habits is not easy and traditional assessment of learning is not likely to disappear. However, the trick is to balance the effects of assessment. In this way, teachers can use assessment to foster learning and motivate learners and not as a method of passing the test. It is also important to integrate assessment into the learning process, where teachers and students can work together and share their beliefs and understandings. This approach can liberate students' natural curiosity and the teachers can further encourage them to engage in the work to acquire knowledge or skills (Earl, 2013).

9.5.3 Lack of Professional Development

Teachers unanimously reported the lack of relevant training and professional development. It is important to note that these three teachers did not have any opportunity for continuous formal learning related to formative assessment; where training was provided, it appeared to have been a once-only option. None of the teachers had attended long-term training in formative assessment, although there was a short briefing from a teacher trainer during a two-day course organised by the District Education Office (DEO) or an in-house training conducted by their respective schools. These short training sessions were cascaded by Senior Teachers and pre-service trainers.

Due to the lack of training, it was clearly challenging for the teachers in this study to put into practice and understand the guidelines given by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate (MES) on the new assessment policy. Rachel, Ken and Maya noted that they were confused on how to implement formative assessment. Added to the lack of professional training was the absence of experts who might have scaffolded their assessment practice and their process of making sense of the meaning of formative assessment. Moreover, their experience in terms of assessing their ESL learners was immersed in a testing culture and examination tradition, thereby limiting the possibilities for learning from others. Against a background of little or no professional development, participants candidly explained that it was very difficult to implement changes in their assessment practice because they simply did not know what to do and why. In this case, the limited training that was provided did not seem to meet the teachers' need for information and training. These findings align with those of Talib

et al. (2014), Sardareh (2014) and Che Md. Ghazali (2015) in that most teachers in Malaysia did not have training in assessment.

The teachers' interview responses also indicated a lack of follow-up and monitoring in the classroom by the relevant authorities, which would have given teachers feedback on how far their assessment practices were appropriate and could have supported them towards developing high-quality assessment tasks. Consequently, there were no opportunities for teachers to reflect on the new assessment reform, or to think about how best to implement it in their classroom.

The document analysis further revealed that there was no comprehensive assessment policy framework to guide teachers in their assessment practices. Instead, they had written instructions on assessment that included the grading criteria they were expected to use and how assessment should be administered and reported. These instructions did not include principles of formative assessment, nor were there directions on the methods and strategies teachers needed to use to construct assessment tasks. There were also no instructions on how data or information on student learning should be managed, processed, interpreted and what purpose it might serve.

In addition, the mismatch between a curriculum that promotes communication and critical thinking, and an examination system that focuses on testing discreet skills such as writing and reading, caused confusion among the three teachers. Thus, it is not surprising that the teachers did not see the relevance of formative assessment to the aim of the curriculum. This problem was further aggravated by the lack of references, materials or handbooks for teachers to refer to when confronted with problems during the implementation stage.

Teachers are in large part responsible for the success of the implementation of an educational change, as they pass on the changes through their teaching (Fullan, 2007). However, their ability to engage in change productively and achieve the desired results can only be achieved if adequate resources and support are provided. Teachers need support in terms of developing their knowledge and skills to implement the new approach and their role within that approach, if the changes are to be successfully implemented. These are knowledge and skills that can be developed through training and professional development. Kennedy (1996) emphasises that "teachers can be a powerful positive force for change but only if they are given the resources and support that enable them to carry out

implementation effectively, otherwise the change is more likely to cause stress and disaffection" (p. 87).

9.5.4 Contextual and Resource-related Constraints

The findings reported in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 suggest that a number of contextual and resource-related constraints contributed to the lack of formative assessment in the primary ESL classrooms, by placing restrictions on the quality of interaction and feedback that teachers could offer their students. Furthermore, the extent to which teachers were able to translate their understandings into practice was also limited by these factors.

Firstly, Rachel and Maya cited the large class sizes as a hindrance in carrying out formative assessment. Student numbers ranged from 40 to 42 (Rachel and Maya's classroom). Rachel and Maya expressed their concern that the number of students made it impossible to give the kind of individual attention that formative assessment would require. Moreover, the majority of their students were at a low level of language proficiency, and this was seen by the teachers as a barrier to incorporating and practising more interactive, learner-centred teaching. This often leads to a teacher assuming that learning has taken place based on one or two student's abilities to give the correct answer to a question or to solve a given problem. In other research the difficulty of managing a large number of students in a very limited space is discussed (Wedell, 2005) as is the unfeasibility of eliciting contributions of ideas or active participation from students with a low level of language proficiency.

Teachers acknowledged the importance of consistent practice due to the practical nature of language learning and in this regard, viewed the checking of learners' work while providing solutions as a very important process. However, the extent to which the checking process could be done in qualitatively rich ways was impeded by the physical impracticalities of performing such an exercise with large class sizes. In addition, because of large classes, it was impossible for teachers to get marking done within a certain time -frame in order to give constructive and timely feedback by which learning could be enhanced.

The large number of students in Rachel and Maya's classrooms also affected the seating arrangement in the classroom.   Based on classroom observation (see Figures 6.1 and 8.1) the traditional straight-row arrangement was predominant in all three classrooms and I would argue that the teachers' actual practices may have

been partly at least due to the physical arrangement of the classroom. Although the Ministry of Education in Malaysia recommends grouped seating arrangements, it has not succeeded in encouraging a learner-centred learning style. A large number of students in a class makes it impractical to have group activities that encourage students' active participation. These teachers may have had a lack of awareness of the importance or the influence of the physical arrangement on learning and teaching, or they may have seen this kind of seating as a feature of the class that was beyond their control. Thus, it can be argued that the physical arrangement of the students in the classroom may have inhibited more learner-centred practices in the observed classes.

In Malaysia, a teacher is expected to handle different levels of classes and different subjects in a day. In this study, the three teachers had to teach between four to six hours a day, excluding the time a teacher would spend in planning and assessing students' work. The planning and assessment related work is carried out after school hours or over the weekend. Teachers are also expected to have a detailed lesson plan for each lesson, as mandated by the Ministry of Education. The school administration follows up on this mandate by instituting a practice whereby each teacher has to submit their lesson plans to the Head of the Department, and sometimes to the Senior Assistant. However, there was no mention of receiving feedback from any of the involved. Hence, the practice is seen to be more of a check and balance in nature than formative.

Besides teaching, teachers are expected to be role models for the students and also to take part in many other school activities like extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, there are other activities teachers and students are expected to take an active part in that are not scheduled in the school calendar. This comes as an ad hoc program and is mostly made mandatory either by the ministry or the school administrators. Those that take place during normal class hours disrupt the teaching and learning process while those taking place after school hours or on Saturdays intrude upon the free hours of teachers and students. Such heavy workloads can compromise formative assessment as teachers find they do not have any time to plan for it. This is exacerbated when, as in Baker's study (1995), teachers do not view assessment as integral to teaching and learning but as an additional task that bears little relationship to what occurs in the classroom. This can create a dislike of, and resistance towards, formative assessment.

Another obstacle to implementing formative assessment is related to the syllabus. A uniform syllabus is followed across the schools in Malaysia and the schools are expected to cover each portion of the syllabus within a certain specified time. According to the teachers, these syllabuses are vast and the teachers often face the problem of not completing the syllabus on time. When the syllabus is not covered on time, the question is never whether it is due to large class size or if more time is required by the students to understand the concept under study. The blame is put on the teacher and his or her capability as a teacher. This puts a teacher in a situation where he or she has, on one hand, the syllabus to cover on time and on the other, is responsible for the students' learning. Since the school administration and the education officials do check for timely syllabus coverage, teachers prioritise covering the syllabus, even though they are aware that this is at the cost of students' learning.

For the teachers in this study, there seemed to be a feeling of being overloaded by assessment requirements. This sense of overload might cause the teachers to grasp for survival strategies which will eventually negate and undermine their ability to assess (Irving,1995). Carless (2005) argues that teachers need to understand the principles of assessment for formative purpose in order to implement it and that these principles require some form of congruence with their own beliefs.

9.5.5 Conflicts Between Rooted Beliefs and Ideals of Effective Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The assessment practices in all the three primary ESL classes were mediated through teachers' beliefs about learning and assessment. There were conflicts between the teachers' beliefs about the role of the teacher as well as about the relationship between learning and assessment. These conflicts seemed to significantly hamper the formative assessment practices in the three classes.

The teachers seemed to be more concerned with how much input should be transmitted and the different types of activities to carry out in a lesson, rather than mastery of language skills. This consequently affected what they assumed their role(s) to be in the new assessment approach and its implementation within the classroom. Instead of playing the role of facilitator in the teaching and learning process (which is a characteristic of learner-centred teaching), the teachers merely performed the roles of knowledge transmitter and evaluator. These roles are not congruent with the focus of recent assessment reform, which demands interactive learner-centred teaching and an emphasis on the development of students' creative

and critical thinking skills (Curriculum Development Centre, 2011). The policy advocates that students should be engaged in more active and effective activities such as problem-solving, decision making, reasoning, expressing thoughts and exchanging viewpoints, to enable them to become confident speakers who can communicate clearly, appropriately and coherently in any given context. But the analysis of the data reveals that students in the primary ESL classroom remain passive, and participation is mainly restricted to answering the teacher's questions or confirming or repeating the teacher's statements.

9.5.6 Conflicts Between Formative Assessment Principles and Malaysian Culture: Examination-Oriented System

Another obstacle that may have contributed to the discrepancy between the teachers' understanding and their actual practices could be the cultural challenges that the innovation poses to existing norms and values (Wedell, 2009). Conflicts between the principles of formative assessment and Malaysian culture created barriers when it came to implementing formative assessment strategies in Malaysian primary ESL classes. Wedell (2009) notes that the norms and behaviours in the work place affect the behaviour and attitudes of teachers when they are confronted by change. In this study, although the teachers were well aware of the cultural challenges and appeared to understand Malaysian students' learning culture, they still faced a number of difficulties. Table 9.3 illustrates how Malaysian teaching, learning and assessment culture are embedded in Rachel, Ken and Maya's assessment practices, thereby impeding the implementation of formative assessment.

Table 9.3: Conflicts between formative assessment and Malaysian culture

In the Malaysian context, summative assessment appears to be in conflict with

Principles of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 2009; Heritage, 2010; Torrance and Pryor, 2001; Wiliam and Thompson, 2007)	Malaysian teaching, learning and assessment culture
● Makes goals and standards transparent to students: Provide clear assessment criteria.	● Transparency would undermine the teacher's role because transparency encourages students to become involved in making decisions on the assessment process and results. ● The time given is considered limited because students have to digest all input given within a short period of time and are yet expected to achieve the required proficiency set by the Ministry of Education. (Maarof et al., 2011)
● Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning – developing effective classroom instructional strategies that allow for the measurement of success.	● High-stakes external examination dominant: Under pressure of accountability, certification and the selection function of assessment (Normazidah et al., 2012; Ong, 2010; Pandian, 2002) ● Rote memorisation and careful exam-taking skill (Lim, 2013)
● Providing feedback that moves learning forward	● Knowledge transmitted from a teacher is considered the most accurate and persuasive. ● Students have a strong preference to seek teachers' feedback instead of peers (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1994) ● Educators are considered respected role models with responsibilities for transmitting knowledge to learners, while learners are seen as knowledge receivers (Mohamad Nasri, 2017)
● Activating learners as instructional resources for one another and owners of their own learning. ● Encourage self-directed learning	● Malaysian students are more inclined to adopt a passive learning style (Lim, 2013)

formative assessment. Summative assessment not only has a long history in Malaysia, but is even more emphasised now in an era of 'accountability', where final exams are believed to provide objective data on student learning (Ong, 2010). Under the pressure of accountability, certification and selection of assessment, the teachers are strongly directed to summative assessment rather than formative assessment. Thus, examination expectations are influencing indirectly the way the three case study teachers implement formative assessment. The interview data indicates that while the new assessment policy stressed learning of language skills using formative assessment, assessment still focused on the attainment of excellence in the examination. Accordingly, the three teachers claimed that test exams are still the yardstick for English language learners' success, and this directed their teaching and assessment practice. Furthermore, in Malaysia, teachers are assessed in terms of their learners' academic success as measured by learners' performance in the exams; thus, learners' examinations scores are seen as indicators of the quality of teaching.

All three teachers mentioned that the examinations provided a barrier to the development of formative assessment because the examinations determined the content of learning. One might argue that while the examinations might determine the content for learning, they do not necessarily determine the process for learning. While all the teachers claimed that there is specific content that must be covered, it appears that formative assessment was not prioritised as a particular pedagogy in their classes to achieve these aims. According to Lee and Coniam (2013), implementing formative assessment will be hindered if it is not compatible with the broader context of a school and educational system, especially in contexts where students are expected to take high-stakes summative tests.

The similarities in terms of assessment policies between the three primary schools are shown in Table 9.4. These suggest that these primary schools have a culture that strongly favours summative testing, which explains why Rachel, Ken and Maya emphasised summative assessment in their practice.

Table 9.4: Malaysian Primary Schools' Assessment Policy

Types of Assessment	Frequency	Year/ Level					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
SBA	Ongoing	/	/	/	/	/	/
Monthly Test	Twice a year	/	/	/	/	/	/
School Exam	Twice a year	/	/	/	/	/	/
National Examination	Once by the end of Year 6						/
Domestic Test	Once at the beginning of the school term	/					

The table above shows that teachers had to administer six different types of assessment within the school academic year. The teachers stated that their school conducts both formative and summative assessment because it is the requirement of the Ministry. Their schools also rely on test and school examinations twice a year to inform the parents and to be kept as the school's record. However, they claimed that the results from the formative assessment were only used for documentation purposes and exams were still conducted and approved by the national government. Thus, despite having positive attitudes towards formative assessment, the teachers stated that they had no choice but to teach towards examination expectations. The teachers all reported that because of the exam-oriented system, they prioritised preparing students for exams. According to Maya, implementing formative assessment was just another requirement of the ministry, and they "just have to do it". Ken and Rachel echoed this point. Being accustomed to abiding by such directives, it is not surprising for the teachers to have lack of confidence in implementing formative assessment in their classes.

In Malaysia, as in other countries, education institutions are expected to produce self-directed learners. In achieving this goal, the Malaysian institutions are driven to enhance the quality of teaching by adopting a Western model (formative assessment) of education to ensure success. Despite being inspired by the Western educational model, Malaysian institutions' working practices are greatly influenced and molded by the diverse culture of Malaysian society. Hence, a failure to acknowledge local context could lead to deterioration in the process of introducing formative

assessment, particularly peer and self-assessment because, within Malaysia's current context and culture, like many other Asian countries, power and authority are prime considerations (Juhana, 2012). The issues of power and authority are evident in educator-learners relationships, where teachers are valued as the absolute authority and role models with responsibilities for transmitting knowledge to learners, while learners are seen as knowledge receivers required to listen attentively to the lecture. This type of relationship may hinder interactive and supportive interaction between all parties which is an essential element for effective self-direction.

The findings from this study indicated that all three teacher participants have not accepted their role as facilitators of learning as they were reluctant to abandon the authority position. Interestingly, even though the teacher participants remain firmly attached to their traditional roles as knowledge experts, they do not view themselves as the absolute authority as they adopt a mix of conventional and active pedagogical approaches. As a result, learners tend not to take responsibility for their own learning but rather, rely on their teachers to provide them with the information and structure for learning. This deep-rooted cultural belief seemed to have mediated the teachers' understandings of the roles of teacher and student in assessment. This belief further influenced their decision regarding whether to implement self or peer assessment. This misalignment of the Malaysian government's aspirations to encourage learner autonomy, along with Malaysian educational belief systems, warrants our attention.

As many students will feel uneasy to take full responsibility of their learning, there is a need to constantly assure the students that peer feedback is not a replacement of teachers' feedback but to complement it (Topping, 2009). Hence, teachers and students must have the commitment to use peer feedback consistently, over a substantial period of time and make it the teaching and learning culture. Teachers should not just use peer feedback for a short period of time and expect students to be miraculously transformed into geniuses. There must be hundred per cent effort when using peer feedback, not just using them once and conclude that peer feedback has failed to contribute to students' learning. Finally, the most important challenge is time. Time must be given to the teachers so that they could use it to collaborate with other teachers to plan peer feedback lessons, prepare teaching and learning materials, do their markings and even observe each other lessons as part of professional development. Time must also be given before positive results could be seen.

9.5.7 Accountability: A Demand for Objectivity in Assessment Practice

The current study provides empirical evidence of the impact summative reporting has in terms of inhibiting the implementation of formative assessment. At certain times during the semester when summative reports were due, the teachers claimed not to use formative assessment techniques. This raises the possibility of another contextual factor, other than examinations, that shaped classroom assessment practices: the school's reporting policy. Furthermore, parental expectations also impacted on the teachers' assessment practices. As the teachers were expected to report numerical grades to parents, they tended to opt for employing testing procedures in the lessons preceding the reporting.

The teachers were under pressure from the stakeholders to produce objective and reliable assessment. This demand seemed to relate to the teachers' understandings of the purpose of formative assessment as prescribed in the new assessment policy and the institutional policies which focused on summative and for reporting purposes. This demand was evident in all three schools (see Table 9.4) in the teachers' reporting of students' performances. This finding confirms the close relationship between teachers' assessment practices and their understandings of the assessment purposes that has been established in the research literature on English language teachers (see for example, Cheng et al., 2008).

Thus, teachers' approach to assessment was a result of the institutional requirement to give objective grades for students' performance. However, it could also indicate that their perceptions of assessment were still rooted in the psychometric regime of language assessment that uses standardised and objective measurements of learning (Kunnan, 2005). In other words, the teachers' understandings of formative assessment probably did not yet encompass the assessment for learning function. Their understandings of assessment and related concepts, such as reliability and validity, need to be extended to include the constructs of informal, classroom-based assessment (Davison and Leung, 2009). The dominance of an assessment culture that demands objectivity is thus, another major factor that constrained the teachers' assessment practices in all three cases.

9.6 Conclusion

The three case studies show that the three English teachers were attempting to implement some strategies aligned with formative assessment principles. Rachel

and Maya, for example, had attempted to explain learning intentions and success criteria to their students, through the use of modelling. All three teachers used observation, oral questioning and oral feedback as common strategies to gauge students' current knowledge and as feedback on their teaching. However, the case study data also shows that the students were not involved in practices of providing and receiving feedback from teachers, peers and themselves with the purpose of recognising their current cognitive levels and setting up new goals for their own learning. Thus, the benefits of formative assessment were not fully achieved. On the other hand, the age and English language proficiency of the young learners in Rachel, Ken and Maya's classrooms need to also be taken into account: formative assessment needs to be considered as age-related rather than as a one-size-fits-all practice. The three teachers' assessment practices demonstrate that they understood Malaysian learning culture and tried to adopt innovative teaching and assessment strategies to their context. From the findings, it can be argued that the teachers had reached the point where they had some understanding of the change they were expected to implement, but at the operational level, they appeared to show superficial engagement with the new assessment policy. Teachers were able to confidently articulate the policy, but had not developed the higher-level conceptual shift and therefore, their pedagogy and assessment practice remained procedural.

This study argues that teachers' passion for and knowledge about innovation are paramount in the successful reform of assessment. At the same time, assessment is socially and culturally complex (Berry, 2011c), and the practices of the three teachers in this study were significantly affected by a number of factors: conceptual and contextual constraints; traditional means of language assessment; lack of professional development; conflict between rooted beliefs and the ideals of teaching, learning, and assessment; conflicts between formative assessment principles; examination-oriented culture. These factors together influenced the negotiation of the meaning of formative assessment in the contexts of the three primary ESL classroom. Contextual factors were significant in terms of the tensions between the primary school's assessment policies, which still focus on summative assessment and the lack of continuing professional development for teachers about assessment practice and policy. In addition, large class sizes, students' low level of language proficiency, and lack of time were among the obstacles that teachers identified to the implementation of formative assessment. As the traditional classroom arrangement still dominates in Malaysia, it may be hard for teachers to initiate innovative changes in their classrooms Additionally, the focus on testing/examination and teachers'

personal teaching experiences have a great impact on the teaching and learning processes.

In terms of sociocultural factors, the difference in cultural values between Malaysian education and the principles of formative assessment present a number of challenges when it comes to implementing formative assessment. Malaysian students' passivity, considered a legacy of Confucian teaching culture, was found to be a significant obstacle to the use of formative assessment in the three primary ESL classrooms. This learning style is in contradiction to the main principle of formative assessment that highlights the central and active role of students in their learning.

Furthermore, the Malaysian tradition of respect for authority also limited students from maximising cooperative learning with their peers. The traditional relationship between teacher and students in the Malaysian classroom is characterised by the teacher as authority. This, coupled with the lack of professional training and principles that have been developed in a Western context, have also been described as significant obstacles in the implementation of formative assessment in this teaching context. These sociocultural hindrances call for the development of culturally appropriate forms of formative assessment for Asian educational countries (Carless, 2011).

In summary, the three teachers attempted to adopt and adapt some formative assessment strategies to benefit their students' learning. However, students' responsibility and autonomy in their learning were restricted due to their historically passive learning habits. Formative assessment practices in the three primary ESL contexts in this study were mainly controlled and directed by the teachers, and tensions between formative and summative assessment were not resolved, as the examination-oriented learning still dominated. Despite the teachers' significant efforts, the deployment of formative assessment has been shown to be limited in these classrooms. This suggests that providing support for teaching and learning is imperative to enhance the uptake of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL context. The implications will now be discussed, along with recommendations for assessment policy and classroom practice.

CHAPTER TEN

THE WAY FORWARD FOR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN MALAYSIAN PRIMARY ESL CLASSROOM

10.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a detailed discussion of of the key findings from the three cases studies, in light of the existing literature. This closing chapter presents a summary of the findings and conclusion of the study. It starts with a brief overview of the study to examine whether the aims have been met and to summarise the contribution the study makes to the body of literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter goes on to discuss the implications for practice and policy, and this leads to the significance of the study. This chapter will then move on to a discussion of the limitations of the study and potential areas for future research. Section 10.6 draw the conclusion of the findings.

10.2 Overview and Summary of the Findings

The aim of the present study was to examine how formative assessment is understood and used by primary ESL teachers and what factors affect teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment.   It responds to calls for more research into formative assessment (e.g. Bennett, 2011; Rea-Dickins, 2001), assessment of young language learners (e.g. McKay, 2006) and intended to extend understanding of how formative assessment can facilitate learning in the primary ESL contexts through collecting and analysing empirical evidence (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009). The current section presents an overview and synthesises the findings relating to the three research questions.

This study investigated the implementation of the recent assessment innovation within the Malaysian education context. It was inspired by my personal and professional interest in exploring issues associated with English education in Malaysia, particularly in the primary ESL classroom. More importantly, it was inspired by an urgent research agenda prompted by a large-scale policy change. In 2011, the MOE implemented a new assessment innovation, the SBA system. One of the main aims was to encourage the optional status of the external test which had proved to be detrimental to learning for its largely negative washback effect (Ministry of Education, 2011). The innovation incorporated formative assessment as an

important addition to the original summative assessment-based framework. These policy changes were intended to improve the quality of ELL via triggering changes to teachers' assessment practice.

However, doubts about the effective implementation of formative assessment strategies in the primary ESL classrooms prompted me to conduct the current study. A critical review of the formative assessment literature revealed that students' learning outcomes and teachers' pedagogical practices can be enhanced when formative assessment is integrated. However, the term itself and the value of formative assessment are still contested, given the tensions identified when applying formative assessment in different contexts. Both this study and existing literature suggest that teachers do not have enough knowledge and skills to implement formative assessment strategies effectively (Wiliam, 2011). They also have difficulty developing learner autonomy while implementing formative assessment (Swaffield, 2011). Thus, understanding the complexities of the implementation of formative assessment strategies in a specific context is important. This was proposed as 'the problem' for this study.

This study was thus designed to explore how Malaysian primary ESL teachers' understandings of assessment, how these teachers use formative assessment in their classrooms, and what factors affect their understandings and assessment practices. The study also attempted to explain why teachers apply formative assessment the way they do with respect to English teaching in their specific contexts. The literature review located my study within the qualitative paradigm, as it was my aim to get the breadth and depth of the research through interviews (primary source data). The classroom observations, field notes and documents were secondary data sources and helped gain insight into teachers' implementation of formative assessment.

The three teachers who participated in this study expressed a positive attitude towards formative assessment. They highlighted the need to identify where the students should be heading, and understood that formative assessment strategies such as feedback could benefit students in their learning. Although teachers were aware of the changes in teaching and assessment in English, shifts in their understandings were marginal. They seemed to understand why formative assessment was needed, but observation of their practices pointed to some difficulties in implementing formative assessment strategies. Their practices

displayed limited knowledge and understanding of how to assess for formative purpose. Teachers' practices revealed that they have not engaged deeply with the shifts as enshrined in the new assessment policy. This was evident in the kind of assessment practice that was happening in their classes. The teachers talked about the need to use a variety of assessment strategies to provide learners with multiple opportunities to practice and master different skills. However, they have not yet made deeper strides into how the change is impacting on their classroom assessment practice. The teachers seemed not to have a thorough knowledge of formative assessment strategies that would be particularly suited to the cognitive level of young language learners. Knowing *about* the assessment policy did not necessarily translate into *enacting* the required change.

Notwithstanding the disjuncture between the teachers' understandings and actual practices, there is evidence of teachers attempting to incorporate elements of formative assessment in their practices, although not consistent with their espoused understandings. Teachers were in fact taking some steps towards an alternative or transformed practice (Torrance, 2013). They choose at least to provide opportunities for a different form of pedagogy, in line with the overall broad conception of a 'learner-centred pedagogy', perhaps it is that because formative assessment has become an important component of the new curriculum and assessment policy. This shows some ray of hope in terms of the transforming their practices over time. The concern, however, is that these new superficial practices might become routine as a response to the policy's expectations. The danger is that this 'little transformation' is accepted as adequate for bringing about the more profound qualitative change intended by the assessment policy.

My findings indicate that the teachers shared learning intentions and success criteria with their students, but gave little consideration to the quality of the learning intentions and criteria as a means of sharing knowledge with their students. This highlights the importance of teachers framing learning intentions and success criteria (Clarke, 2005) as part of their teaching if their practice is to become formative in nature, rather than merely instructive.

The findings also suggest most of the questions required low level cognitive answers and did not provoke thoughtful reflection; furthermore, the importance of effective questioning to foster autonomy was overlooked. Based on observation, students

were not provided with a supportive and collaborative learning environment and patterns of participation were predominantly hierarchical.

I have argued that the teachers' struggle to frame their feedback in a formative manner might be due to the influence of behaviourism on their beliefs. Teachers were unable to provide formative feedback on the planned learning intentions and success criteria for their students; thus, they were unable to address the criteria of closing the gap between students' current and desired performances. Instead, teachers often resorted to the action of 'telling' as their feedback. Furthermore, teacher feedback to the students was mostly in the form of praise and one-to-one instruction. It was also observed that feedback was not dialogic and therefore did not encourage active participation of students in the feedback process, which in turn would develop autonomy. The implication of this finding is that, without deeper understanding, assessment strategies may fall short of supporting students in becoming active participants in their learning. Instead, students tend to be passive consumers of feedback. Sadler (1989) argues that for feedback to be formative, students' involvement is important in the process: through understanding their learning goals and through engagement in formative strategies, they can close the gaps in their learning achievements. Peer and self-assessment are two formative assessment strategies that, according to Sadler (1989) help students to make qualitative judgements on their work during learning. Yet, as the findings revealed, none of the three teachers were in favour of this practice, appearing to believe that it was only suitable for native L1 students or advanced learners who had higher linguistic abilities; thus, the practice of peer and self-assessment was not fully utilised as a strategy in their classrooms.

This study is predicated on the argument that teachers' understanding is influential in their interpretation and enactment of formative assessment. However, this study has highlighted that the interplay between understanding and practice is complex. Certain pervasive aspects influence teachers' thinking and action, and findings in this study strongly suggest that these teachers were caught in a paradigm shift between behaviourist and socio-cultural approaches to teaching and learning. It appears that teachers may still be influenced by behaviourist analytical approaches that perceive feedback to be a matter of making judgements (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). This may have come about because teachers were trained under a behaviourist paradigm, while current educational reform advocates for

student-centred, facilitative teaching and learning, reflecting a socio-cultural understanding of learning.

This study, which recognised the educator's role in supporting the learner's direction of learning has provided new insights into our understanding of formative assessment. Having reviewed and critically analysed the research participants' accounts of their pedagogical practices, it is interesting to note that, while the majority of research participants reported that they provide various learning opportunities to support their learners' language learning skills, nonetheless, the teacher participants were not comfortable abandoning their roles as authority figures in learning. This finding reaffirms existing literature which reported that not all Malaysian educators have accepted their role as facilitators of learning, but they instead remain firmly attached to their traditional roles of knowledge experts, to an extent they are comfortable with one-way knowledge transmission. While recognising the learner's role in the formative assessment process, the findings of this study highlight the need to harmoniously blend the conventional mode of teaching with formative assessment strategies, particularly peer and self-assessment to ensure successful and meaningful learning experiences for the learners.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the three primary ESL teachers have reached the point where they know what the change ought to be, but at the operational level, they show somewhat superficial engagement with formative assessment. The three teachers have reached the stage where they can verbalise what the policy says, but they are yet to develop higher-level conceptual shift and therefore their pedagogy remains procedural. Nonetheless, the relationship between teachers' understanding and practices should not be underestimated. In fact, this interplay should be investigated further, as it will likely reveal important indicators of the specific (and powerful) ways in which teachers' knowledge indirectly influences students' learning outcomes. Importantly, as each of the three cases has revealed, a range of contextual factors have also affected the implementation of formative assessment.

10.3 Implications of the Present Study

Although this is a small-scale thesis, this research study reveals some important finding which have implications to be considered by a variety of people, perhaps especially by those in settings where traditional summative assessment currently dominates. The findings of this study could be useful for teachers and

educational-policymakers, as a guide for action in Malaysia. This study indicates that not all teachers may have a complete understanding of what formative assessment means in classroom practice. Therefore, serious consideration has to be given to the gap in teachers' understanding and their practice.

10.3.1 National Assessment Policy

Given that the formative function of assessment is vital in supporting student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998b), assessment policy should support this function. However, Brown and Harris (2009) found that policies that promote the use of assessment data as external accountability mechanisms lead teachers to lose their positive orientation towards the improvement function of assessment. This study found that although innovation in teaching and assessment is evident at the policy level in Malaysia, the summative purpose of assessment is still over emphasised, leading teachers to focus on marks and certification. This finding is supported by previous research (Berry, 2011; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Broadfoot et al., 2014) which found that in an accountability era, there is limited space for assessment for formative purposes because teaching and learning are directed by test results and grades rather than by the aim of enhancing learning. Therefore, to make formative assessment effective, this study recommends that the formative function of assessment should be prioritised, explicitly stated in the policy and promoted in practice. The policy should explicitly outline directions for practice (Fullan, 2004). When policy ideas such as formative assessment are new to teachers, such policies need to be presented explicitly to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation. To this end, policy needs to be communicated in such a way that the actors at various levels understand the goals of the change. Limited understanding of the deep underlying principles often results in limited change (Spillane et al., 2002).

10.3.2 Pedagogical Implications

This section synthesises the pedagogical implications that the findings of the current study may have. My findings provide insights in relation to how the learning function of assessment (Rea Dickins, 2001) can be enacted in the primary ESL classroom, based on an understanding of assessment as a continuous process that occurs alongside teaching and learning, with implications for how teachers plan and deliver their lessons. Building on studies that suggest that setting objectives, monitoring work and providing feedback can be conducive to language learning (Edelenbos and Vinje, 2000; Rea Dickins, 2001), the present study proposes that primary ESL

teachers could create such conditions in their lessons by implementing formative assessment strategies. In order to enact the learning function of assessment, teachers should also strive to more consistently align their assessment foci with the pedagogical objectives of lessons. To ensure deeper understanding of formative assessment and more skilful use of formative assessment strategies, Malaysian teachers need continuing development opportunities. However, as discussed later in this chapter, the introduction and implementation of SBA suffered both from insufficient resourcing and from lack of consistent, continuing focus on professional development of teachers tasked with embedding formative assessment in their practice.

Formative assessment can be used for giving explicit feedback and assisting learning. Yet in this study, there was limited use of feedback. In contexts where learners' language proficiency is low, providing formative feedback to learners may be inherently difficult. Hence, there is a need to widen teachers age specific feedback repertoires and to sensitize them further to the importance of feedback and the various feedback procedures that could be used to support and promote students' learning. Exposing teachers to the various possible forms of feedback, particularly in the primary ESL classroom, would provide opportunities for teachers to select the most appropriate types of feedback for their young language learners.

While it is well acknowledged that students have a central role in assessment as expressed in formative assessment principles (Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Black et al., 2003), the findings reveal that peer and self-assessment were not implemented by the teachers due to the belief that younger children relied predominantly on feedback received from teachers. This finding has useful pedagogical implications as it suggests that teachers should, at least, be aware of the evidence that younger children may be capable of self-evaluating. Hence, the teachers do need to shift their understanding about the roles of students not only in terms of learning but also in assessment. Building on studies that suggest that young learners may be trained to self-assess accurately (e.g. Butler and Lee, 2010), the findings of the current study propose that teachers could use formative assessment to provide opportunities for learners to practise how to peer and self-assess. Teachers need to see that, apart from passing the internal and external assessments, the students also need to develop meta-cognitive strategies with regards to how to learn. Accordingly, teachers need to give students more opportunities to learn from participation and to learn how to take on a more central role as assessors.

Further, while peers are considered by sociocultural theorists as a resource for learning, the equal status of peers seemed to reduce the impact on individual learning. This requires effort from teachers in this regard, to make assessment an integral part of their general pedagogy. This process requires teachers to shift their pedagogical belief from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach, and also to develop their capacity to adopt and adapt strategies of formative assessment to their particular context. In the Malaysian primary education context, dominated by a passive learning style, the new assessment strategies need to be introduced gradually. Teachers should explain the purpose, process and outcomes of the new assessment strategies to their students. Teachers would also need to observe and follow up on how students perceive and conduct these strategies for timely intervention. Typically, in the Malaysian education context, the teacher ultimately maintains power in the classroom. When introducing formative assessment, the three teachers in this study were not able to share this power with their students. This study has argued that the influence of power on learning is complex due and in the case of Malaysia, can be directly linked to Malaysia's hierarchical sociocultural structures. In order to adopt and adapt formative assessment strategies, teachers need to have the capacity to understand not only students' learning needs and their specific disciplinary context but wider local and national cultural influences.

10.3.3 Teacher Professional Development

Training and technical support are essential prerequisites for the successful implementation of policy by ensuring that policy messages are clearly delivered and practitioners are equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills. Research from West to East has consistently found that poor teacher preparation for formative assessment impacts on its use and value in classes (Berry, 2011; Tan, 2011). This issue emerged in this study, as the three primary ESL teachers had limited opportunities to participate in training courses that focused on assessment, particularly formative assessment. This lack of effective training led teachers to fall back on their culturally, socially and historically embedded understandings and experiences of assessment. As a response, they made minimal changes to their assessment practice. Tensions arose from the fact that formative assessment theory and practice was new to these teachers, and consequently, they lacked specific skills to implement formative assessment effectively. It is therefore recommended that teachers' knowledge and skills regarding the implementation of formative assessment in their classrooms, be addressed through professional development.

I argue that the approach to teacher learning and professional development needs to be context specific. Effective professional development requires taking into account what a particular context values and how teachers can unlock what they value so as to be able to see both potentials and limitations. If teachers are simply given a structured curriculum and policy without understanding the context, changes are unlikely to be implemented because they are not well understood. Thus, training is crucial (Spillane et al., 2002), particularly when a policy change has been imported from foreign cultural contexts and involves a fundamental change in conceptualisation. This is the case for the new assessment policy introduced in Malaysia. Superficial knowledge about techniques and skills are not sufficient to bring about change to assessment approaches in the Malaysian context, where there is a long and entrenched history and understanding about teaching and testing. As revealed in this study, both macro and micro level factors influence the local context: conceptual constraints; traditional means of language assessment; lack of professional development; contextual constraints; teachers' beliefs that are in conflicts with certain ideals of teaching, learning and assessment; conflicts between formative assessment principles and examination-oriented culture. Hence, for formative assessment to take root and flourish in such a context, teachers need to be provided with formal professional development that leads to "professional learning" (Assessment Reform Group, 2009b) and a fundamental change in understanding and attitude. To achieve this purpose, teachers' professional training should start with initial teacher education (Carless, 2008) and be maintained throughout their teaching career.

As James (2006) argues, formative assessment is not a set of techniques that can be simply implemented in classrooms. Rather, it involves values and philosophy, requiring teachers to have a deep understanding of formative assessment theory and also the capacity to translate these principles into their specific classes. To support this process, the Malaysian Ministry of Education could organise professional development courses that provide knowledge and skills to implement formative assessment in particular contexts, taking into account the characteristics of Malaysian learning culture. For example, professional development should include topics such as assessment transparency using rubrics and exemplars, principles and strategies for peer and self-assessment and providing useful feedback. Apart from the assessment training provided by the system, teachers can seek to develop literacy in assessment in their professional career. Teachers can also involve themselves in networking within the wider English language learning (ELL)

disciplinary community, by reading journal articles or participating in community activities such as conferences. In this way, teachers can keep abreast of disciplinary developments and be conscious of changes and rationales for those changes. As teachers have adopted some formative assessment strategies in their teaching practice, a collaborative approach to training is strongly recommended. Teachers can act as active learners who bring with them a wealth of teaching experience and knowledge to share with others. Working with successful colleagues can prompt a perceived need for change as well as assure teachers that changes are possible (Zhao and Cziko, 2001). In addition, more expert teachers can both challenge and support their colleagues during a change process.

Although professional development is not a quick fix that immediately improves teachers' existing knowledge and practice (Black and Wiliam, 2004), it can enhance teachers' knowledge and confidence to use this knowledge in a changing educational environment (Torrance, 2007). Teachers engaged in professional development need continuous support and opportunities to reflect on their practice, to examine how outmoded ideas and assumptions can be transformed to meet the current practice (Shepard, 2008). The enactment of professional development, while it is a gradual and challenging process (Guskey, 2002), is acknowledged to some extent to have an influence on teachers' changing practice. Hence, the indication that professional development does have the power to change teachers' understandings and practices is a further incentive to engage teachers in professional learning about formative assessment.

10.4 Significance of the Study

While the benefits of formative assessment have been documented in the Western education context, little research related to the practice of formative assessment has been conducted in the Malaysian education context and specifically in the primary ESL classroom. Thus, this study is significant for its practical contribution to the field of teacher education and implications for assessment policy development in the primary ESL context in Malaysia. Additionally, this study has the potential to contribute to the development of formative assessment theory in primary ESL education, particularly in a non-Western context. The significance of the study is outlined below.

10.4.1 Contribution to Policy

Even though this study focuses on the perspectives of teachers, it also provides insights that are of relevance to policymakers. The findings can create an awareness of the problems and challenges that the new assessment policy has posed for teachers, with a view to improving English language education in Malaysia. They can lead to a better understanding of the new assessment reform and of the impact of the reform on ESL teaching and learning, particularly in the primary ESL context. The findings of this study may be useful in revising the assessment policy documents in a way that is beneficial for the students' learning needs. This study implies that although changes may be the most desirable outcomes of the recent assessment reform, change is not easy to achieve, because it involves so many factors.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education has to reconsider and rethink the suitability of the reform effort for the current Malaysian teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, in relation to ESL, they have to consider the impact of contextual issues such as large class sizes and the students' low level of English language proficiency. Thus, there is a need for the Ministry to review and reallocate the number of students per class and to review the policy to suit the needs of young language learners and less proficient students, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the assessment reform.

Furthermore, continuous monitoring in the classrooms is essential to improve the effectiveness of the reform. Thus, there should be a review of the process of follow-up in the Malaysian education system, regulated by the Ministry of Education through the inspectorate, involving pedagogical inspection and evaluating the teachers' performance and competency. The Quality Assurance authority should also be re-examined in this regard. Based on the findings, the teachers claimed that such inspection was seldom carried out. Hence, instead of occasional visits to schools, it is recommended that English language inspectors carry out more regular visits to observe more classes, so as to provide feedback and give teachers the opportunity to discuss the problems that arise.

10.4.2 Contribution to Practice

This thesis argues that if changes occur only at the policy level, without a conducive environment for teaching and learning, teacher preparation and the participation of

all actors in the changes, it is difficult to reform the teaching and learning system. Therefore, the Malaysian Ministry of Education may need to develop solutions to deal with challenges teachers face and to support them in implementing the innovation effectively. Any imported teaching and assessment approach will need to be adapted to be effective. This insight is important for further changes that may enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the primary ESL context in Malaysia. Specifically, with regard to formative assessment in ESL, Malaysian cultural values such as hierarchy and examination-oriented learning need to be taken into account when adopting and adapting such strategies in the classroom.

10.4.3 Theoretical Contribution

It is hoped that this study will also contribute to the debate on the effectiveness of formative assessment in the primary ESL context. Researchers (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009; Torrance, 2012) have reported limited effectiveness of formative assessment in some classes in Western schooling. More importantly, as Carless (2011) points out, there is a lack of evidence on the use of formative assessment in non-Western countries. Outcomes of this study, therefore, have the potential to provide theoretical insights and empirical evidence of how assessment might be used to support learning in the Malaysian education context, particularly in the primary ESL classroom. These understandings are significant for the field of educational assessment in Malaysia and to develop the theorisation of formative assessment. This study has demonstrated the persistence of cultural education norms and values in an examination-oriented context, Malaysia. It therefore also has demonstrated the need to adapt Western theoretical approaches and practical strategies to local contexts, as Carless (2011) has argued: "formative assessment needs to take different forms in different contexts" (Carless, 2011, p. 2). The findings suggest that the three teachers in this study, to some degree, adopted and adapted some aspects of formative assessment, including oral questioning and oral feedback. Such adaptation appeared to fit within the Malaysian sociocultural context, in which students value authority and adopt an examination-oriented learning style. These findings illustrate that when formative assessment is adapted to the local context, it can promote learning (Pham and Renshaw, 2015). Although the adaptations need further research to verify their universal effectiveness this study provides crucial insights into how formative assessment might be adapted successfully in the primary ESL context.

10.5 Limitations of this Study and Future Research

This study was an exploratory investigation into the assessment practices of three primary ESL teachers in three different primary schools. Although it has potential to contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning in the primary ESL education in Malaysia, and to the development of formative assessment theory in non-Western settings, this study has a number of limitations. Further research is needed to gain more insight into the practices of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom and to recommend effective assessment strategies for learning within the Malaysian context. A number of limitations were discussed in Chapter 5 as they were related to the study design and the sample. The current section aims to draw them together and consider their effect in the context of the whole study.

First, as a researcher, I have brought to the study my own professional experience as a secondary teacher and an ESL teacher. Effectively, my understanding of formative assessment may have differed from that of the participant teachers. Hence, measures were employed to ensure that the findings of the current study could be substantiated by the data. Another area in which my interpretation could have affected the results of the study was in recording field notes of the lessons observations. It is believed that by implementing these measures, the researcher's role as the main tool of the qualitative procedures did not affect the quality of the findings and that, in effect, the findings are a worthy representation of the phenomena studied.

The time restriction in the data collection phase was a limitation, as classroom assessment observations were only conducted twice for each teacher. This was supplemented by the use of interviews with the teachers as well as through the collection of teachers' lesson plans and students' work. Although credibility can be achieved by triangulation between data sources, time constraints prevented me from gaining a truly comprehensive picture of the teachers' assessment practices. The lack of time as constrained by scholarship regulations that allowed only three months for data collection in the home country, also excluded the possibility of a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study over several years would have provided richer information with regard to the implementation of the recent assessment reform. A future study could be carried out to look at how the same three teachers perceive and view the assessment reform and the impact it has on their classroom assessment practices

over time. In addition, teachers' questioning techniques and follow-up strategies after receiving feedback and professional development could also be investigated.

Furthermore, this study was carried out five years after the introduction of the policy in 2011 (this study was conducted in 2015). The reform was still new to the teachers and some might well have still been trying to adjust and adapt to it. Hence, their views, understanding and practices may change over the course of time. Although the classroom practices identified were typical of the classes observed, the picture described in this thesis might not reflect what is happening now in the ESL primary classroom in Malaysia.

Another limitation is the number of participants involved in this study. The teacher participants involved in this study were only three primary ESL teachers who volunteered and met the criteria set for the purpose of this study (see Section 5.5). Although Rachel, Ken and Maya came from different primary schools and taught different levels, all of them taught the same subject, English. Therefore, there were similarities in their approaches and application of formative assessment strategies. Findings and implications of this study are therefore limited to ESL and do not represent other ESL teachers' responses within and outside the research setting. It would be useful to elicit from all the other ESL teachers in the same schools their perceptions and pedagogical practice in the teaching and assessing of ESL.

Next, is the problem of generalisation. Malaysia is a large country comprising 13 states and 3 federal territories that differ in their cultural, social and economic backgrounds. Thus, the findings in one geographical location may not be representative of the overall ESL primary classrooms in the country. However, the teachers involved in this study were typical in their qualifications and educational backgrounds, which implies that the findings that emerged from this study are likely to be relevant to an understanding of how teachers' view the assessment reform and what happens in the primary ESL classroom generally.

As I have acknowledged in Chapter 5, no one research paradigm is better than another, nor will it be able to investigate all problems effectively. The strength of qualitative, interpretive research is its ability to provide a rich description of the phenomenon it investigates, especially from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2009). However, the weakness of qualitative research is its lack of generalisability. I acknowledge that utilising a quantitative approach to investigate

teacher's formative assessment understanding and practices would afford complementary information.

Hence, a survey may be designed and administered to a larger sample of primary ESL teachers across Malaysia in order to gather views of teachers' understandings of formative assessment, what formative assessment strategies they are using, and what they consider to be the factors affecting their assessment practices. This would allow generalisation to a wider cross-section of the population. Furthermore, this survey could collect data relating to teachers' expectations of further changes in policy, and recommendations for enhancing teaching and learning in their context. Meanwhile, a quantitative study would help to gather a holistic picture of the practice of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL education.

As an exploratory study, this study reveals some initial insights into formative assessment practices and factors that affect the practices of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL context. There are several issues that need further research to further understand formative assessment practices in non-Western primary ESL settings. For example, the three teachers in this study gave feedback to groups rather than to individuals. This was considered to save time. This technique is also suggested by Carless et al. (2006) as a solution for large classes. However, issues arise with regards to the need to provide specific feedback at the individual rather than the group level. The effectiveness of feedback at the group level, particularly among young language learners, requires future research.

Further, issues of how feedback impacts on students with a different identity and learning style and how the use of formative assessment strategies makes a difference in students' learning results are unclear in this study. The effectiveness of formative assessment may need further analysis using students' evaluation sheets on a subject to explore whether or not there is a correlation between their positive feedback and the teachers' formative assessment practices. More research is needed to provide a deep understanding of formative assessment practices, including why the teachers did not use some of the suggested formative assessment strategies in their ESL classes. This may inspire further research on the development of theoretical and practical models and strategies of formative assessment that are more appropriate to the Malaysian context.

This study aimed to provide a rich description of the teachers' understandings and formative assessment practices. Hence, it has mainly focused on the teachers and

excluded collecting data from students. As explained in Chapter 5 (Section 5.5), deliberate decisions to not include students' perceptions of the assessment process was highlighted in the methodology, as this study aimed to explore teachers' understandings and practices. As other studies have noted (e.g. Broadfoot, 2001; Cowie, 2005), while the role of students has been given importance theoretically, students' perspectives have been largely absent from the research agenda. Evidence from this study suggests that it may be challenging to teach students to become active participants in assessment or take on a role that provides them with opportunities to build their evaluative and productive knowledge. Therefore, investigating the students' views and perceptions of the assessment reform, and the impact of the formative assessment implementation on students' learning over the next few years, would make a further contribution to the field of research regarding assessment, and would complement this study.

A significant contribution of this research is its rich and detailed description of teachers' classroom practices, which has hopefully highlighted the complexity of the enactment of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL context. In-depth studies of the teachers in their contexts illustrate the fact that teachers' experiences and knowledge about teaching and learning do not completely fit with the current philosophy of teaching and learning. This is significant for practising teachers who may be exploring alternative approaches to assessment. The three case studies provide important insights into how teachers are caught in a paradigm shift and acknowledge that more information and skills may be needed to deal with these dynamic and changing classrooms, specifically, diverse, multilevel or multi-age classrooms.

Within the primary ESL setting, little attention has been paid to these facets of teachers' practices. My research therefore makes a valuable contribution to the field of assessment, with respect to identifying a gap between teachers' understanding of formative assessment and practice. It draws attention to teachers' limited understandings of young language learners' ability and linguistic proficiency, noting that it often restricts them in fully utilising the formative assessment strategies in the classroom. In addition, teachers' beliefs and assumptions about the linguistic proficiency of their students meant that formative assessment strategies such as self and peer assessment were rejected.

Finally, it is important to recall that this study was a project undertaken by the researcher in order to learn and subsequently demonstrate the research skills required for the award of an academic degree. Hence, it was also a developmental task for me as a researcher.

10.6 Conclusion

The implementation of SBA is an innovative approach that represents a fundamental shift from the traditional approach of assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning. The results of this study indicate that while teachers held positive perceptions of this assessment innovation, their practices revealed difficulties in making the shift towards assessment *for* learning. Despite being wedded to traditional assessment   the three primary ESL teachers attempted to enact several formative assessment strategies such as oral questioning and oral feedback in their classes. However, the full range of formative assessment were not realised, therefore, their far-reaching effects was not shown in the three Malaysian primary ESL classrooms that opened their doors to me as a researcher. Any potential generalisation from the three cases needs to be approached with utmost caution. As Simons (2009) argues, the purpose of a case study approach is not to generalise knowledge because findings are embedded within a particular and unique context. Findings of this study, therefore, cannot be generalisable to other contexts. However, researchers or teachers in similar settings could relate the findings to their contexts or conduct further research on formative assessment practices.

Formative assessment, a concept originally developed in Western societies, is based on values that are not apparent in Malaysian culture. The historical hierarchical relationships that characterise Malaysia's education system and the wider society, along with students' passivity and examination-oriented learning seemed to hinder the three teachers' efforts to fully achieve their intentions with respect to formative assessment principles and values. Furthermore, teachers also cited a number of other challenges such as time constraints, classroom enrolment, heavy workload and lack of training that impeded the effective implementation of formative assessment.

With the small sample size, the results are not representative of a broader community of primary ESL teachers in Malaysia. However, since the implementation of formative assessment was trialled using qualitative methods approach, the triangulated results from this study provide some useful insights on what supportive

measures are needed to better implement this assessment innovation in the primary ESL context. Besides raising teachers' knowledge about assessment, there is also a need to strengthen the culture of formative assessment. A classroom ethos needs to be created that supports formative assessment, based on clear learning goals and performance standards. This will help teachers to track student progress and encourage learner interaction, using varied instruction methods, to meet diverse student needs while providing continuous feedback on student performance.

Thus, it can be concluded that the key to the effective implementation of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL context is not only how the policy is implemented but rather, lies in the local actors' conceptualisation and valuing of assessment. It is not the policy initiative and the implementation that decides the assessment reality; rather, it is the local actors' view of assessment and its nature, their understanding about who is rightly positioned to assess, that are decisive factors. Hence, formative assessment requires adaptation for it to be effective in the Malaysian primary ESL context. Finally, it is pertinent to note that though formative assessment is not a 'silver bullet' to enhance student learning, there is no denying that this assessment innovation has much to offer. Therefore, more research is needed to further explore the constraints faced by ESL teachers in bridging their knowledge between policy and practice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL ISSUES APPROVAL

EDU ETHICS APPLICATION FEEDBACK 2014-2015

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	Vivemarlyne Mudin
School:	EDU
Current Status:	PG student
UEA Email address:	V.F-Mudin@uea.ac.uk

EDU Recommendation	✓
Approved, data collection can begin	✓
Approved with minor revisions data collection can begin (see feedback below)	
Not Approved, resubmission required (see feedback below)	

EDU REC feedback to applicant: Committee meeting date …8.7.15…………………………

Comments:
All aspects have now been fully addressed

Action required by applicant:
    Please provide the 4th Head Teacher approval when you receive this.

Ethical approval has now been given: *Kate Russell*

Signed: Course Ethics Coordinator (PGT courses)
Signed: EDU Chair, Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX B: APPROVAL LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM ECONOMIC PLANNING UNIT

BAHAGIAN PERANCANGAN DAN PENYELIDIKAN DASAR PENDIDIKAN
KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA
ARAS 1-4, BLOK E-8
KOMPLEKS KERAJAAN PARCEL E
PUSAT PENTADBIRAN KERAJAAN PERSEKUTUAN
62604 PUTRAJAYA.

Telefon: 03-88846591
Faks : 03-88846579

Ruj. Kami : KP(BPPDP)603/011/Jld16(35)
Tarikh : 07 April 2015

Ketua Pengarah
Seksyen Ekonomi Makro
Unit Perancangan Ekonomi
Jabatan Perdana Menteri
Blok B5 Aras 4
Kompleks Jabatan Perdana Menteri
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan
62502 PUTRAJAYA
(u.p. Pn. Munirah Bt. Abd. Manan)

Puan,

Permohonan Untuk Menjalankan Penyelidikan di Malaysia
Nama: VIVEMARYLYNE F.MUDIN

Dengan hormatnya saya merujuk kepada perkara di atas.

2.   Adalah saya diarahkan memaklumkan bahawa permohonan puan untuk menjalankan kajian bertajuk:

"**English Language Teachers beliefs and Assessment Practices: A Study of Primary Teachers in Malaysia** " diluluskan.

3.   Bersama-sama ini disertakan ulasan Bahagian ini ke atas cadangan penyelidikan yang dikemukakan.

Sekian dimaklumkan, terima kasih.

" **BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA**"

Saya yang menurut perintah,

(DR. HJ. ZABANI BIN DARUS)
Ketua Sektor
Sektor Penyelidikan Dan Penilaian
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan
b.p. Ketua Setiausaha
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

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APPENDIX C: APPROVAL LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

JABATAN PENDIDIKAN NEGERI SABAH
Sektor Pengurusan Sekolah
Aras 2, Wisma Pendidikan
Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah
Jalan Punat Tanah, 88450 Likas
KOTA KINABALU, SABAH

Tel : 088-537127/115/098/106
Fax : 088-310719
Laman Web: www.moe.gov.my/jpnsabah
E-mel : sjk.sabah@moe.gov.my

Rujukan: JP (SB)/700/7/03 Jld. 40
Tarikh : 04 Jun 2015

Vivemarlyne F. Mudin
25 Gipsy Close
NR58BA Norwich Norfolk
United Kingdom

Tuan,

KELULUSAN UNTUK MENJALANKAN KAJIAN DI SEKOLAH, INSTITUT PERGURUAN, JABATAN PENDIDIKAN NEGERI DAN BAHAGIAN-BAHAGIAN DI BAWAH KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA
Dengan segala hormatnya, saya diarah merujuk surat tuan/puan mengenai perkara di atas

2.   Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah tiada halangan bagi pihak tuan menjalankan kajian **"English Language Teacher Beliefs and Assessment Practices: A Study of Primary Teacher in Malaysia"** seperti dalam surat Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. Walau bagaimanapun ianya tertakluk kepada syarat-syarat berikut:

2.1   Berhubung dan berbincang dengan pentadbir sekolah tentang pelaksanaan/ perjalanan kajian tersebut.

2.2   Penyertaan warga pendidik dan murid-murid dalam kajian adalah sukarela.

2.3   Proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran atau pelaksanaan aktiviti sekolah tidak terganggu atau terjejas semasa kajian dijalankan.

2.4   Tuan tidak dibenarkan menjalankan aktiviti di kelas-kelas peperiksaan awam sekolah.

2.5   Sebarang data / maklumat serta dapatan kajian hanyalah untuk memenuhi syarat-syarat kursus pengajian sahaja

2.6   Sila tuan kemukakan ke sektor ini senaskah laporan akhir kajian/laporan dalam bentuk elektronik berformat Pdf di dalam CD bersama naskah hardcopy setelah selesai kelak sebagai rujukan

Sekian, terima kasih.

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menurut perintah

RAISIN BIN SAIDIN
Ketua Sektor
Sektor Pengurusan Sekolah
b.p Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah

s.k   1. Pendaftar Institusi Pendidikan dan Guru,
           Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri sabah

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (TEACHER INTERVIEW AND CLASSROOM OBSERVATION)

An Investigation into the English teachers' Understandings and Practices of Formative Assessment in the Malaysian Primary ESL Classroom: Three Case Studies

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research. I am writing to you about the research I am conducting as part of my Doctor of Philosophy at the University of East Anglia (UEA). The purpose of the research is to examine how formative assessment is understood and used by primary ESL teachers and what factors affect their understandings and practices of formative assessment.

I have attached an Information Sheet to tell you more about the research, and I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have, before, during or after the research. I will also be asking for your signed consent, and have already obtained the consent of your Head teacher. However, their approval does not mean you have to take part. There will also be a letter for parents of any students videoed within the research, and all your students will be asked to consent to being videoed at the start of the session.

It would be very helpful if you could take part in my research. Please read the information sheet attached to this letter and, if you are willing to take part in this study, please sign and return the consent form enclosed.

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact me on:

V.F-Mudin@uea.ac.uk.   If you have any concerns about the research please contact my supervisors: Professor Nalini Boodhoo, n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk and Dr. Agnieszka Bates, Agnieszka.Bates@uea.ac.uk.

If you have any complaints about the research, please contact the deputy Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Terry Haydn at t.haydn@uea.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

……………………………..

(VIVEMARLYNE F. MUDIN)

INFORMATION SHEET

An Investigation into the English teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom: Three Case Studies

Researcher: Vivemarlyne F. Mudin

Supervisors: Professor Nalini Boodhoo and Dr. Agnieszka Bates

I would like to invite you to take part in my research and I need your signed consent if you agree to participate. Before you decide, you need to know why I am doing this research and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully to help you decide whether or not to take part. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is this study about?

This study investigated the implementation of the recent assessment innovation within the Malaysian education context, which is the School-based Assessment (SBA). The new innovation was advocated to incorporate formative assessment into the original summative framework. The aim of the present study has been to examine how formative assessment is understood and used by primary ESL teachers and what factors affect teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment. This study adopts case study as the methodological framework and employ interviews, classroom observations and documents analysis as the method of enquiries.

How will you be involved?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. However, you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, all information from you will be destroyed. However, withdrawal will expire on completion of the data collection and analysis (Before June 2016). For this study, I would like to visit you in your school on 4 occasions. However, I might also visit again briefly, or contact you by email for clarification of any points that arise during the data analysis. There are 2 parts to the research.

Part 1

In Part 1, the focus will be on conducting an introductory interview with the teachers and a preliminary classroom observation. You will be asked to spend no more than one hour on the interview. I would like you to talk about your teaching background and experience and your opinion on the school-based assessment system. The interview will be audio recorded. For the preliminary classroom observation, I will observe one of your lesson to provide an opportunity to trial the video recording equipment and to familiarise the students with the situation.

Part 2

In Part 2, I would like to observe one or more of your classes. I would like to observe and video record each session, with the camera directed at your interactions with students. I will also take brief notes whilst recording the session.   I would like to observe your teaching at least 2 times. Before the classroom observation, you will be interviewed to identify the lesson information, pedagogical reasoning, assessment activities and the anticipated difficulties of your lesson. After the classroom observation, a post-lesson interview will be conducted to identify your self-evaluation of the lesson taught, your retrospective reflection on specific lesson activities, methodological decisions and your perceptions and beliefs of your practice. Teachers teaching lessons and materials will be collected from you before the classroom observations.

Who will have the access to the research information (data)?

Data management will follow the 1988 Data Protection Act. I will not keep information about you that could identify you to someone else. All the names of the individuals taking part in the research and the school(s) will be anonymised to preserve confidentiality.   The data will be stored safely and will be retained for five years after the completion of the study to allow future queries of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. However, the data will only be used for my work and will only be seen by myself, my supervisor, and those who mark my work.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research study has been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

Who do I speak to if problems arise?

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Vivemarlyne F. Mudin

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

V.F-Mudin@uea.ac.uk

T: +447469017300 (UK)

  : +60128138613 (Malaysia)

If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisors:

Professor **Nalini Boodhoo**	Dr. Agnieszka Bates
E: n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk	Agnieszka.Bates@uea.ac.uk
T: +44 (0)1603 592630 / 592853	

If you have any complaints about the research, please contact the deputy Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Terry Haydn at t.haydn@uea.ac.uk.

OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return it to me. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

Can you change your mind?

Yes. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

CONSENT FORM

An investigation into the English teachers' Understanding and Practice of Formative Assessment in the Malaysian Primary ESL Classroom: Three case studies

I have read the information about the study.

Please tick the relevant box.

I am willing to take part in the study.

I am not willing to take part in the study.

I am **willing** to be **audio recorded** as part in the study.

I am **not willing** to be **audio recorded** as part in the study.

I am **not willing** to be **audio recorded** but still **willing** to take

part in the study.

I am **willing** to be **video recorded** as part in the study.

I am **not willing** to be **video recorded** as part in the study.

I am **not willing** to be **video recorded** but still **willing** to take

part in the study.

Your Name: ……………………………………

Your Signature: ……………………………………………………

Date: ……………………………………………….

APPENDIX E: PERMISSION LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent/Guardian,

An investigation into the English teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom: Three case studies

You and your child, ……………………., are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by myself, Vivemarlyne F. Mudin, a Doctor of Philosophy student at the University of East Anglia (UEA). I am interested to identify how formative assessment is understood and used by primary ESL teachers and what factors affect teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment. My research involves observation of the teacher and students during normal lessons but there will be no direct contact with any of the students. This study focuses on the teacher however, the recordings will involve the whole classroom. Your child can stop participating at any time.   If your child stops, he/she will not lose any benefits. The students' information will be protected throughout the study. The study will not contain any markers of the students' identity.

The data (recordings) will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher, supervisor and participating teacher and it will be stored on USB sticks/ external drive and placed in a locked secured filing cabinet in University of East Anglia. The data (recordings) will be used as part of my PhD thesis, conferences or seminars for University of East Anglia. The data will be stored safely and will be retained for five years after the completion of the study to allow future queries of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. After five years, the written data used for this thesis will be destroyed, and any audio and video data will be wiped.

I hope therefore that you will agree to your child being involved in my research. I have approached the school your child attends and explained the purpose of the study, and the school has kindly agreed to distribute these letters to you. Please read the information sheet attached to this letter.

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact me on:

V.F-Mudin@uea.ac.uk. If you have any concerns about the research please contact my supervisors: Professor Nalini Boodhoo, n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk and Dr. Agnieszka Bates, Agnieszka.Bates@uea.ac.uk.

If you have any complaints about the research, please contact the deputy Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Terry Haydn at t.haydn@uea.ac.uk.

If you would prefer that your child does not take part, please sign and return the form enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

………………………………..

 [VIVEMARLYNE F. MUDIN]

INFORMATION SHEET

An investigation into the English teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom: Three case studies

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Supervisor: Professor Nalini Boodhoo and Dr. Agnieszka Bates

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what we will ask your child to do, and the way we would like to use information about your child if you choose to allow your child to be in the study. Please take time to read this information carefully together with your child. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is this study about?

This study investigated the implementation of the recent assessment innovation within the Malaysian education context, which is the School-based Assessment (SBA). The new innovation was advocated to incorporate formative assessment into the original summative framework. The aim of the present study has been to examine how formative assessment is understood and used by primary ESL teachers and what factors affect teachers' understandings and practices of formative assessment. This study adopts case study as the methodological framework and employ interviews, classroom observations and documents analysis as the method of enquiries.

How will my child be involved?

The research will be carried out during a normal lesson and your child's learning will not be affected in any way. Your child's participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to your child beyond that of everyday life. I will be observing the class twice and at the same time taking written notes. I will video record the lessons in order to capture the events that happen in the classroom, such as the interactions between the teachers and students, the interactions between students and students, the various kind of assessment tasks, and comments or response made by the teacher and students.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may withdraw from this study at any time. You and your child will not be penalized in any way or lose any sort of benefits for deciding to stop participation. If you and your child decide not to be in this study, this will not affect the relationship you and your child have with your child's school in any way. Your child's grades will not be affected if you choose not to let your child be in this study. Your child's name will not be used when data from this study are published. Every effort will be made to keep the personal information confidential.

Who will have the access to the research information (data)?

Data management will follow the 1988 Data Protection Act. I will not keep information about your child that could identify them to someone else. The data will be stored safely and will be retained for five years after the completion of the study to

allow future queries of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. After five years, the written data used for this thesis will be destroyed, and any audio and video data will be wiped. The data will only be used for my work and will only be seen by myself, my supervisor and those who assess my work.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research study has been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

Who do I speak to if I have questions about this research?

If you would like more information or have any problems with this research, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Vivemarlyne F. Mudin

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

V.F-Mudin@uea.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisors:

Professor Nalini Boodhoo	**Dr. Agnieszka Bates**
E: n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk	Agnieszka.Bates@uea.ac.uk
T: +44 (0)1603 592630 / 592853	

If you have any complaints about the research, please contact the deputy Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Terry Haydn at t.haydn@uea.ac.uk.

What do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return them to the school or your child's English subject Teacher Mr/Mrs/Miss _____before (_____insert date_____). Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

Can you change your mind?

Yes. You and your child have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

PARENT CONSENT FORM

An investigation into the English teachers' understanding and practice of formative assessment in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom: Three case studies

I have read the information about the study and talked about this with my child.

Please tick the relevant box.

I am willing for my child to take part in the study.

I am not willing for my child to take part in the study.

I am willing for my child to be video recorded as part in the study.

Name of child: …………………………………

School: …………………………………………….

Class: …………………………………………….

Signature of parent/guardian: ……………………

Date: ………………………………………….

APPENDIX F: MAP OF MALAYISA
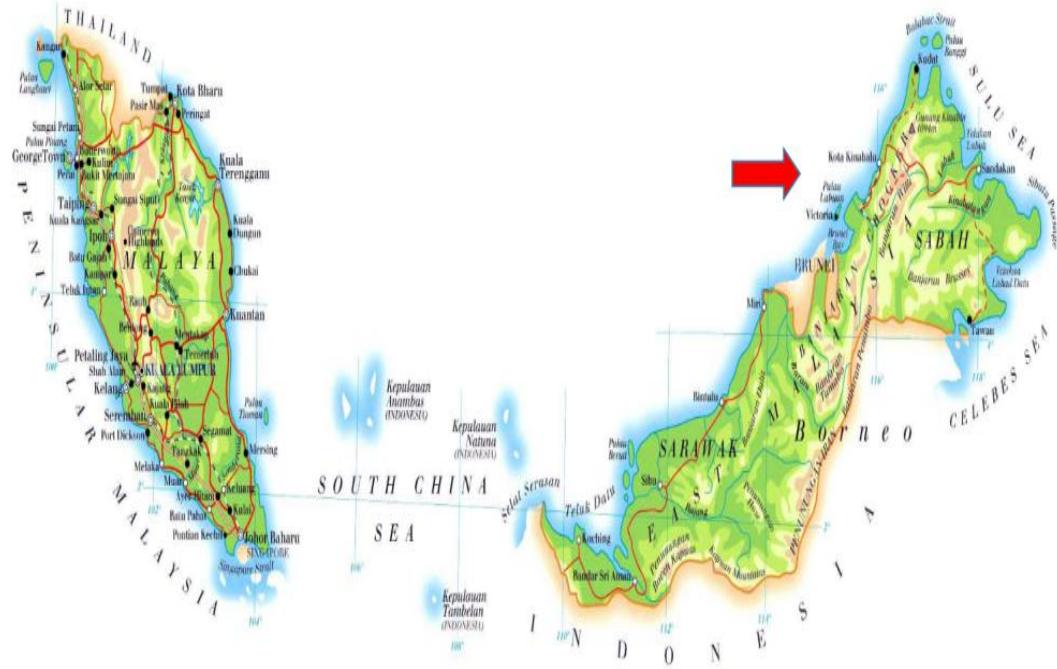
APPENDIX G: PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. **OPENING**

    I.   (**Establish Rapport**) [shake hands] My name is Vivemarlyne and I am currently conducting a study on the ………. I've met your Head of School/ Senior Assistant and he/ she thought it would be a good idea to interview you, so that I can better understand teachers' formative assessment practices.
    II.   (**Purpose**) I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your education, some experiences you have had, your FA practices, etc.
    III. (**Motivation**) I hope to use this information to improve our assessment system, probably improving the FA.
    IV.   (**Time Line)** The interview should take about less than an hour. Are you available to respond to some questions at this time?

    (**Transition:** Let me begin by asking you some questions about ………….)

2. **BODY**

A) **GENERAL QUESTIONS ON TEACHERS;**

    I.   **BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION**
    - How many years of teaching experience do you have?
    - What are the year level or curriculum level students you have taught?
    - Can you tell me about your professional and academic qualifications? Where did you receive your qualifications?
    - What professional development and learning have you participated in?
    - Describe an ideal image of a teacher of English? What makes you believe so?

    II.   **PREVIOUS LEARNING EXPERIENCE AS A LEARNER OF ENGLISH**
    - Can you describe how you learned English?
    - Can you describe how you were assessed during your school years?
    - Can you describe how you were taught English during your primary/ secondary school?
      How would you evaluate your experience of learning English on the whole? Is it mostly positive or negative?

B) **GENERAL UNDERSTANDING ABOUT SBA/ FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**
    - Can you explain to me what SBA/FA means to you?
    - In your opinion, what is the purpose of carrying out SBA/FA?
    - How do you think the English language assessment is different from assessment in other subjects?
    - In your class, what are the important aspects do you think you should focus on in the SBA/FA? Why?
    - Why is SBA/FA important to you as an English teacher?
    - Do you think SBA/FA is important to the students? Why?
    - Who benefits more from the implementation of SBA/FA in the teaching and learning process, teachers or students? Why?
    - What do you do with the results of the students' SBA/FA? How are the

results useful to you as a teacher?
- How are the assessment results useful to the students?
- How do you view the SBA/FA now compared to the previous assessment?
- Throughout your career as an English teacher, how have the assessment approaches changed in Malaysia?

C) **EXPERIENCE AS A TEACHER OF ENGLISH AND USE OF SBA/FA IN THEIR LESSON/ TYPES OF ASSESSMENT**

- Describe a typically successful/ unsuccessful lesson with the inclusion of SBA/FA that you have ever taught as a teacher. What makes the lesson successful/ unsuccessful?
- When do you usually carry out SBA/FA in your English lesson?
- What type of assessment do you usually carry out in your English lesson? Why?
- What are the different assessment techniques that you choose to use in your English lesson?
- Describe the process that make decisions for a lesson. Can you identify the reasons for such decisions?
- Why do you choose to use these assessment techniques?
- What are the factors that you consider when you choose to use a particular assessment technique in your English lesson? Why are these factors important?
- Is the classroom environment different when you use different assessment techniques? Could you give me an example?

D) **CHANGE TO ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

- What is your opinion of any proposal to change the current assessment system?
- Do you think there is a need to reform the current assessment system?
- What are the changes that you feel are necessary to be made to the way you currently assess the students? Why are these changes necessary?
- How will this change effect you as a teacher?
- How will the change effect the students?
- What are the problems that teachers would face when this change is implemented?
- What are the challenges that you face in implementing the school-based assessment based on the learning intentions and success criteria in your classroom?
- How did you overcome the challenges?

(**Transition:** Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about you. Let me briefly summarise the information that I have recorded during our interview.)

3 **CLOSING**

I. **(Maintain Rapport)** I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know so that I can really understand how you and perhaps other teachers implement SBA/FA?

II. **(Action to be taken)** I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you/ text/ WhatsApp if I have any more questions? Thanks again. I look forward to meet you again.

APPENDIX H: SAMPLE OF PRE AND POST-LESSON VIDEO STIMULATED RECALL (VSR) INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Possible questions to participants (probes will be used when deemed necessary).

Interview Activities	Focus of Interview	Questions
Pre-observation Interview	• Lesson information • Pedagogical reasoning • Assessment activities • Anticipated Difficulties	1) Can you describe your lesson? 2) What type of assessment are you using in the lesson? 3) Why do you choose this technique? 4) What are the assessment activities in the lesson? 5) In your opinion, what will be the difficulties you will encounter during the lesson?
Post-observation Interview	• Self-evaluation of the lesson taught • Retrospective reflection on specific lesson activities • The informant's methodological decisions • The teacher's perceptions and understandings of their practice	1) What is your reflection towards your lesson? 2) Do you think you have achieved your objectives? 3) What was your intentions/ aims/ purpose in using this strategy? 4) Why do you choose this strategy? 5) What were you thinking /feeling at this moment/? 6) What do you notice now that you were not aware of during the lesson? 7) What are your beliefs in using this type of assessment?

APPENDIX I: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE SHEET (FIELD NOTES)

TOPIC: EXPLORING TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICES OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this observation schedule is to observe teachers interacting with learners in the class to see how teachers' interpretation of formative assessment plays out in class. It will be completed by the researcher during the lesson.

Participant: _____   Date: _____

Observation no: 1/ 2/ 3/ 4   Observation week: 1/ 2/ 3/ 4

Topic: _____   Time of observation: _____

Lesson Module:

Listening & Speaking [   ]   Reading [   ]   Writing [   ]   Language arts [   ]
Grammar [   ]

No.	What to observe	Always	Sometimes	Never	Observation Notes
	Classroom assessment				
1	How frequent were learners assessed during the lesson?				
2	Different techniques or forms were used to assess learners				
	Questioning				
3	Planned for questions asked				
4	Closed questions were asked				
5	Open ended questions were asked				
6	Interactive questions were asked by teachers				

7	Questions were asked by learners				
8	Learners were asked to elaborate on answers				
9	The answer was immediately given by the teacher				
10	Learners were given wait-time				
Learner involvement					
11	Criteria discussed with learners				
12	Were learners encouraged to work in groups?				
13	Learners encouraged to ask questions in class				
Feedback					
14	When was feedback given to learners?				
15	Learners also give feedback				
16	Learners gave feedback to each other				
17	Type of feedback given				
Self and peer assessment					
18	Learners assess their work				
19	Learners were given a chance to assess each other.				
Subsequent instruction					
20	Emphasises areas that need improvement				
21	Learners were given a chance to use feedback				
22	The teacher used learners' responses & feedback				

APPENDIX J: KSSR STUDENTS' LEARNING DEVELOPMENT RECORD MODULE

MODUL PEREKODAN PERKEMBANGAN PEMBELAJARAN MURID

TAHUN PERSEKOLAHAN:

NAMA SEKOLAH:

KELAS:

MATA PELAJARAN: BAHASA INGGERIS SJK TAHUN 1

NAMA GURU MATA PELAJARAN :

Arahan:
1. Sila lengkapkan maklumat No Mykid/Surat Beranak/Dokumen dan Nama Murid.
2. Sila pilih jantina murid.
3. Sila taip atau pilih "X" pada kotak Band penguasaan murid.

BIL	NO. MYKID/ SURAT BERANAK/ DOKUMEN	NAMA MURID	JANTINA	KEMAHIRAN																		
				Lisan						Membaca						Menulis					
				BAND						BAND						BAND					
				1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1	A																			
2	2	B																			
3	3	C																			
4	4	D																			
5	5	E																			
6	6	F																			
7	7	G																			
8	8	H																			
9	9	I																			
10	10	J																			
11	11	K																			