

From an international English language assessment framework to a teacher-based assessment: A study of primary English teachers' agentic perspectives and projections

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ABSTRACT

This study explores four primary English teachers' agentic perspectives about assessment in their schools. Given the challenges brought by the abolition of International Standard School (ISS), the changed status of the school, and the exclusion of English from the 2013 National Education Curriculum (NEC), a teacher-based assessment was the only solution to the unavailability of assessment guidelines and the unsuitability of assessment materials and methods. Employing teacher agency theory, this study examines the agentic sides of the teachers' perspectives as they would represent the teachers' strategic solutions toward the school's emerging problems. The teacher-based assessment was expected to accommodate the school's context, the students, and the subject taught. This instrumental case study's data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, which was then analyzed through six phases of thematic analysis and by employing nVivo12 software. The study indicates that the challenges brought by the changed educational policies reinforced collaborative work amongst the teachers. The teachers' perspectives also represent their agentic projections toward English language assessment which was heavily shaped by the teachers' previous assessment experiences during ISS and their ultimate teaching objectives. The findings are expected to provide insightful knowledge about how English teachers responded to shifted educational policies and projected to accommodate the school's specific contexts of assessment. The findings are also expected to explain how people's perspectives can be examined from an agency perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

Impacts resulted from the termination of the International Standard School (ISS) system in Indonesia in early 2013 are still being felt until today, especially by former ISS. The ISS founding - through the enactment of Republic of Indonesia Act No. 20 of 2003 - was intended to inform and ultimately improve the education quality in Indonesia (Kustulasari, 2009; Sundusiyah, 2011) by integrating internationally certified education standard along with the National Education Curriculum (NEC). The abolition of ISS system created confusion at the micro-level in terms of adjustments that need to be taken to maintain the international standard teaching and assessment (Damarjati, 2013), especially for English subject as an ISS image (Farmasari, 2020). The confusions brought by the absence of further guidelines for teaching was aggravated when English is excluded from the 2013 primary school NEC, resulting in the absence of an assessment framework for English. The absence of an assessment framework has reinforced teachers to seek for solution to fill the assessment gap. In this case, Teacher-Based Assessment (TBA) is believed to

be a strategic solution to respond to the assessment reference unavailability. TBA also aligns with English as an elective subject (Sulistiyo et al., 2020) at primary school since its design and enactment are at school and teacher level. Besides, TBA has been acknowledged to be a more appropriate scheme of assessment at school level as it enables teachers to address and integrate the specific contexts of the school and region into the assessment they develop (Dunlea et al., 2020; Janssens & Meier, 2013). Literature shows that studies related to ISS implementation in Indonesia were mainly done during the ISS implementation, focusing on the areas of policy studies (e.g. Kustulasari, 2009; Lumbanraja, 2009; Soepriyanti, 2004); issue of national identity (e.g. Sakhiyya, 2011); teachers' professionalism (e.g. Sundusiyah, 2011); economic consequences (e.g. Coleman, 2011); and the legal aspect (e.g. Rosser & Curnow, 2014). Studies on how school stakeholders, especially teachers, respond and adapt their academic practices to the changed policy in the aftermath of the abolition, such as the one in this study, remain scarce but much needed.

Considering ISS which used to implement internationally certified assessment for the final year students and the formative assessment was also projected as a preparation for the final international assessment, English teachers would have taken into account these previous assessment experiences into their current TBA practices (Buchanan, 2015). In another vein, the English teaching inputs that ISS students previously received were socially, culturally, pedagogically and linguistically richer than those in the NEC (Farmasari, 2020; Mahyuni et al., 2010), there need to be substantial adjustments for the assessment system. Given this problematic situation, English teachers are required to exercise their capacity to respond to the problems by taking into account the school's specific contexts and of the students (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2015). The problematic situations have provided opportunities for teachers to exhibit and exercise their agentic capacity in seeking strategic solutions toward emerging situations. As a starting point of examining agentic capacity, this study explores English teachers' perspectives about moving from an international assessment framework to a TBA amidst the school's given assessment contexts (X. Yan et al., 2018).

While studies about people's perspectives have been dominantly conducted to examine people's attitudes and views toward specific issues (Jerald & Shah, 2018; Zein, 2017), this study offers an angle in which perspectives can be examined from a teacher agency point of view. This theory examines whether the participants' perspectives are agentic or less agentic by examining their responses towards the cultural, structural and material contexts of assessment in the school (Priestley et al., 2016). As visualized in Figure 1, the changed policy of ISS and English teaching in primary school is part of *teacher agency's practical-evaluative* element with an interplay between cultural, structural, and material aspects of assessment in the school.

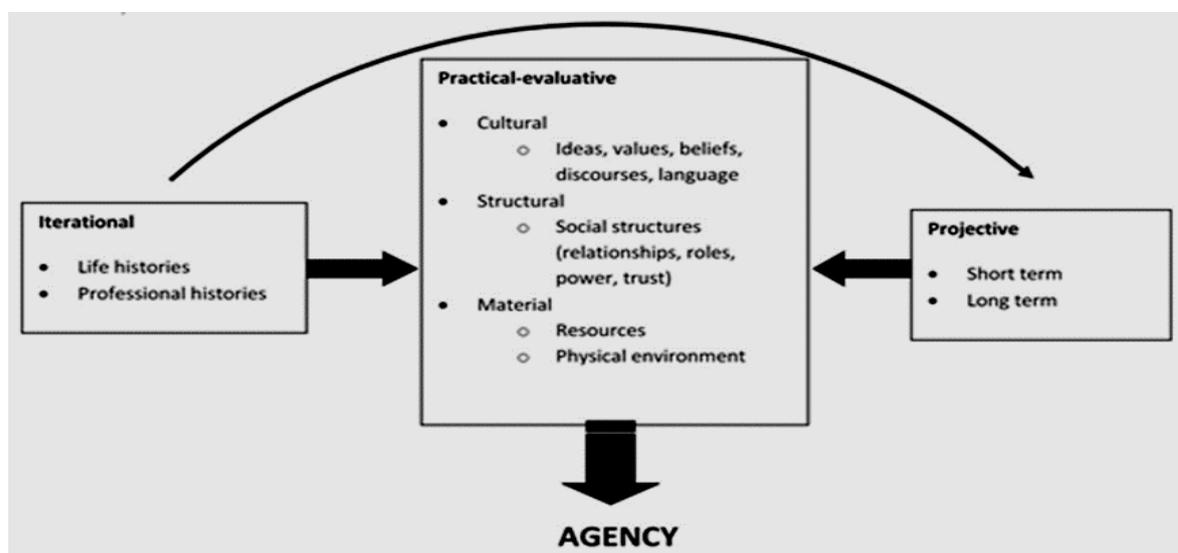


Figure 1. Teacher Agency Model (Priestley et al., 2016, p. 30)

Given the insightful international background from the previous international assessment experiences and the practical-evaluative aspects of the assessment in the school, this study was conducted to find out (1) what agentive perspectives that the participants possess concerning the practice-evaluative aspects of assessment in the school, and (2) what projections can be identified from the participants' agentive perspectives. These findings of this study are expected to provide insightful knowledge into how English teachers in a former ISS respond to the changed educational policies and provide examples of how agentive perspectives represent projective educational practices, particularly in the assessment of English language in the context of primary schools in Indonesia.

The Context of the Study

The school where the study was undertaken used to be an International Standard School (ISS) which implemented both the national curriculum and international curriculum, i.e. the Cambridge Primary Checkpoint (CPC) in which English was included as an international subject. The English teaching and assessment complied with the CPC scheme where students had to sit on an international assessment at their final year. After the abolition of ISS in early 2013, former ISS was not given any further guidelines (Damarjati, 2013), except for a return and complete implementation of the national curriculum. The school and the teachers experienced a dilemma whether they had to comply entirely with the policy mandate or maintain the school's international curriculum; what to do with the students accustomed to the teaching pedagogy and assessment of the international standard curriculum. One of the participating teachers commented that, "If we returned to the national curriculum, the contents of the available teaching materials and assessment were too low for our students..." (Pripa).

These conditions had reinforced the teachers' personal capacity to seek a strategic solution in response to the change (Priestley et al., 2015, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to explore the English teachers' agentive perspectives about assessing the students' English achievement when moving from an international assessment framework to a teacher-based assessment.

METHOD

Type of Study and the Participants

This study is an instrumental case-study since it studied a single specific case of the English teachers' agentive perspectives. This research aims to explore an issue based on a lived experience in a "bounded system" (Creswell, 2014 p. 73). Besides, it draws on a qualitative interpretative paradigm which analyses cases in diverse schools of thoughts in the social sciences, such as social constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Collins, 2010).

Table 1. The Participants' Profile

Participants	Age	Gender	Role	Leadership Experience (years)	Teaching Experience (years)	Employment Status
Pripa	43	Male	6	-	19	Government teacher ¹
Gesi	29	Female	6	-	9	Honorary teacher ²
Miki	30	Male	5	-	8	Honorary teacher
Daru	23	Female	5	-	8 months	Honorary teacher

¹ A government officer/teacher is a permanent position where a teacher is employed and paid by the national government

² An honorary teacher is a non-permanent position where a teacher is employed and paid by the school.

This study was conducted in a former ISS located in a provincial city in the south-eastern part of Indonesia. The school was selected purposively as it satisfies the purpose of the study, and the participants possessed understandings of the case study or the research problems and the core phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2016). The participants of this study were four English teachers who were teaching Grade 5 and 6 classes (as presented in Table 1).

Over one month (mid-August to mid-September 2018), the empirical data about the participants' agentive perspectives were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). The teachers were then interviewed two times in order to explore their agentive perspectives and assessment projections. The second interview followed up with the teachers' responses in the first interview. The FGD was conducted one time, following the interviews, by referring to the interview data. The interview and FGD protocols and the questions were developed by following the teacher agency theory proposed by [Priestley et al. \(2016\)](#), representing the cultural, structural, and material contexts of English language assessment in the school.

Data Analysis

The data of this study were analyzed thematically by adopting the six phases of thematic analysis from [Braun and Clarcke \(2006\)](#), as presented in Table 2. The data were then analyzed inductively in Nvivo 12 Pro software. All of the codes and relevant data extracts were collated together for the later analysis stages.

Table 2. Steps to Thematic Analysis

Phases	Activities	Tools
1 Familiarisation with the data collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing understanding of the meaning of each data Discovering how each data related to the corresponding research questions 	Microsoft Word
2 Developing codes across the data sets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating codes inductively Reducing and revising through a refinement process of the data 	NVivo12 Pro
3 Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A careful line-by-line reading of the excerpts Looking for repetition of words, Key-Words-In-Context (KWIC) and shifts in content 	NVivo12 Pro
4 Reviewing for themes	Developing a coding table with lists of the themes, codes and their relationship to ensure the integrity and consistency an representativeness of the data	Microsoft Word
5 Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining, naming and finalizing each theme Writing their descriptions and illustrating them in a matrix 	Microsoft Word
6 Reporting	Reporting the findings	Microsoft Word

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Influences from the Past Assessment Practice

[Buchanan \(2015\)](#) states that the contexts of teachers' previous teaching experiences heavily shaped how teachers exercised agency. As teachers engaged with the material resources from the previous practice and adjusted them to the students' current context ([Stritikus, 2003](#)), the teachers' agentive perspectives may influence their analysis, interpretation and adaptation to the available resources for their respective contexts ([Smagorinsky et al., 2011](#)).

During the ISS period with the CPC program, the English teachers received great support from the school in forms of professional development and supervisions, which helped their understanding of which assessment forms would contribute to the expected outcomes. This critical support from the school is expected to still embedded in them; thus it can affect agency ([Sachs, 2016](#)) as they were not only given opportunities to exercise their agentive role but also supported with relevant knowledge and skills ([Verberg et al., 2016](#)). However, since the abolition of the ISS policy, the school's change status, and the exclusion of English from the 2013 NEC, similar professional development programs for teachers were rarely conducted. In response to this, the participants, Miki and Gesi perceived that they needed to pursue professional development inde-

pendently to support their assessment practices. This agentive perspective resulted from Miki's and Gesi's personal network beyond the school culture they enacted voluntarily, yet purposefully (Chisholm et al., 2019).

As a result of insightful experience from the past assessment practice, Miki perceived that her past assessment practice needed to be adopted as it aligned with the school's English learning outcomes, i.e. assessing communication skills using alternative assessment forms. In support of Miki's preferences, Pripa, admitted that he perceived the students' real-life needs to be integrated into assessment as it used to be during the ISS period with the CPC assessment. Implementing authentic assessment principles (Cheng et al., 2010), Pripa perceived that incorporating authentic use of English in the classroom context would assist students' perspectives of the use of English in their daily life. From these perspectives, the teachers' past assessment practice has given the teachers valuable insights into their current assessment practice. The assessment design and the materials provided in the CPC assessment packs (assessment samples, rubrics, and scoring system) assisted teachers to develop their current assessment tasks, assessment criteria, and scoring as Gesi stated, "...the CPC pack was complete...there was a teacher's book with suggestions for assessment tasks, scoring...I learnt from it". With the current English teaching policy in primary school and the absence of suitable assessment materials for English, the teachers' experiences with the CPC benefit their practice in terms of guidance in developing and implementing the assessment. Even though they admitted their practice to become more challenging, the teachers understand that their role in teacher-based assessment (TBA) is critical, explained as follows.

Teachers' Pivotal Role in TBA

Due to teachers' opportunity to address the specific contexts of assessment in their respective settings, teachers' role in TBA becomes very critical (Brookhart, 2011). When explicitly asked about their perspective about their role TBA, Miki initially defined what she understands about teacher-based assessment before commenting about her role, "Teacher-Based Assessment is an assessment scheme where teachers are given authority as well as responsibilities to plan, develop and conduct an appropriate assessment."

Miki's definition of TBA implied her perspectives about her role and responsibilities in the assessment as pivotal as she needed to design and implement assessment by herself for her respective class due to the unavailability of assessment guidelines for primary school English. She further mentioned that teachers are "the right people on the right job" which is echoed by Daru that, "... the role of teachers as the key persons in the development and implementation had to be substantially recognized..." They believe that the right person to assess students is their teachers as they are in possession of knowledge about the school, the subject and the students so that the assessment could be directly monitored and improved.

Another participant, Pripa, viewed that teachers' role in TBA echoed the view that teachers should act not only as assessment developers but also as assessment enactors and evaluators (Black & William, 2009; Davison, 2019). Further, Pripa believed that the assessment developed by teachers would be more effective than the assessment created by external parties as he stated, "TBA provides opportunities for teachers to use their knowledge about their class to develop a more direct and suitable assessment for students..."

Pripa implied that TBA provides opportunities for teachers to employ a more direct assessment of students' learning in the four language skills based on the school's goals and the students' needs. As part of teacher assessment literacy (Webb, 2002), this perspective can be viewed as the teachers' processes in collecting data directly about their students' learning. As a result, their perspectives about their pivotal role, the four teachers, Miki, Gesi, Pripa, and Daru, represent their agentive intention. The teachers resisted using external English tests in the school as the tests presumably included under-representative items to assess the students' learning achievement (Bachman, 2002; Z. Yan & Cheng, 2015). To achieve the maximum benefit from TBA, teachers' role in ensuring whether the tasks are effectively aligning with the pre-determined learn-

ing objectives is significant. Despite the teachers' critical role in TBA, Gesi highlighted another vital role of teachers, which can help improve assessment quality, building a positive relationship with students and parents as she stated, "Students and parents need to be involved during the preparation process...after the assessment, I always inform the results to parents so that we can work together to improve students' learning."

Teachers need to consider what role parents can play in assisting their children (Ho, 2006) such as evaluating their children's progress based on teachers' evidence (Cheng et al., 2010). Even though this involvement requires enormous time and vigorous commitment from both teachers and parents, its valuable contribution to improving students' learning is promising (Azevedo et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2010).

In a similar vein, Miki perceived that her role in maintaining an effective communication about students' learning progress with both students and parents was essential and influential in achieving her goal: "...the first thing is my relationship with students and then parents". Moreover, Simpson (2017) and Lasky (2005) recognized that a positive relationship with students as a sociocultural process as a manifestation of agency as it helps students improve their assessment performance. Further, when specifically inquired about their role and responsibilities in TBA after the abolition of ISS, three teachers remarked that the situation after the ISS abolition had encouraged them to work collaboratively to maintain the quality of assessment. They believed that the opportunities to learn from and aspire to each other were facilitated during the collaborative work, while at the same time respecting each other's capacity.

Learning from, Aspiring and Respecting Each Other for a Quality Assessment Practice

As stated earlier, the situation amidst the changed national policy of ISS, the school's changed status, and the exclusion of primary English teaching in the 2013 NEC had become a driving force for collaborative work amongst the English teachers. Collaborative works were required as teachers needed to have intensive discussions and analysis of the school's assessment contexts. The work was initiated to create a more suitable English curriculum, teaching and assessment, and better English language assessment quality. The teachers admitted that the collaborative work was a place for their reciprocal learning, aspiration and respect towards each teacher's capacity. The beneficial effect of collaborative work would be achievable when teachers possess a sincere motivation to receive learning, even from younger members (Novotný & Brücknerová, 2014). Miki stated, "I am passionate about working with other teachers, senior and junior, as they must have different knowledge and skills which will enrich my own [knowledge and skills]."

The extract above shows Miki's perspectives about working with other teachers in an inter-generational environment as a learning opportunity. Rubin and Land (2017) stated that the situational collaborative framework within a school context would create a bi-influential process where the induced and inducing teachers could influence each other's practices positively. Further, Priestley et al. (2015) also highlighted that that achievement of the agency in a school context is achieved when teachers engage with colleagues in a collaborative way maximizing their contributions in response to a problematic situation while taking into account the "cultures and structures of schooling" (p.195) they belong to.

A similar perspective was revealed from Daru, the most junior teacher who values his working team as knowledge sources. He tried to position himself as a learner. He enjoyed working with other senior teachers as they regarded him as a partner. He admitted that this acknowledgment had built his confidence when working with the team, and he was not reluctant to deliver his ideas during the teachers' meeting. Novotný and Brücknerová (2014) maintained that to facilitate every member in teamwork and learn from each other; all participants must welcome each other as a working partner, although the members are from different generations. The most senior teacher, Pripa, perceived his experience working with the three junior teachers as positive. As his juniors frequently consulted him, he could see their potential through their discussions during the meetings. He trusted that his juniors were committed to maintain and improve the qual-

ity of English teaching and assessment, including its related programs, by stating, “I believe they [the junior teachers] are competent, they are good team. They’ve been working hard to maintain the quality of English teaching, they work on the right track and I will always support them...” (Pripa).

The reciprocal trust between Pripa and his junior fellows would have brought a positive atmosphere to the teachers' collaborative work in developing and implementing the TBA. As Vaughn and Faircloth (2011) stated, collaborative work amongst teachers exhibits teachers' agentic actions as they negotiate obstacles to achieve their goals. Collaborative work also facilitates teachers' capabilities to solve specific problems in their educational settings (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Despite the positive opportunities for reciprocal learning, the four teachers repeatedly admitted that their work is quite challenging due to some factors such as the limitation of available resources for assessment, supervision and professional development programs in the school as one of the teachers stated, “...we had to work hard to develop our own curriculum and assessment, but we don’t have someone we can discuss with, a supervisor. ...it is very difficult for us now...” (Miki).

This extract represents the challenges faced by the teachers in their collaborative work. The decision taken by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia (CCRI) to terminate the ISS implementation without a follow-up scenario for the former ISS positioned them in a difficult situation, that was aggravated when the local public university's cooperation for the supervision programs was also terminated. The teachers' collaborative work was expected to be fruitful in terms of seeking strategic solutions to the challenges they faced (Rubin & Land, 2017). The challenges had reinforced their agentic perspectives as the teachers need to project actions “by means of their environment, rather than in their environment” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007 p. 137).

The Teachers’ Projections of English Language Assessment

As the second dimension of teacher agency model (Priestley et al., 2016), projective in this study refers to the teachers’ aspirations or goals toward their TBA practice. Data indicate that the teachers’ projections were influenced by the teachers’ past practice and professional development and their cultural factors, i.e., their perspectives (Priestley et al., 2015). When asked about their TBA projections, the four teachers highlighted the importance of implementing Assessment for Learning (AFL) and addressing the students’ characteristics as young language learners. They believed that assessment should inform them about their students’ learning progress, and teachers should use the assessment result to improve their instructions as Pripa stated, “My goal is simple, assessment for learning, I will assess the students’ progress towards the intended outcomes, and I will use the result to improve my teaching” (Pripa).

Similarly, Miki highlighted the importance of achieving the English teaching objectives in the school, that was enabling students to use English actively for their daily communication, “I aim my assessment to improve the students’ speaking skill because it is our goal [the English teaching goal in the school]”. Miki’s projection may have been influenced by her role as a coordinator of English subject in the school where she endeavoured to achieve English teaching goals. Concerning assessment, Miki further stated that “the assessment will inform me about the students’ problems to address them in my teaching”. Miki’s projections of her TBA practice show how she related assessment to teaching, reflecting an essential principle of AFL (Willis, 2011). This also reflects Miki’s agentic projection in which she oriented her practice by responding to the contextual conditions (of the students) in her assessment practice (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Interestingly, Daru’s (Miki’s teaching partner) short-term TBA projection was similar to Miki’s: improving the students’ oral language skills. Stating that, “my assessment goals are... students can use English orally in their daily activities based on the materials taught”.

This similar projection may result from Daru and Miki’s daily interactions, where they discussed and shared their practices and inspired each other (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Miki, who was more senior in terms of teaching length and experiences with the CPC, may have in-

fluenced Daru regarding the importance of improving students' communication skills through various methods, not only traditional paper-based tests as commonly practised in Indonesian schools (Saefurrohman & Balina, 2016). Gesi commented about this as a common practice in the past with the CPC, "In the past [with the CPC], we used lots of methods [of assessment] ...we used portfolio, peer-assessment, performance-based, project based..." (Gesi). Gesi's comment shows her projection to incorporate various assessment methods as informed by her past assessment practice, strengthening what Buchanan (2015) theorized that teachers' past teaching experiences heavily shape their current practices.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, from the four teachers' perspectives about English language assessment in the school, some potential capitals can significantly contribute to their agentic actions during the practical-evaluative works of assessment. These capitals include the teachers' experiences with the CPC in the past, the teachers' understanding of their key role, the teachers' concerns and commitment to maintaining the symbol of quality of education in the school through collaborative work. After the abolition of ISS, the teachers' situation was instrumental and encouraging for their sense of agency (seen from their perspectives), finding strategic solutions for the challenges and finding ways to succeed within their current assessment contexts despite the struggles they faced. Furthermore, the situation also increased the teachers' awareness of the surrounding contexts afforded their projective strategies regarding constraints and opportunities. Given all the constraints, the participating teachers believe that the circumstances provided opportunities for them to find a way to determine better techniques for assessing the students' English proficiency, rather than just copying the prescribed curriculum and assessment guidelines of other subjects.

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