

Research and Trends in the Studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment from 2003 to 2011: A Review of Selected Journals

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ABSTRACT

Assessing oral proficiency is a real challenge for English language practitioners. Throughout the process of assessing, many features of oral competence are worth given attention by teachers as the assessors. As such, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has urged for another alternative for oral assessment in 2002 with the intention of revamping and improvising the existing system. This new assessment is none other than School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA). Therefore, this paper intends to review the studies done on the implementation of School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA). Among the 15 articles selected from 2003 to 2011, 7 of them focused on the Malaysian school context. The rest of articles touched on School-Based Assessment in other contexts and speaking test as a whole. Based on this review, it is now possible to postulate that most studies were conducted to investigate respondents' attitude and perception toward this type of assessment. At this juncture, it is also obvious that mixed methods which involve the use of both quantitative and qualitative study are the most preferred method in the studies of School-Based Oral Assessment. Although the use of questionnaire is fairly dominant in these journals articles, it is noted that other instruments such as semi-structured interview, observation and document analysis were also employed for data analysis. In addition, the insight and the data gained from these studies could be beneficial for future reference in reviewing and modifying the implementation of School-Based English Oral Assessment in Malaysia. As such, the findings drawn from the studies can shed some light for better implementation in Malaysia.

Keywords: *school-based assessment, studies, review, research purpose, trend*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, it is universally acknowledged that assessment has played an integral part in teaching and learning at any learning institution around the world. The word "assessment" itself may have been interpreted distinctively by concerned parties. For example, Gurnam, Chan, and Sarjit (2011) state that five different parties which include policy maker, administrator, teacher, parent and student may hold different perceptions and conceptions on assessment. According to Gurnam et al., policy makers define assessment as standards to monitor the quality of education. Administrators view assessment as a means to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of a program whereas teachers use assessment as a tool for monitoring student progress and performance. By contrast, students perceive assessment as an indicator of their ongoing progress and performance. Instead, parents regard assessment as a kind of feedback on their child's progress as well as the gauge to indicate the school's accountability in offering effective teaching and learning. In this sense, the assessment system not only affects teaching and learning but it does affect the society at large. Hence, Mariam and Sabrin (2008) concur that new approaches to assessment are certainly necessary for educational reform.

Traditionally, assessment in Malaysian schools was centralised on national examination. Students were required to sit for three main public examinations as a prerequisite to the next level of education. In Hamzah and Paramasivan (2009), these principal examinations have been generally known to Malaysians as the Primary School Assessment (UPSR), the Lower Secondary Assessment Examination (PMR) and the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). Nevertheless, School-Based Assessment was introduced in 2002 as a move away from traditional teaching to keep abreast with changing trends of assessment. In other words, this initiative was also a directive from our Ministry of Education aimed to suit the global trend of decentralisation of assessment. One of the reasons for this implementation is to help improve students' communicative competence which is parallel to the learning outcomes outlined in the English Language Syllabus for Malaysian Secondary Schools (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2002). To meet this need, School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA) was integrated for the teachers to promote the improvement of English communication skills.

According to Gurnam, Chan, and Azleena (2011), the rationale for integrating School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA) into the School-Based Assessment component is the power of this alternative assessment as an authentic form in assessing students' actual speaking activity. In comparison, the conventional Oral English Test administered before 2002 failed to offer true reflection of students' actual communication skill (Gurnam, Chan et al., 2011). In addition, Zaitun, Arshad, Mazanah, and Malachi (2011) believe that SBOEA mandates both teaching and testing to be integrated in the English classroom. In this respect, these ongoing oral assessments can also promote teaching and learning in the English classroom as they are conducted three times throughout two years of upper Secondary education. In gaining more insightful information on the implementation of SBOEA, a review has been done on selected journals from different educational publications. This review of published articles in academic journals has seen various areas of studies conducted. This variance comprises the perception, perspectives and attitude, similarities and differences, influencing factors, knowledge and understanding and the concerns on the implementation of School-Based Assessment. Therefore, the following sections will discuss the review findings according to research purpose, method, results and discussion, implications and conclusions as well as limitations of the research.

Research purpose

This paper intended to investigate the research and trends in the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA). The articles published by 13 different educational journals such as *Journal of Malaysian English Language Teaching Association (MELTA)*, *Journal of English Language Teaching*, *Asian EFL Journal*, *Journal of the English Teacher*, *The International Journal of Educational and Psychological Assessment*, *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*, *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, *Journal of US-China Education Review*, *International Education Studies*, *Language Testing*, *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, *JALT Testing and Evaluation and Educational Studies* between the years 2003 and 2011 were reviewed by research topic, journal, publication year, research purpose and trend.

The review of selected journals might outline the research trends and patterns of the articles related to School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA) in recent years. The trend may encompass the methodology used (whether it is qualitative or quantitative) and the instruments used in gathering data. As such, it is hoped that this review can help school administrators, English Head of Panel as well as English teachers in Malaysia to gain some better insight into the publishing trends of School-Based Oral Assessment studies. To a larger extent, this review could be somehow beneficial for the Teacher Education Division (Bahagian Pendidikan Guru) and Malaysian Examination Syndicate (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia) to improve the existing assessment and to promote further study on the subject matter. In addition, the insight offered by this review could be useful for future reference in reviewing and modifying the implementation of School-Based English Oral Assessment especially in Malaysia.

Hence, three research questions were developed to guide this review. They were as follows:

1. Which context shows the highest percentage of conducting studies on School-Based Oral English Assessment?
2. How many categories can be generated based on research topics?
3. What was the trend of the studies conducted on School-Based Oral English Assessment in these eight years?

METHOD

Research papers for review

This paper used articles published by 13 different educational journals which include *Journal of Malaysian English Language Teaching Association (MELTA)*, *Journal of English Language Teaching*, *Asian EFL Journal*, *Journal of the English Teacher*, *The International Journal of Educational and Psychological Assessment*, *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*, *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, *Journal of US-China Education Review*, *International Education Studies*, *Language Testing*, *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, *JALT Testing and Evaluation and Educational Studies*.

It is worth noting that this paper only provides a review on selected journal articles. Any other research documents such as book review and unpublished theses are not included for this review. In order to find the related articles, some key terms were used and those terms included "School-Based Oral Assessment", "School-Based Assessment", "Oral Assessment" and "Speaking Test". These journal articles were then selected when the contexts have primarily focused on assessment of English oral production, not other languages than English. As a result, 15 articles were identified to meet these requirements best. Based on the 15 selected journal articles, the review was done by analysing abstracts and other significant sections such as method and data collection in order to determine the publishing trends of School-Based Oral Assessment studies.

Research topic analysis

The purpose of analyzing the research topic is to determine the number of studies which were closely related on School-Based Oral English Assessment. In reviewing 15 selected articles from 13 different educational journals, the research topics were first categorized into seven different categories based on the research topics themselves. In relation to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment, these respective categories include: *perception*, *similarities and differences*, *analysing factors*, *knowledge and understanding*, *concerns*, *washback effects* and *miscellaneous*. Table 1 will further explain the content of the articles based on different categories:

Table 1: Research topic analysis

No.	Categories	Description	No. of articles
1.	<i>Perception</i>	Articles in this research category generally discuss perceptions, reactions, perspectives and views on School-Based Oral English Assessment from different parties. The data were obtained from different groups of respondents including teachers, students and parents.	5
2.	<i>Similarities and Differences</i>	This topic of research touches on similarities and differences in teachers' and students' perception on School-Based Oral English Assessment. However, this article is hardly categorised under ' <i>Perception</i> ' category because of the absence of such word in the research topic.	1
3.	<i>Analysing factors</i>	This category explores the influencing factors which are associated with oral performance.	1
4.	<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	This topic category generally focuses on teachers' knowledge and understanding of School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia as a whole.	1
5.	<i>Concerns</i>	This topic of research includes the concerns expressed by teachers on the implementation of School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia.	1
6.	<i>Washback effects</i>	This category includes a study which aimed to determine the washback effects of an oral assessment among EFL learners.	1
7.	<i>Miscellaneous</i>	Articles that fall under this category are quite general in	5

nature (somehow related to School-Based Assessment and Oral Assessment) and hardly categorised under aforementioned categories. The following includes the research topic for these articles:

School-Based Assessment: Will it really change the Education Scenario in Bangladesh (Mariam & Sabrin, 2008)

Oral Examination Assessment Practices: Effectiveness and Change with a First Year Undergraduate Cohort (Oakley & Hencken, 2005)

Assessing speaking in Japanese junior high schools: Issues for the senior high school entrance examinations (Akiyama, 2003)

Interaction in group oral assessment: A case study of higher and lower scoring students (Zhendong, 2010)

Rating criteria for the three speaking test format: Monologue, dialogue and multilogue (Nakamura, 2009)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Percentage for contexts related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment

By reviewing these 15 journals articles from 2003 to 2011, it is noted that seven of these articles were closely related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia. The analysis can be further explained as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of articles related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment for different contexts

Contexts	Msia	HK	Japan	Bdesh	UK	S'pore	Cbia
Related articles	7	2	2	1	1	1	1

First, the review has identified that 7 of the selected articles were closely related to **Msia** (Malaysia). As for **HK** (Hong Kong) and **Japan**, 2 articles were closely related to each country respectively. By contrast, the review has revealed that only 1 article was related to the following countries: **Bdesh** (Bangladesh), **UK**, **S'pore** (Singapore) and **Cbia** (Colombia). Based on the information presented in Table 2, a pie chart was generated to provide a clear picture of percentage for contexts related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment.

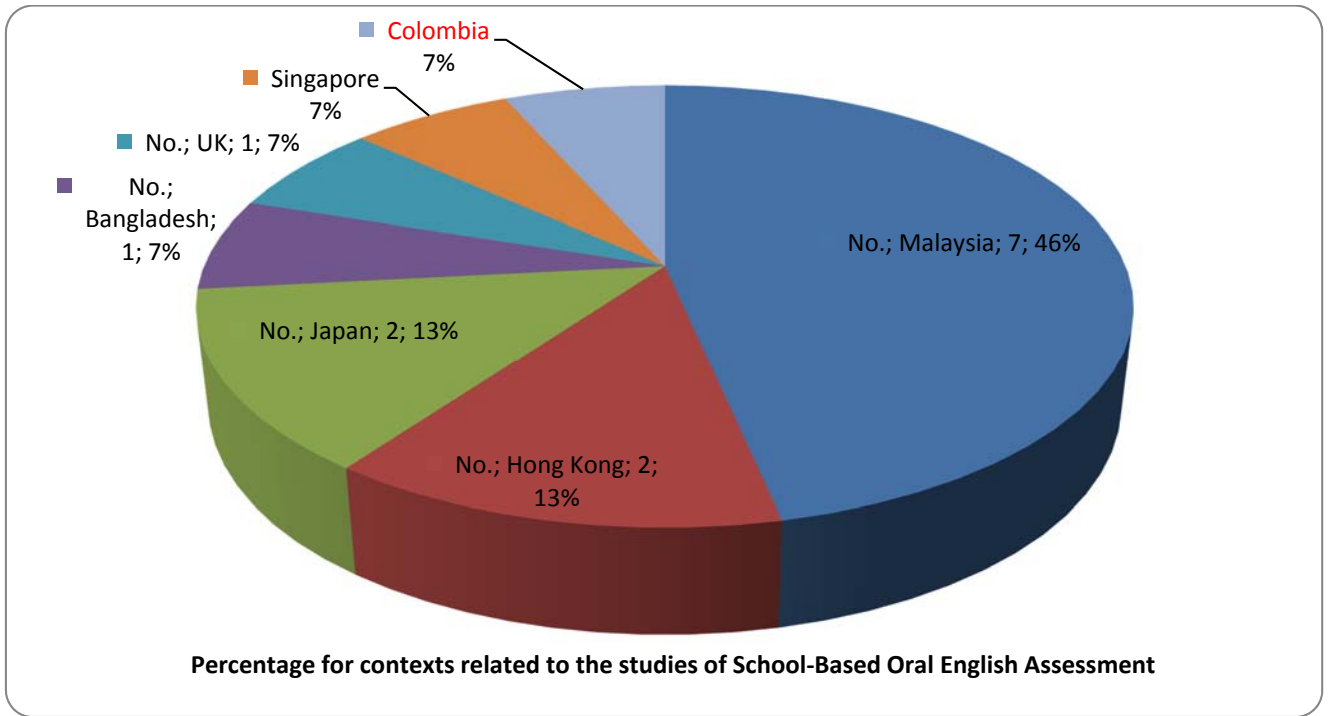


Figure 1: Percentage for contexts related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment

From the preceding analysis, it can be seen that almost half (46%) of 15 articles published in 13 educational journals between 2003 and 2011 were related to School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia. As for the Hong Kong and Japan context, the articles analysed represent 13% of the overall percentage. Also, Fig. 1 has proven that other countries such as Bangladesh, UK, Singapore and Colombia only constitute 1% of the percentage of the related articles. Therefore, based on this analysis, it is feasible to conjecture that most studies on School-Based Oral English Assessment have been conducted in Malaysia.

Research purpose analysis

After reviewing 15 selected articles from 13 different educational journals, it is now possible to categorise the articles into six different categories based on various research purposes. These respective categories include: *perception, analysing factors, knowledge and understanding, concerns, washback effects and miscellaneous*. The rationale of this is to find the most common purpose related to the studies on School-Based Oral English Assessment. The following table will provide further elaboration of the area of studies based on different categories:

Table 3: Research purpose analysis

No.	Purpose	Description	No. of articles
1.	<i>Perception</i>	Articles in this research category generally aim to find out perceptions, reactions, perspectives and views on the following matters: the implementation of SBOEA, challenges and problems arise, its effectiveness as an accurate gauge, impact and consequences of SBOEA. Instead, two articles among these eight focus on the similarities and differences as well as the relationship in perceptions between different parties. Those parties included teachers, students and parents.	8
2.	<i>Analysing factors</i>	This topic of research generally hopes to identify factors associated to students' oral performance. Besides that, study was also done on the relationship between these factors and students' oral scores.	1
3.	<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	This category investigates teachers' knowledge and understanding of SBOEA in Malaysia. The subject matters comprise of objectives, the implementation (pre, while and post administration) and challenges faced.	1
4.	<i>Concerns</i>	This topic category investigates the concerns of the teachers on School-Based Assessment at 5 stages using the model from Hall, George, and Rutherford (1977).	1
5.	<i>Washback effects</i>	This topic of research was conducted to determine the washback effects of an oral assessment between experimental and comparison group.	1
6.	<i>Miscellaneous</i>	Articles falling under this category touch on Oral Assessment in general and are still considered to have little connection with School-Based Assessment. These three articles do not share the same purpose. Zhendong (2010) - identify the interactional features that characterise a group of higher-scoring and lower-scoring students' participation in group oral assessment Nakamura (2009) - Rating criteria for the three speaking test formats: Monologue, Dialogue and Multilogue Akiyama (2003) - discuss how high school teachers in Tokyo assess speaking skill	3

As can be seen from Table 3, it is noted that 8 articles fall under the 'Perception' category. Articles that fall under this category were written by Gurnam, Chan, and Sarjit (2011), Liying, Andrews, and Ying (2011), Zaitun, Arshad, Mazanah, and Malachi (2011), Norashikin, Mohan, Shashi Kumar, and Emily (2010), Suseela and Sim (2010), Hamzah and Paramasivan (2009), Mariam and Sabrin (2008) and Oakley and Hencken (2005). In comparison, only 1 article can be categorised into these respective groups: Analysing factors (Chan, Gurnam, Norhamimah, & Norazah, 2011), Knowledge and Understanding (Gurnam, Chan, & Azleena, 2011), Concerns (Faizah, 2011) and Washback Effects (Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010). Under 'Miscellaneous' category, 3 articles (Akiyama, 2003; Nakamura, 2009; Zhendong, 2010) were considered to fit into this category.

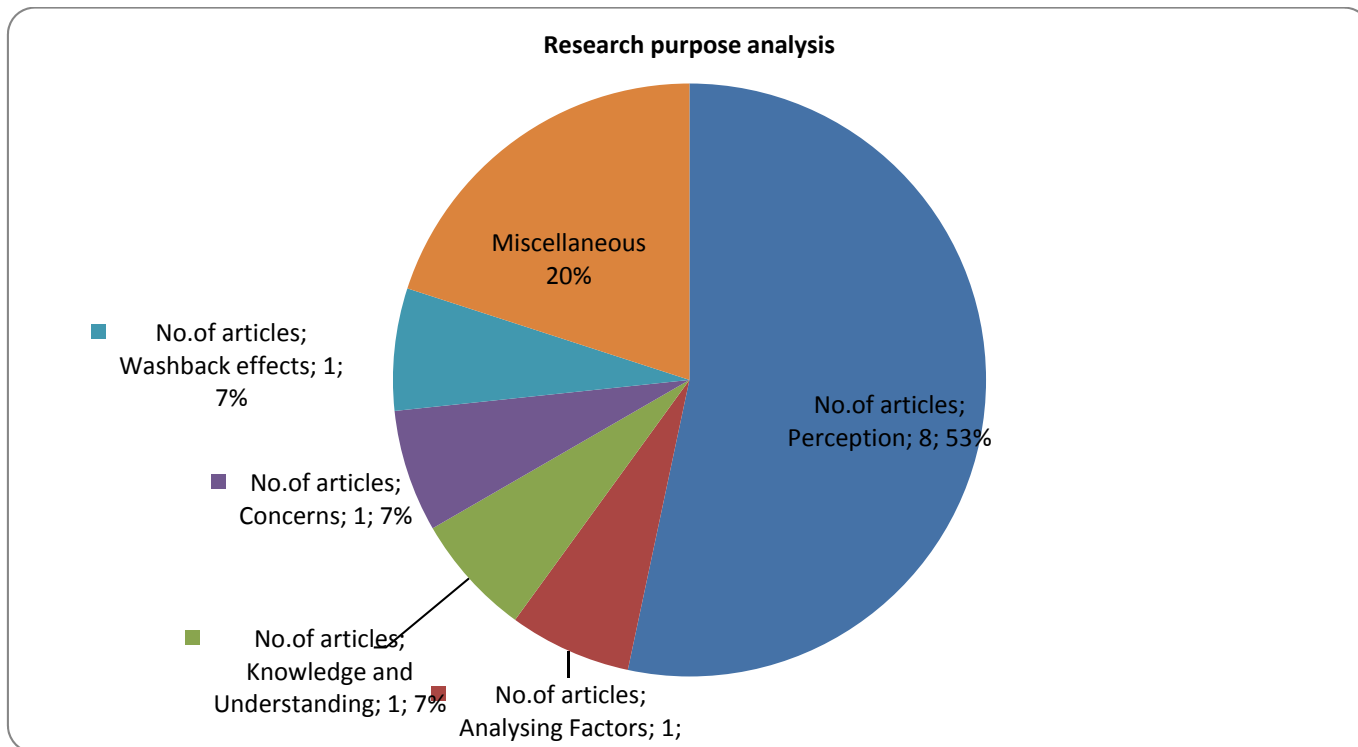


Figure 2: Percentage of research purpose analysis

The published percentage of related purpose in each category for 15 selected journal articles between the years 2003 to 2011 are presented in Fig. 2. Fig. 2 reveals that ‘Perception’ has made up more than half (53%) of the overall percentage. That is to say, “Perception” is the most common category among all. In addition, it is also worth noting that many researchers were interested in studying respondents’ perceptions and views on School-Based Oral English Assessment based on this analysis. This highest percentage is then followed by ‘Miscellaneous’ (20%), Washback effects, Concerns and Knowledge and Understanding which respectively accounted for 7%. It is also interesting to note that ‘Analysing factors’ had 1% less than the second lowest even though they share the same number of articles.

Trends of the studies conducted on School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia

In determining the trend of the studies conducted on School-Based Oral English Assessment for the past eight years (2003 - 2011), it is worth giving attention to the methodology employed and the instruments used in gathering data. In terms of methodology, the articles from selected educational journals can be categorised into three categories: quantitative, qualitative and both quantitative and qualitative. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), quantitative study involves the prospect of analysing numerical data. By contrast, Cohen et al. define qualitative study as data analysis which involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data and often largely lies on interpretation. The following Tab. 4 summarises the methodology employed and instrument used in the studies of selected journal articles.

Table 4: Trends of the studies conducted on School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia

No.	Title	Author(s)	Methodology	Instrument
1.	Between the Ideal and Reality: Teacher’s perception of the implementation of School-Based Oral English Assessment (SBOEA)	Hamzah Md Omar and Paramasivan Sinnasamy (2009)	Quantitative study	Self-constructed questionnaire
2.	School-Based Assessment in Malaysian Schools: The Concerns of the English teachers	Faizah A Majid (2011)	Quantitative study	Questionnaire

No.	Title	Author(s)	Methodology	Instrument
3.	Impact and consequences of School-Based assessment (SBA): Students' and parents' views of SBA in Hong Kong	Liyong Cheng, Stephen Andrews, and Ying Yu (2011)	Quantitative study	(Questionnaire)-1 for Students (SQ) and 1 for Parents (PQ)
4.	Assessing speaking in Japanese junior high schools: Issues for the senior high school entrance examinations	Tomoyasu Akiyama (2003)	Quantitative study	Questionnaire and test result analysis
5.	Rating criteria for the three speaking test format: Monologue, Dialogue and Multilogue	Nakamura Yuji (2009)	Quantitative study	Questionnaire
6.	Upper Primary Teacher's perception of PSLE English Oral Assessment	Norashikin Mohamed Noor, Mohan K. Muniandy, Shashi Kumar Shanmugan, and Emily Jothee Mathai (2010)	Qualitative study	Semi-structured interview
7.	The School-Based Oral English Test: Similarities and Differences	Zaitun Abdul Majid, Arshad Abd Samad, Mazanah Muhammad, and Malachi Edwin Vethamani (2011)	Qualitative study	Interview and observation
8.	Teacher perspectives of school-based assessment in a secondary school in Kuala Lumpur	Suseela Malakolunthu and Sim Kwan Hoon (2010)	Qualitative study	Semi-structured interviews, Observation of Oral Assessment session
9.	Interaction in group oral assessment: A case study of higher and lower scoring students	Zhendong Gan (2010)	Qualitative study	Observation (based on group oral assessment)
10.	Students' Reactions to School - Based Oral Assessment: Bridging the Gap in Malaysia	Gurnam Kaur Sidhu, Chan Yuen Fook, Sarjit Kaur Sidhu (2011)	Quantitative and qualitative study	Questionnaire and Focus Group Interview
11.	Analyzing factors associated with students' oral test performance	Chan Yuen Fook, Gurnam Kaur Sidhu, Norhamimah Rani, Norazah Abdul Aziz (2011)	Quantitative and qualitative study	Questionnaire, A set of Oral Test Paper, Semi - structured interview
12.	Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of the Malaysian School-Based Oral English Assessment	Gurnam Kaur Sidhu, Chan Yuen Fook, Azleena Mohamad (2011)	Quantitative and qualitative study	Questionnaire, Semi-structured interviews and document analysis
13.	School-Based Assessment: Will	Mariam Begum	Quantitative and	Questionnaire,

No.	Title	Author(s)	Methodology	Instrument
	it Really Change the Education Scenario in Bangladesh	and Sabrin Farooqui (2008)	qualitative study	interview and document analysis
14.	Washback of an oral assessment system in the EFL classroom	Ana P. Muñoz and Marta E. Álvarez (2010)	Quantitative and qualitative study	Surveys for students and teachers, class observations and external evaluations)
15.	Oral examination Assessment Practices: Effectiveness and Change with a First Year Undergraduate Cohort	Ben Oakley and Clare Hencken (2005)	Quantitative and qualitative study	Questionnaire, observation

First, the results of this analysis revealed that mixed methods involving both quantitative and qualitative study are the most favoured methodology used for the studies on School-Based Oral Assessment. This may be due to the notion that mixed method can enable rich data to be collected which later affords triangulation of the findings (Cohen et al., 2011). It can be seen that 6 articles out of 15 starting from Article No. 10 to 15 have employed this mixed method. The result is then followed by the use of quantitative study which includes 5 articles starting from No. 1 to 5 and 4 articles on qualitative study starting from No. 6 to 9.

As presented in Tab. 4, it can also be concluded that more than half of the studies (11 articles) have employed questionnaire as a main tool in gathering data. Owen (2002) believes that employing a questionnaire in an educational research is very beneficial as it offers unbiased representation of the population of interest. This claim may somehow explain the highest usage of questionnaire as a primary data collection method. Nonetheless, some other methods were also used in these articles and they involved the use of interview (7 articles), observation (5 articles) and document analysis (3 articles). Although a variety of methods used does exist, the questionnaire remains the most prevalent among all.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned in the previous section, three research questions were posed as a guide for this review. Hence, this section will elucidate the findings as well as implications derived from each research question. The first research question referred to the percentage for contexts which were related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment. This review has indicated that almost half of 15 journal articles from 2003 to 2011 were closely related to the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia. For instance, the review has identified that 7 of selected articles were closely related to the Malaysian context.

When the data were analysed into percentage form, it can be seen that 46% of these 15 articles were related to School-Based Oral English Assessment in Malaysia. As such, it is possible to claim that a substantial number of studies had been conducted on the subject matter in Malaysia. This may somehow imply that many different parties in Malaysia were interested in studying the implementation of this School-Based Oral English Assessment as a whole. Nonetheless, it would be interesting if more studies on such subject are also conducted in other countries.

The second research question concerned the research purposes related to School-Based Oral English Assessment which were published in the selected journals over the past 8 years. After reviewing 15 selected articles from 13 different educational journals, it is now possible to categorise the articles into six different categories based on various research purposes. These respective categories include: *perception, analysing factors, knowledge and understanding, concerns, washback effects and miscellaneous*. The review has shown that 8 out of 15 articles fall under the 'Perception' category. In addition, Fig. 2 shows that 'Perception' makes up more than half (53%) of the overall percentage. In this respect, there were indications that most of researchers were interested in investigating the respondents' perceptions, perspectives, views as well as attitudes toward School-Based Oral English Assessment. Therefore, the insight offered by this review which comes in the form of feedback could be beneficial for future reference in reviewing and modifying the implementation of School-Based Oral English Assessment needs assessment for program planning and program development especially in Malaysia. Nevertheless, more in-depth investigation on

other areas which may include teachers' and students' readiness, impact and consequences and the future of School-Based Oral English Assessment are also deemed worthy of attention.

Additionally, the third research question investigated the trend of the studies conducted on School-Based Oral English Assessment in these eight years. At this juncture, it is obvious that mixed methods which involve both quantitative and qualitative study are the most preferred method used for the studies on SBOEA. As presented in Tab. 4, it is noted that 6 articles out of 15 have employed mixed method. Besides that, this review has also indicated that the questionnaire appears to be a primary data resource as more than half of the studies (11 articles) have employed questionnaire as a main tool in gathering data. Inadvertently, this paper has disclosed that these two predominant trends are most preferable among recent researches. As such, it can also shed some light on the best selection of method and instrument in extending similar studies.

Limitations of the research

Taking all the results from journals, we have now gained a better insight into the research and trends in the studies of School-Based Oral English Assessment. Nevertheless, it is worth addressing a few limitations of the studies in order to ensure precise interpretation of the findings. First, it is not too much to postulate that a limitation of this content analysis lies in the generalisation of the findings. Although almost half of the articles centred on the Malaysian context (7 articles), it is still hard to determine that most studies on School-Based Oral English Assessment have been conducted in Malaysia. Under such circumstances, the results only offer us a snapshot of the studies in a particular context. As well, the findings offered by each study could not simply be generalised to other countries in the world. The purpose of conducting studies on School-Based Oral English Assessment may vary from one place to another even in the same country, considering many other external factors. Second, it is obvious that the use of mixed method and questionnaire is the most prevalent among recent studies throughout this review. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that the small number of selected articles (15 articles) can hardly represent the research trend around the globe. As well, it is also recommended that the studies be repeated in the next few years in other different contexts in order to get a precise picture of pattern and trend in the studies of the subject matter.

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