

English Language Teachers' Speaking Assessment Beliefs and Practices in Malaysian Secondary Schools

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Abstract—This study examines the correlation between Malaysian secondary school English teachers' speaking assessment beliefs and their actual classroom practices within a classroom-based assessment framework. Adopting a quantitative research approach, data were collected from 98 teachers via a survey, and correlational analysis was employed to examine the strength, direction, and significance of the relationship between their beliefs and practices. The findings indicate that while teachers generally believe speaking assessment is important for developing students' communication skills, their actual practices do not always match these beliefs. A statistically significant moderate positive correlation was found between teachers' beliefs about speaking assessment and their frequency of using it; teachers who attached more importance to it, tended to use it more in practice. The results highlight the need for focused professional development and clearer guidelines to assist teachers in aligning teachers' assessment beliefs and practices. This alignment will promote more effective and consistent use of speaking assessments in the classroom.

Index Terms—speaking assessment, beliefs, practices, Malaysian English language teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, education systems around the world have placed more emphasis on classroom-based assessments (CBAs) to assess student performance and inform teaching practices. Malaysia's shift from traditional centralised exams to CBAs has prompted significant reforms, particularly in language education. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025) supports this transformation by promoting more holistic assessment practices aimed at enhancing student learning outcomes and preparing learners for real-world communication demands (English Language Standards and Quality Council, 2015). Within this framework, speaking assessment has gained prominence in English language instruction, given its critical role in fostering students' communicative competence and advancing their overall language proficiency (Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2002).

Despite the strong emphasis on speaking assessment in educational policy, a significant gap remains between teachers' perceptions of its importance and the practical implementation in classrooms. Effective speaking assessment demands that teachers assess a range of linguistic and communicative skills, including pronunciation, fluency, and pragmatic skills (Luoma, 2004; Fulcher, 2012). However, many teachers express feeling insufficiently prepared to conduct comprehensive speaking assessments, frequently pointing to inadequate training opportunities and unclear guidelines as key obstacles (Majid, 2011; Rahman, 2014). Therefore, many teachers resort to conventional assessment techniques that prioritise writing skills over oral proficiency, even if they acknowledge the importance of speaking assessments in enhancing communicative competence (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021).

This study is important because it fills a critical gap in the existing literature regarding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices in speaking assessment. While previous studies have examined teachers' assessment knowledge and general practices (Crusan et al., 2016; Marzaini et al., 2023), the association between teachers' beliefs and practices about speaking assessment has received relatively little attention, especially within the context of Malaysian secondary schools. As Malaysia's educational assessment framework continues to evolve, it is essential to explore the factors that shape teachers' approaches to speaking assessment and determine the extent to which their beliefs either support or hinder

the successful implementation of their practices.

This study contributes to the existing body of research on language teachers' perceptions of assessment by investigating the relationship between their beliefs and practices. Comprehending this link helps guide the design of professional development programs focused on improving teachers' assessment literacy, especially in speaking assessment, which is still inadequately addressed in Malaysia (Nimehchisalem & Bhatti, 2019). The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and educators seeking to bridge the gap between educational innovations and practical classroom implementation, facilitating more effective integration of assessment reforms into everyday teaching practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Teachers' Speaking Assessment Beliefs and Practices

Teachers' approaches to instructional practices and assessment are heavily shaped by their underlying beliefs (Borg, 1997; Pajares, 1992). These beliefs strongly influence teachers' classroom practices, especially the strategies they use for assessing speaking skills. Teacher beliefs, which combine knowledge and practices, form a complex framework guiding instructional decisions (Borg, 2003). However, research shows that teachers' beliefs often do not align with their actual practices, both in general education and language assessment (Brown, 2002; Hill, 2017).

Teachers face many challenges in speaking assessments because they need to evaluate both language accuracy and communication skills. Luoma (2004) points out that effective speaking assessments include skills like making meaning, pronunciation, and fluency. However, these assessments are often underused due to practical issues such as time limits, large class sizes, and a lack of training (Majid, 2011; Fulcher, 2012). In Malaysia, teachers also struggle to keep up with changing standards and have to deal with updated curricula and shifting assessment policies (Jamil et al., 2025).

Mertler and Campbell (2005) define assessment literacy as the knowledge and skills needed to design, conduct, and interpret assessments effectively. This literacy is necessary for assisting teachers in addressing issues and effective teaching. Research indicates that numerous teachers lack adequate training in assessment, particularly in countries such as Malaysia where school-based assessments are still developing (Fook & Sidhu, 2006; Salleh et al., 2023). In the case of Malaysian secondary school teachers, a significant gap in knowledge related to speaking assessment persists. Teachers report difficulties in selecting suitable assessment methods and in effectively reporting assessment outcomes to students and parents (Majid, 2011; Rahman, 2014).

While teachers understand the importance of speaking assessment, they often find it difficult to evaluate students fairly and communicate the results clearly (Frey & Schmitt, 2007). This uncertainty can result in inconsistent practices because teachers' beliefs do not always match how they carry out assessments in the classroom.

Studies from Thailand and Hong Kong show that teachers encounter difficulties in adjusting to the shift toward more communicative language assessments, largely due to insufficient guidance and a lack of professional support (Cheng et al., 2004; Narathakoon et al., 2020). The situation is more problematic in Malaysia due to the pressure of centralised tests, which prioritise writing and reading comprehension over speaking (Malakolunthu & Sim, 2010). In Malaysia, the assessment of speaking skills has traditionally been overshadowed by a predominant emphasis on reading and writing in public examinations. This focus has often led to the marginalisation of oral communication skills. However, recent curriculum reforms aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) have highlighted the importance of developing oral communication among students (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Despite this shift, the implementation of speaking assessment remains inconsistent and studies have reported several ongoing challenges including lack of training, time constraints, large class sizes, and teachers' limited confidence in assessing speaking (Kaur & Aziz, 2020; Jamil et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the level of assessment literacy among teachers, such as their knowledge, skills, and confidence in designing and implementing speaking assessments also mediates this belief-practice relationship. Teachers with strong beliefs but weak assessment literacy may struggle to implement effective speaking tasks, while those with high assessment literacy but rigid beliefs may still limit students' speaking opportunities. Thus, understanding teachers' beliefs about classroom-based speaking assessment is essential not only for interpreting their current practices but also for designing professional development programs that help bridge the gap between theory and practice. Encouraging reflective practice and providing ongoing support can help align beliefs with assessment methods that truly enhance learners' communicative competence.

B. Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives of this study were drawn from teachers' cognition theory (Borg, 2003), Taylor (2013) Assessment Literacy Theory and the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students Measures of Assessment Literacy (NCME, AFT, NEA, 1990) in examining the underpinnings issue of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, and practices of speaking assessment. Borg's (2003) Teachers' Cognition Theory highlights how teachers' knowledge, belief and experiences influence their classroom practices and the assessment of speaking skills. In speaking assessment, a teacher's past learning, training, and professional experience may influence how they judge students' spoken performance, what they focus on (e.g., fluency, accuracy), and how confident they feel in assessing speaking tasks. Taylor's (2013) Assessment Literacy Theory emphasises that teachers need specific

knowledge and skills to carry out effective language assessments. This includes understanding the nature of spoken languages, being familiar with different types of speaking tasks and knowing how to interpret students' performance fairly and accurately. To guide the practical aspects of speaking assessment, the standards for teacher competence in educational assessment of students (NCME, AFT, NEA, 1990) outlined seven areas that teachers need to be competent in. The seven standards include, choosing and developing appropriate tasks, scoring and interpreting results, using results to inform instructions, grading fairly, communicating results clearly and recognise unethical assessment practices. In the context of speaking assessment, these standards support teachers in ensuring that assessments are meaningful, consistent, and ethical. By combining these three perspectives, the study investigates how teachers' beliefs align with their actual classroom practices when assessing speaking in Malaysian secondary schools.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study examines the relationship between Malaysian teachers' speaking assessment beliefs and practices using Borg's (2003) teacher cognition framework, which explains how teachers' beliefs and experiences shape their practices, and Taylor's (2013) language assessment literacy model, which emphasises the role of both cognitive understanding and contextual factors in language assessment. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the Malaysian secondary school English language teachers' speaking assessment beliefs?
2. What are these teachers perceived speaking assessment practices?
3. What is the relationship between the teachers' speaking assessment beliefs and practices?

This study hypothesised that there is no significant relationship between English language teachers' speaking assessment beliefs and practices scores.

B. Research Design

This was a quantitative study with a correlational design. The sampling, data collection, and analysis methods are presented in this section. The study involved 98 participants, who were English language teachers from secondary schools in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. These teachers were graduates in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), English language, or related subjects, with teaching experience ranging from novice to senior levels. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the study's goals, ensuring they had practical experience with classroom-based speaking assessments.

C. Instruments

The instrument utilised to collect the data was a self-administered survey questionnaire that was developed from Zhang and Bury-Stock's (2003) Assessment Practice Inventory. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: (a) Speaking Assessment Beliefs, which included questions measuring teachers' beliefs about the objectives, ethics, and outcomes of speaking assessments; and (b) Speaking Assessment Practices, which assessed teachers' perceived (i.e., self-reported) speaking assessment practices, such as how they conduct assessments, select assessment strategies, grade students, and share results. A 5-point Likert scale, with 0 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree, was used to record the responses. The survey yielded information about teachers' beliefs and practices regarding established standards of assessment literacy (NCME, AFT, & NEA, 1990).

D. Data Collection Procedures

The survey was given to all participants, who were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their consent. Participants took the test and answered the questionnaire in a single session. The test and questionnaire were conducted through face-to-face administration. Data collection was finished from 11th May to 1st June 2019. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were calculated, and Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their self-reported practices.

E. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's ethics review board. Participants were informed about the study's goals and objectives in addition to a promise that the information they provided would be kept private. Prior to the survey, all respondents provided their informed consent. Additionally, participants had the choice to leave the study at any time. To preserve participant anonymity, data collected were anonymised and stored securely.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings, focusing on the beliefs and practices of Malaysian secondary school English teachers about speaking assessment. The analysis answers the research questions by outlining teachers' beliefs, reviewing their reported practices, and exploring the connection between them. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are used to summarise the data and highlight important features.

A. Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

The items in the survey were examined for internal reliability. The objective of the test is to verify if the participants consistently responded to the survey. Table 1 displays the reliability statistics of the speaking assessment belief and practice questionnaire. With a Cronbach's Alpha ranging from 0.906 to 0.774, the subscale that focused on teachers' beliefs (7 criteria) showed strong internal consistency. Each item in this subscale contributed positively to the overall reliability. The subscale for teachers' practice (7 criteria) also ranged from 0.933 to 0.751 contributed positively to the overall reliability. The high internal consistency of the questionnaire suggests that it is a reliable instrument for examining teachers' beliefs and practices.

TABLE 1
RELIABILITY STATISTIC OF SPEAKING ASSESSMENT BELIEF AND PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE (N = 98)

| No. | Criteria | No. of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | |
|-----|--|--------------|------------------|----------|
| | | | Belief | Practice |
| 1. | Choosing the correct method | 14 | .868 | .751 |
| 2. | Developing speaking assessment | 10 | .853 | .806 |
| 3. | Administering speaking assessment | 12 | .864 | .906 |
| 4. | Using speaking assessment results for classroom instruction and students' improvement. | 6 | .886 | .876 |
| 5. | Validating grading procedures | 15 | .906 | .933 |
| 6. | Communicating speaking assessment results | 5 | .774 | .800 |
| 7. | Recognising ethical consideration in speaking assessment | 4 | .873 | .781 |

Regarding the first research question, the results indicate that Malaysian secondary school English teachers hold strong beliefs about the importance of speaking assessments, particularly in terms of evaluating students' communicative competence (Table 2).

TABLE 2
TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT BELIEFS AND PRACTICES (N = 98)

| No. | Criteria | Belief | | | | Practice | | | |
|-----|--|--------|------|------|------|----------|------|------|------|
| | | Min | Max | M | SD | Min | Max | M | SD |
| 1. | Choosing the correct method | 3.00 | 5.00 | 4.02 | .375 | 2.64 | 5.00 | 3.51 | .488 |
| 2. | Developing speaking assessment | 2.67 | 4.89 | 3.87 | .396 | 1.78 | 5.00 | 3.80 | .563 |
| 3. | Administering speaking assessment | 2.08 | 5.00 | 3.84 | .436 | 1.33 | 5.00 | 3.51 | .677 |
| 4. | Using speaking assessment results for classroom instruction and students' improvement. | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.65 | .617 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.36 | .771 |
| 5. | Validating grading procedures | 1.40 | 4.87 | 3.63 | .544 | 1.20 | 5.00 | 3.24 | .806 |
| 6. | Communicating speaking assessment results | 1.80 | 5.00 | 3.82 | .534 | 1.40 | 5.00 | 3.56 | .771 |
| 7. | Recognising ethical consideration in speaking assessment | 2.25 | 5.00 | 4.19 | .661 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 4.06 | .840 |

*Cut off points mean for Belief & Practice: low (1.00 – 2.33), medium (2.34 – 3.67), and high (3.68 – 5.00).

The mean score for beliefs regarding the significance of speaking assessments was high ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.43$), indicating that teachers mostly agreed on the importance of speaking assessments in teaching language. Teachers expressed strong agreement on the importance of selecting the correct method for assessing student performance ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.35$) and developing effective assessment tools to students' needs ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.39$). The results also highlighted a strong consensus among teachers regarding communicating the findings of the speaking test results ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.53$) and the ethical procedures ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.66$). It suggests that teachers show a high level of commitment to maintaining the integrity of the assessment process. The scores for utilising assessment results to enhance instruction ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.61$) and assessing the grading procedures ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.54$) were comparatively lower. This suggests that teachers feel less confident in these areas of speaking assessment.

The second Research Question was related to the teachers' perceived assessment practices. The findings reveal a misalignment between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices. While there is some consistency in the selecting the methods ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.48$), administering the assessment ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.67$), validating the grades ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.86$), communication of results ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.77$), and utilising assessment results to enhance instruction ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.77$), other areas of practice, such as ethical values ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.84$) and designing speaking assessment tasks ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.48$), were reported at notably medium levels. This discrepancy indicates that although teachers value speaking assessments, practical constraints, such as limited time and large class sizes, may prevent them from fully implementing effective speaking assessment practices.

B. Relationship Between Assessment Beliefs and Practices

The third Research Question tested the relationship between teachers' speaking assessment beliefs and practices. Pearson correlation analysis was used to study the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding speaking assessment. The findings indicated a moderate positive correlation among all seven standards of speaking assessment ($r = .476$, $p < .001$). Teachers who hold a strong belief in the significance of speaking assessments are more inclined to implement these practices in their classrooms.

TABLE 3
PEARSON CORRELATION BETWEEN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF SPEAKING ASSESSMENT

| | | Belief | Practice |
|----------|---------------------|--------|----------|
| Belief | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .476** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 98 | 98 |
| Practice | Pearson Correlation | .476** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 98 | 98 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The positive correlation suggests that while teachers with stronger beliefs about speaking assessments are more likely to implement related practices, several contextual factors—such as time constraints, large class sizes, and inadequate training—limit the extent to which these beliefs are consistently reflected in their classroom practices. The findings support Borg’s (1997) model of teacher cognition, which posits that while beliefs shape instructional decisions, contextual factors moderate the extent to which these beliefs are enacted in practice.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices in speaking assessment. The scatterplot displays the distribution of data points, showing how teachers’ reported practices tend to increase with higher belief scores. The trend line indicates a positive association, suggesting that teachers who value speaking assessment are more inclined to implement corresponding practices in their classrooms.

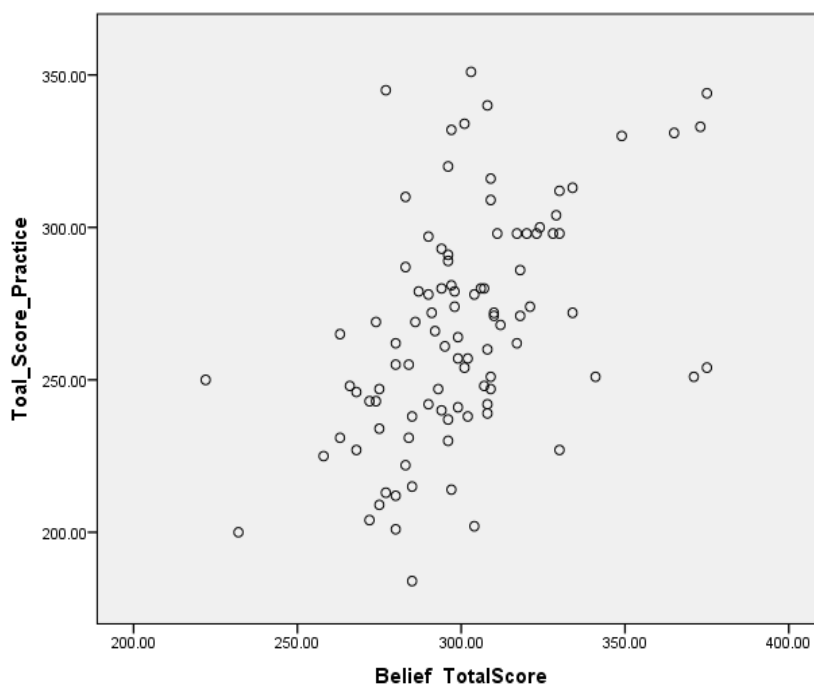


Figure 1. The Relationship Between Belief and Speaking Assessment Practice (Pearson’s $r = .476$)

Figure 1 illustrates that while there is a noticeable upward trend, the data points are somewhat dispersed, reflecting variability in the extent to which teachers’ beliefs translate into classroom practices. This variation may be attributed to factors such as logistical challenges and limited resources, which can affect teachers’ capacity to fully implement their beliefs about speaking assessment in practice.

V. DISCUSSIONS

This study examined the relationship between the beliefs and practices of Malaysian secondary school English language teachers concerning speaking assessment. The results provide valuable insights into the challenges teachers face in aligning their beliefs with their practices. In this section, the findings are interpreted in light of previous research, highlighting both consistencies and discrepancies with the existing literature.

A. Teachers’ Beliefs About Speaking Assessment

The results indicate that Malaysian teachers hold strong beliefs about the importance of speaking assessment in evaluating students’ communicative competence. This finding aligns with previous studies that emphasise the role of speaking assessment in language education (Luoma, 2004; Fulcher, 2012). The high mean scores for administering speaking assessments suggest that teachers recognise its value in developing students’ language skills, particularly in real-world communication settings. This is consistent with Luoma (2004), who argued that speaking assessments are essential

for assessing learners' ability to convey meaning effectively.

However, lower belief scores in areas such as ethical considerations and communicating assessment results reveal gaps in teachers' confidence regarding specific aspects of speaking assessment. These findings align with Frey and Schmitt (2007), who observed that teachers frequently encounter difficulties in understanding and applying ethical assessment practices. The variability in teachers' beliefs may stem from insufficient training or a lack of clear guidelines on effectively managing these aspects of assessment (Majid, 2011; Rahman, 2014). Such challenges can prevent teachers from fully embracing all dimensions of speaking assessment, suggesting a need for more comprehensive professional development in these areas.

B. Teachers' Practices of Speaking Assessment

The reported practices of teachers show a discrepancy between their beliefs and actual classroom implementation. While teachers generally believe in the value of speaking assessments, practical limitations hinder the extent to which these beliefs are realised in their practices. The results, which indicate lower scores for using assessment results to improve instruction and developing speaking assessments, are consistent with earlier studies in Malaysia that identified logistical barriers such as large class sizes and limited instructional time as significant challenges (Majid, 2011; Rahman, 2014). These limitations may lead teachers to pick quicker methods, like group assessments, which can make it harder for them to provide individual feedback to students.

The lower scores for developing speaking assessments support the findings of Narathakoon et al. (2020), who saw similar challenges for teachers in other Asian countries when changing assessment methods to fit communicative language teaching. This shows that the problem isn't just in Malaysia; it's part of a bigger challenge that schools face as they shift from traditional assessment methods to more communicative and student-centered approaches.

C. Relationship Between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

The moderate positive correlation found here ($r = .476$) shows that while teachers' beliefs influence their practices, this influence is only partly visible in the classroom. The results suggest that teachers with stronger beliefs about speaking assessment are more likely to use related practices, but this link is limited by outside factors. This finding supports Borg's (1997) model of teacher cognition, which proposes that while beliefs significantly shape instructional decisions, contextual factors such as classroom environment, time, and available resources moderate how these beliefs manifest in practice.

The variation in correlation indicates how practical challenges hinder teachers from continuously implementing their views in the classroom. This finding corresponds to the research conducted by Brown (2002) and Hill (2017), which identified that teachers frequently encounter issues such as institutional policies, curriculum requirements, and various systemic obstacles while attempting to implement ideal assessment procedures. Malakolunthu and Sim (2010) observed that in Malaysia, centralised examinations emphasise reading and writing skills above speaking abilities. This emphasis restricts teachers' ability to conduct comprehensive speaking assessments.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

A. Findings

This study looked at how well Malaysian secondary school English teachers' beliefs match their perceived practices in speaking assessment. The results show that although teachers see speaking assessment as important, practical issues like time limits, large class sizes, and insufficient training make it hard to implement these beliefs in the classroom. There is a positive link between what teachers believe and what they do, but they will often be challenged by external factors.

The findings suggest that teachers need more support and resources to help them put their beliefs into action. Practical training and solutions to common problems in the classroom could make speaking assessment more effective. Clearer policies and guidelines are essential to help teachers conduct speaking assessments consistently and effectively. Well-defined frameworks can bridge the gap between policy expectations and classroom practices, minimising ambiguity and fostering more uniform implementation.

This study adds to the expanding body of knowledge on speaking assessment and highlights the importance of enhancing teacher training and refining policy guidelines. Future research should further investigate the factors influencing teachers' assessment practices to ensure that language assessment reforms effectively improve both teaching and learning outcomes.

B. Implications for Professional Development and Policy

The findings reinforce the need for focused professional development to assist teachers in integrating their beliefs with their practices. These training programs should cover more than just the technical aspects of conducting speaking assessments. They should provide teachers with practical strategies for managing large classes, making the best use of instructional time, and addressing ethical issues effectively. In addition, policymakers should develop clearer guidelines for implementing speaking assessments, especially in challenging areas like grading and giving feedback.

The results also indicate that ongoing educational reforms, such as those outlined in the findings suggest that ongoing educational reforms, like those in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013–2025), should not only revise assessment policies but also provide strong support for teachers. This support is needed to ensure that classroom practices match with

the objectives of the reforms and are implemented efficiently. Considering the study's limitations, subsequent research should investigate other factors that may affect teachers' speaking assessment procedures, including school culture, administrative support, and collaboration among teachers.

C. Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides helpful insights, it has some limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported data can introduce bias because teachers might overstate or downplay their beliefs and practices. Second, the study was limited to one Malaysian state, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings.

Future research should include objective measures of assessment practices, such as classroom observations, and involve teachers from diverse regions. Investigating factors such as institutional policies, resource availability, and teacher collaboration will provide a more comprehensive understanding of what shapes speaking assessment practices.

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