

The Role of PPMR in Engaging and Inspiring Learners to Make Better Decisions in Upper Forms Streaming

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Abstract

Lower Secondary Assessment Report or locally known as *Pelaporan Pentaksiran Menengah Rendah* (PPMR) is a comprehensive report that comprises academic and non-academic development of learners who have undergone three years of lower secondary schooling at the age of fifteen in Malaysia. Before 2014, highlights were mainly on learners' academic achievements, particularly the high stake Lower Secondary Evaluation exam. PPMR, a holistic reporting that covers learners' overall development, enables learners, teachers and parents to gain information on learners' performance extensively by presenting assessment results in performance standards and formats that are user-friendly, meaningful and information-rich. PPMR consists of reports on the Classroom Assessment (PBD), Physical Activities, Sports and Co-curricular Assessment (PAJSK), Psychometrics Assessment (PPsi) and Form Three Assessment (PT3). PBD illustrates learners' learning development and achievements in all the subjects taught in school. Assessment for, as and of learning is emphasized through formative and summative assessments conducted in the classroom. PAJSK reports learners' physical fitness and health as well as their participation, involvement and achievement in various sports and co-curricular activities. PPsi is a method used systematically to collect information on learners' innate and acquired abilities. It is a profiling assessment which emphasises on learners' learning inclination, attitudes, aptitude and interest, and also enables teachers to help learners in their learning in accordance to their profile and identify the areas of their interest. PT3 is a central assessment focuses on the academics subjects and a shared accountability between the Examination Syndicate and schools whereby it is conducted and administered by teachers in schools using instruments, scoring rubrics, guidelines, time line and procedures prepared by the Examinations Syndicate. It is a check-point that reports on learners' performance at lower secondary levels. The paper deals at length with the concept of PPMR on how this reports could contribute to better preparation of lower secondary school learners for upper secondary education, and how the information from these assessments is used to promote as well as assist learners in choosing their paths.

Keywords: holistic assessment, secondary school assessments, meaningful reporting

Introduction

“Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.”

National Philosophy of Education, 1988

The NPE emphasises the importance of holistic and all-rounded educational and personal development of individuals (encompassing mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects in the domains of cognitive, affective and psycho-motor), as well as the development and

propagation of a united and harmonious multi-racial progressive Malaysian society. NPE is the foundation and main reference for Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia in initiating changes, tabulating education planning framework, curriculum, programmes, activities and educational assessment.

Background

Initially, when the Examinations Syndicate (ES), Ministry of Education Malaysia, took over the administration of the examinations from Cambridge Examination Board in 1957, the British type of public examinations were adapted and adopted in the form of Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE) and Higher School Certificate (HSC). These two main examinations have since been the determining qualifications for learners' future academic success. In addition, two public examinations were introduced; the Primary School Achievement Test or commonly known as UPSR at Year 6 and Lower Secondary Evaluation or PMR at Form 3. Both of these exams which are supposed to evaluate learners' performance at different levels have become high stake exams as they are the main criteria used in selection to boarding and high performing schools.

These public examinations are seen as a valid and administratively manageable means of grading and selecting learners for various educational and social purposes, and are generally accepted by the public and are deeply embedded in the social and educational system as a fair and just way of measuring standards and as a form of accountability. They are often considered the key indicator of success awaited by learners, parents, teachers, media and society at large. Substantial highlights are drawn towards learners' academic performance to indicate their success at the primary and lower secondary levels. The reflection of this phenomenon can be seen throughout the nation whereby media, national television and newspaper avidly do coverage on the announcement of these exams results.

With the realization that holistic assessment must be parallel with holistic education that does not merely focuses on academic performance only, MoE reviewed its examination system in 2005 with some proposed changes in the assessment system;

- a. To reduce over reliance and over dependence on data (grades and scores) obtained through the central examinations for information about learners in the school system.
- b. To empower the school and teachers to conduct quality assessment of and for the learning of their own learners.
- c. To introduce psychometric test to help schools and teachers gather more data about their own learners so that they may understand them better – their innate abilities, their strengths, weaknesses, talents, attitudes, aptitudes, interests and personalities.
- d. To carry out assessment of learners' participation, involvement, and performance in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities systematically and objectively.
- e. To introduce and implement standard-referenced assessment to ensure the performance of our learners are comparable to accepted world standards in various areas of knowledge, skills, and competence.

In 2006, a holistic and integrated assessment called National Educational Assessment System (NEAS) was introduced. The rationale for introducing NEAS is namely to;

- a. achieve the aspiration of National Philosophy of Education towards developing learners' physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual abilities;
- b. reduce exam-oriented learning among learners;
- c. evaluate learners' learning development and progress;
- d. enhance teachers' integrity in assessing, recording and reporting of learners' learning.

(Examinations Syndicate, 2011)

NEAS was designed to assess learners' profile, achievement, development and involvement through five various modes (School-Based Assessment (SBA) which comprises four components and the standardised examination). SBA consists of four major components; the Classroom Assessment (Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah- PBD), the Central Assessment, the Physical Activities, Sports and Co-curricular Assessment (Pentaksiran Aktiviti Jasmani, Sukan dan Ko-kurikulum-PAJSK) and the Psychometric Assessment (Pentaksiran Psikometrik – PPSi). It was also agreed that NEAS should concentrate on school-based assessment and examinations should remain in the system at a lower stake at primary and lower secondary education (Examinations Syndicate, 2005, 2006 & 2010; Mokhtar et al., 2006).

The main focus of SBA is assessment for learning in developing learners' potential comprehensively and holistically. The implementation of SBA paves the way to a meaningful assessment. SBA is characterised by its authenticity and robustness besides being holistic, integrated, low stake and comprising measures of quality assurance. It is hoped that this form of assessment will produce learners who are critical, creative, innovative, competent, competitive and progressive as desired by the nation. SBA basically evaluates learners in three main domains; cognitive, affective and psychomotor. It allows teachers' ability to assess learners' achievements to be acknowledged and recognised as they are empowered to carry out formative and summative assessments in school. Everyone involved in learners' education and best interest, be it the policy makers, school administrators, teachers or parents, has important roles to play and is responsible for ensuring the success of SBA as transformation in educational assessment.

Lower Secondary Assessment Report (PPMR)

In 2014, MoE formally reported Form 3 learners' profiling, achievement, development and involvement in learning activities in all four (4) components of SBA to ensure highlight is not merely on academic performance but focusing on the overall outlook of learners' profile that includes academic and non-academic. It was also the first year where standardised exam was no longer conducted for lower secondary learners. Figure 1 illustrates PPMR as a holistic report that gathers various information of learners' profile.

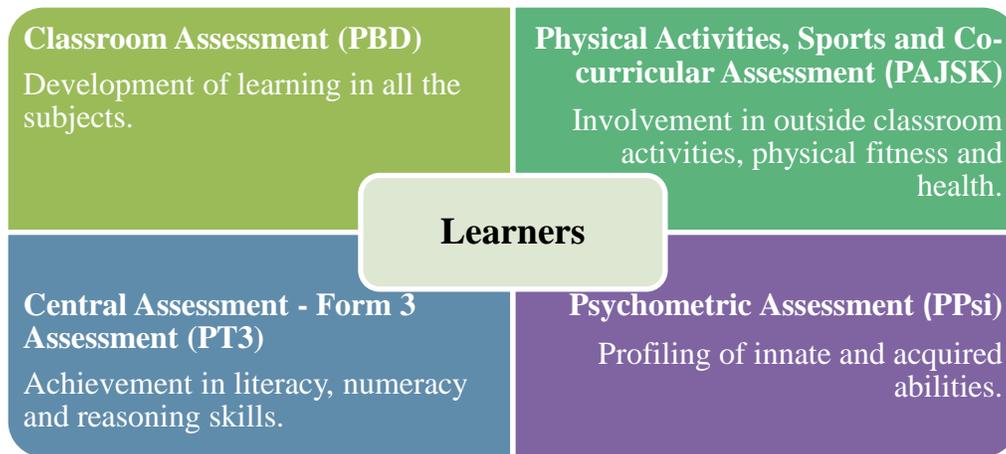


Figure 1: Illustration of individual reports included in PPMR

Classroom Assessment (PBD)

Black and Wiliam (1998) refer to assessment as all the activities undertaken by teachers and learners in assessing themselves which provide information to be used as feedback by teachers to adjust their teaching strategies, and by learners to adjust their learning strategies.

PBD emphasises on collecting first-hand information about learners' learning based on the Standards-Based Curriculum and Assessment Document (DSKP) published by the Curriculum Development Division. It is an academic component in PPMR. DSKP is used as a main reference for teachers in national schools, whereby teachers plan their assessment, prepare the instruments, administer the assessment, examine learners' responses and report their progress in all academic subjects offered in school. To ensure that assessment improves the ability and mastery level of the learners, teachers carry out formative as well as summative assessments that provide constructive feedback and feed forward for them. Teachers also conduct and use various methods of assessment such as observations, oral presentations, quizzes, question and answer, task sheets or written assignments to document learners' progress in learning. This information can be used to help teachers to plan effective teaching and learning activities.

Through PBD, teachers are also encouraged to develop assessment tasks that could enhance learners' higher order thinking skills and the 21st century skills such as creative, innovative, problem solving and decision making apart from instilling moral values. Classroom activities provide the opportunity for the teacher to support the learner to reach a higher level of understanding. In one classroom, there are learners with various learning styles and different types of intelligence. It is paramount for teachers to use authentic teaching, learning and assessment to promote meaningful learning in the real life situation to cater for all of these learners. Authentic assessment refers to original, contextualized teaching, learning and assessment (Booyse, 2016).

PBD reporting provides information to learners, teachers and parents on learners’ learning growth and development that can be used to help them improve or enhance their learning. The report is not meant to be compared to other learners. There are six mastery levels and each level includes knowledge, skills and values related to each subject. The levels are defined both generally according to the subjects as well as specifically based on the skills. Level 1 is the most basic mastery to Level 6 being the advanced mastery (Examinations Syndicate, 2011). The general description of performance level is shown in Table 1.

Level	Description
1	Learners know basic matter and are able to respond to it or could carry out basic skills.
2	Learners show understanding by explaining things learnt in the form of communication.
3	Learners are able to use knowledge to carry out skills in certain situation.
4	Learners are able to use knowledge and carry out tasks using certain skills appropriately according to procedures systematically and analytically.
5	Learners are able to use knowledge and execute skills in new situations according to procedures systematically with positive attitude.
6	Learners are able to use prior knowledge and skills in new situation systematically, with positive attitude, creative and innovative in creating new ideas and able to be exemplary to others.

Table 1: General Description of Mastery Levels in PBD

General descriptor for each subject gives an overall outlook on learners’ performance for the specified subject. The performance levels indicate learners’ progress in learning. There are six levels which indicate learners’ progress. The levels take into account the knowledge, skills and values stipulated in the curriculum. Teachers can record learners’ progress in the record book, exercise book, notebook, checklist, schedules or through other appropriate methods. The performance levels are recorded in the reporting template that has been provided after the teachers have completed the Content and Learning Standards.

Learners’ Overall Performance Level for each subject is determined at the end of each year. Teachers need to assess learners collectively and holistically by looking at all aspects during the learning process. Teachers should use professional judgement in assessing and determining the overall performance level. Professional judgement can be carried out based on the teachers’ knowledge and experience, teachers’ interaction with learners and also discussions with colleagues. Once the performance level has been identified, teachers can then determine their learners’ overall performance level. Table 2 shows an example of general performance for Form 3 English Language obtained from DSKP. Performance Standards refer to the six levels of learners’ progress in the acquisition of the four language skills; Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. This English Language curriculum has been aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001).

PERFORMANCE LEVEL	NOTES
1	Pupil hardly achieves the curriculum target even with a lot of support.
2	Pupil is on track to achieve the curriculum target.
3	Pupil achieves expectations of the curriculum target.
4	Pupil works towards exceeding expectations of the curriculum target.
5	Pupil is on track to exceed expectations of the curriculum target.
6	Pupil exceeds expectations of the curriculum target.

Table 2: Overall Performance Level for Target Level CEFR B1 (Independent User)

Physical Activities, Sports and Co-curricular Assessment (PAJSK)

PAJSK is the non-academic component in PPMR that consists of co-curricular, health and physical fitness assessments. The co-curricular assessment comprises three main activities which are Society/Club, Uniform Bodies and Sports/Games. PAJSK is meant to accommodate a standardized assessment on extra-curricular activities that can be used in all national schools throughout the year. Learners' excellence in co-curricular activities is shown through their active participation in activities at various levels such as school, district, state, national as well as international. The degree of their participation, commitment, potential and achievement in all activities that they have participated in is being recorded and awarded with appropriate grades, ranging from A for very active to E, which is below satisfactory level as described in Table 3.

Grade	Description
A	Learner is active, committed and shows high potential in participated activities.
B	Learner is active, committed and shows satisfactory interest in participated activities.
C	Learner's participation in activities is satisfactory.
D	Learner's participation is low and learner does not show grit in activities participated.
E	Learner's participation and achievement level is below satisfactory.
TL	Learner did not carry out activities (Special Case)

Table 3: Grade Description for Learners' Participation in Co-curricular Activities

A report on learners' physical fitness is also recorded through National Standard Physical Fitness Test for Learners or *Ujian Standard Kecergasan Fizikal Kebangsaan untuk Murid Sekolah Malaysia* (SEGAK). This test consists of collection of data on learners' physical activities and fitness. Learners' fitness level is recorded by teachers by referring to the levels, from Extremely Fit, Very Fit, Fit, Nearly Fit and Not Fit.

Another important aspect in keeping the learners physically fit is their Body Mass Index (BMI). Collecting learners' BMI is important as learners can keep track of their weight and teachers and parents could carry out intervention programme if there is a need. Their BMI is being rank as normal, nearly overweight, overweight and also underweight. The data collected is also useful for stakeholders to monitor learners at risk of being underweight as well as obese and to take appropriate preventive measures.

The information collected for PAJSK reporting is to encourage learners to participate in physical and outdoor activities alongside the pursuance of academic excellence. Furthermore, sports are important as they also have the ability to bring people from different ethnic communities together and unite them behind a common goal (David, 2009). This aspiration is very much desired in a multi-racial country like Malaysia in order to maintain a united, peaceful and harmonious nation. Furthermore, the record and report of these activities could also be used as added value to learners' application for further education and training. This gathering of information is an acknowledgement and recognition of learners' participation in sports and outdoor activities as part of learning process which enriches learners' knowledge, soft skills and experience. Such activities are the driving factors to building a strong and rounded character in enhancing human capital as advocated in the National Philosophy of Education.

Psychometric Assessment (PPsi)

Psychometric Assessment (PPsi) is a profiling assessment used to gather information that could portray characteristics, attributes or individual psychological traits. It is also a non-academic component in PPMR. It is introduced to measure learners' innate and acquired abilities such as personality, career interest, aptitude, thinking skills and learning styles. The goal is to help learners realize their potential and subsequently use this information to help them progress in their learning accordingly.

Psychometric Assessment for Form 3 learners consists of two instruments, Multiple Intelligences Inventory and Career Interest Inventory. Both of these instruments focus on specific aptitude and personality tests that measure learners' potential in education. According to Psychometric Assessment Manual (2013), Multiple Intelligences Inventory is designed and adapted from Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory to identify multiple intelligences such as verbal-linguistic, spatial, logical mathematical, musical, naturalist, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and existential. This is reported based on the level of tendencies for each construct which are high, medium and low. The Career Interest Inventory was introduced to guide learners in choosing career paths. It is based on Holland Theory (1985) which states that individuals can be categorized into six types based on their personality namely Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. The reporting of this instrument is based on 3 personalities or Holland Points those learners' get the highest scores out of 100.

Information gathered from Psychometric Assessment reporting can be used to shed some lights for learners in the selection of class streaming in Form 4 or for choosing career path in the long run. The assessment results can assist teachers to choose suitable approach from variety of teaching and learning methods to produce creative and innovative learners with high self-esteem,

knowledge and skills in various fields. It can provide guidance to teachers, learners and parents to identify learners' personalities and plan learners' career paths that are in line with their personalities and interests.

Form 3 Assessment (PT3)

The fourth component of SBA is the Central Assessment. Central Assessment is an academic component in PPMR, and reports learners' achievements in academic subjects. It is a centralised assessment whereby the accountability of its administration is shared between schools and the ES as opposed to the centralised exams where every aspect is being managed by the syndicate. It is conducted and carried out by teachers in schools using instruments, scoring rubrics, guidelines, time line and procedures prepared by the ES.

Central Assessment is implemented in a summative form according to the schedule fixed by the ES. Marks awarded by the schools are sent to the syndicate to be analysed and moderated before they are sent back to be reported by the schools. At Form 3 level, it is known as Form 3 Assessment, or PT3. There are 23 academic subjects involved and being tested in this assessment. The grades awarded ranging from A for excellent to F for has not achieved minimum level, and the reporting is given in a form of result statement.

Starting 2019, new PT3 formats for all subjects are introduced in line with the MoE's effort in implementing a new and more enhanced curriculum. This is to give more autonomy to schools in managing educational assessments, and to uphold the teaching profession by recognising teachers' important role and expertise.

How PPMR Engages and Inspires Learners to Make Better Decisions in Upper Forms Streaming

“Lower secondary education and upper secondary education goals are to ensure learners have critical, creative, innovative thinking, have a high sense of nationality and acquire mastery at least two major languages, Malay and English”.

Malaysia Education Act 1996 (Act 550)

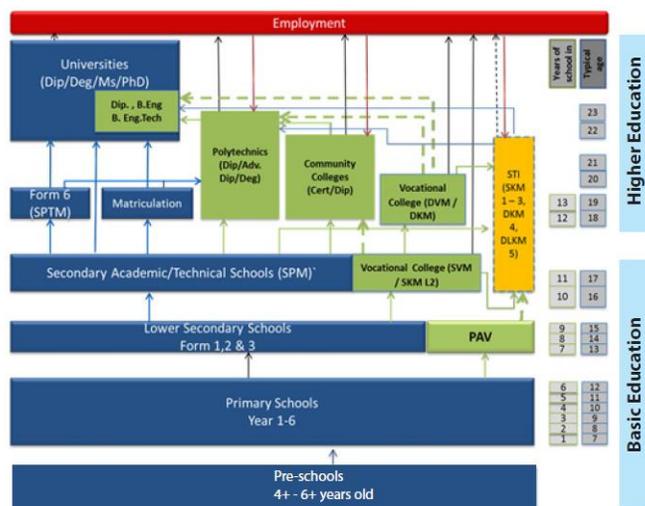


Figure 1: Education pathways in Malaysia (source from Educational Planning and Research Division, MoE)

PPMR reporting provides comprehensive, profound, and useful information for learners to develop their potential accordingly when they continue their study in upper secondary level. Based on the PPMR reporting and with the help and guidance from their parents, teachers and counsellors, learners will have a better understanding of their ability in academic as well as non-academic fields and subsequently are able to make better decisions in choosing the stream that is right for them at the upper secondary level.

PPMR reporting can be used as the golden ticket for high achievers in choosing their desired stream as well as schools. For this group of learners, decisions must be made carefully as not to make choices solely based on their academic performances, but to also use their psychometrics test results to help them in decision making. Every so often we come across learners who are forced by demanding parents to choose the paths that they are not interested in. This results in unhappy learners who might not be able to show their full potential and ability in their studies at upper secondary level.

For learners with moderate achievement, they too can have better opportunity in choosing the best stream if they know where their strength is. There are still many good options for them, and with the right combination of subjects, they will be able to continue their secondary schooling in the stream of their choice. PPMR reporting serves learners as helpful guidelines. In competing to get the limited seats in their dream class, what differentiate one learner from the other might be their achievement and involvement in sports or co-curricular activities or even their psychometrics profiling. Those with better achievement and suitable profile will stand out as a better candidate to get the enrolment.

As for lower achievement learners, sometimes they are left with less desired choice of stream. It must not be seen as the end of the world, for they can choose courses in vocational training in Vocational Colleges that require less demanding academic achievement compared to mainstream classes. These colleges offer on-the-job training courses, and at the end of the training they will

be awarded with Malaysia Vocational Certificate that can be used to apply for high skilled job or to become competitive entrepreneurs.

Moving forward

PPMR reporting that includes PBD, PAJSK, Ppsi and PT3 encompasses multiple perspectives of useful and holistic information that can be used by stakeholders as it portrays learners' profile as human capital for national growth in the future. Since its implementation, PPMR is seen to be on the right track towards achieving the objective of the NPE in developing individuals' potential holistically and fulfilling the education aspiration in providing equal access to quality education.

Support and understanding from parents, teachers and other stakeholders are vital at this stage of learners' life. Every learner must be given equal opportunity to study in their field of interest according to their profile, achievement, development and involvement in PPMR. Some of them might need just a little help in making the right choice, and others might require handholding all the way to get through this phase. Learners are guided to choose their paths using the extensive information gathered from PPMR. PPMR is hoped to continue to equip learners with relevant and necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to survive in this ever changing world. It is necessary for both parents and teachers to play their roles in helping learners to find their happy endings.

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