

# Consideration of the research setting in a qualitative case study: assessment for learning Arabic language

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to observe how assessment is practised by a teacher in the classroom. In good teaching, assessment is not treated as a separate entity. It provides an avenue to improve students' learning. The main research question is to examine how a teacher conducts assessment in the process of teaching and learning for Arabic Language subject in a secondary school. A qualitative case study method was chosen for this research. The research participant in this case study is a form one teacher who teaches Arabic Language. Three types of data were collected, namely; observation, interview and document evidence. The process of collecting qualitative data is a valuable experience and important for researchers in this study.

**Keywords:** Assessment for Learning, Interview, Observation, Participant, Teaching Arabic Language.

## Introduction

This presentation will describe my experience of the process of getting started a qualitative case study. It started with selection of location, participant and the method suit to the title and research question.

The main discussion focused on data collection and case study in qualitative research in terms of assessment in the process of teaching and learning Arabic language in a secondary school. Research methodology the study referred to the appropriateness of the title, objectives and research questions. The objective of this study was to review the current practice of evaluation of teaching and learning Arabic language to enhance student learning. Specifically this study aimed to; (1) *find out the general assessment practice mode adopted by teachers in teaching*, and (2) *to identify the real purpose of the teacher's assessment activities during the process of teaching and learning in the classroom*. Therefore, this study aimed to answer the question: "How teachers adopted assessment during the process of teaching and learning Arabic language in the classroom?". In particular it will examine in depth with respect to; (1) what are the ways of assessment practiced by the teacher during teaching and learning?, and (2) what is the real purpose of assessment activities in the classroom?

## The Selection of Case Study Method

The selection of case study method in qualitative made based on justification and the review covered the following questions:

**First:** Does the title and field work studies appropriate with qualitative case study method?

The first aspect relating to the appropriateness of the selection case study method with the title of the review. The word '*assessment in teaching and learning processes*' in the title referred to practices or activities that occurred on an ongoing basis and sequentially in the classroom. It is certain that through several steps need to real contexts, specific and in-depth review to produce a complete description for descriptively explains the process.

This method is suitable for the needs of the study and consistent with the study habits that require realistic, naturalistic, expect the emic perspective, holistic, descriptive and parsing in a grounded theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

**Second:** Do research questions stated appropriate with case study method?

This second aspect concerned with the appropriateness of selection the method of case studies with research question. The question of this study was to explore about: "*How teacher practiced assessment during the process of teaching and learning Arabic language in the classroom*". Question of 'how' mentioned here required explanation descriptively, deep and detailed.

Hence, the selection of case studies in qualitative methods deemed suitable to answer the research question.

### **Selection The Research Location**

The selection of research location became a vital part in set design case studies and qualitative basis prior to collection. Purposive sample was selected after field investigations on some group in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes were included in the study.

For example, location where research should be appropriate, easy to access and close to the residence of researcher. This important prerequisites to facilitate researcher began the study by entering the fieldwork study on the first day (Marohaini, 2001). There were four main criteria in setting and selecting the research area, namely: (1) the nature and purpose of the research, (2) free admission, simplicity and permission, (3) facilities and opportunities, and (4) the size of the place of study or school (Spradley, 1980; Jorgensen, 1989; Marohaini, 1998).

A secondary school in Selangor that fulfilled the requirements of the study and in accordance with the qualitative characteristics of a place of study was selected. The school offered teaching Arabic language to form 1 students. There was at least one teacher who trained, skilled and expert in the field of teaching for Arabic language subject. The selection of a school also allowed researcher to have a lot of time in one place and be able to investigate in depth and detail all the data that will appear or publish in 'emergent'. Consideration is also given with respect to the characteristics of a good study place and main personality (gate keeper) who can help the task of the researcher. A best school once already, but if the headmaster and the administrators did not cooperate, then it is not a good study place for a qualitative case study (Marohani, 1998, 2001). Before the selection was made, the researcher has obtained information related to a secondary school that is offering Arabic and its position close to the residence of researcher that is approximately five kilometres. Researcher also made an early survey of current go perform Friday prayers because the school have a mosque used by residents.

The school also have an easy access with a security guard at the main entrance. According to informal conversation with the other teacher, the principle is friendly and easy to discuss with him. At the same time researcher have identified an old contact (Ustaz Aziz) that is being taught at the school. Based on the experience of Marohaini study (1996), this is a good start for the selection of research areas.

### **Enter The Field Study**

Entering the place of actual case study required careful planning. We also needed to focus on the process of data collection, data analyse and recording the findings starting with the first visit. The first experience with the school administrators, research participant and the related helpful step in this research (Merriam, 1990; Marohaini, 2001). The study began with the first time presence of researcher to the location and met with the school principal. The researcher does not contact the principal in advance. At this first meeting, researcher encountered a little problem. After introduction, starting a conversation and expressed the willingness to carry out the study, the researcher was asked with several questions by the principal about the suitability of his school as the sample. The principal stated that his school has many activities and emphasis on achievements in public examinations.

The principle agreed after explanation that this study does not associate with public examinations. It will focus on the aspects of assessment done by teacher in the classroom and just focusing on a form 1 class for subject in Arabic language only. The principal mentioned that in his school have three teachers who teach Arabic.

Researcher felt uncomfortable and challenged the confidence when asked with a few questions by the principle at the first time visit.

Researcher recorded the feeling of challenge and slightly uncomfortable with this situation in the reflexive notes. Although, the researcher still hoping to choose this school as a place of study, but this first experience pushed the researcher to think of the alternative place if necessary. This situation will not occurred if the researcher made a phone call before the first visit to the location. According to Marohaini (2001), researchers are required to obtain the consent and the best way is to make a phone call. In this way, the headmaster of a school readiness to be assessed in advance.

### Explore Other Places

This first experience led researcher to explore other schools as the proposed second or third alternatives. Within a month, researcher visited informal basis to another secondary school offered Arabic language in Sungai Buloh, Selangor. Its purposed to explore the possibility of making it as a place of study. Information about the school obtained in advance via phone to Gombak District Education Office. Distance, facilities and access route to the location was taken into consideration. The location of this second school far away compared to the first school. The school's position on a hill and had to cross a main road that is currently in the process of enlargement works of the road from Kuala Selangor to Sungai Buloh road congestion cause quite severe in the morning and afternoon. The researcher also found some teachers in other schools that also suggested another school in Selayang under the supervision of the Selangor State Religious Department in Rawang. Both of the schools offered Arabic but researcher rejected this proposal because a further problem, traffic congestion worse would face and there are some difficult obstacles for researcher. The most unsupported factors were about no personnel can serve as a gate keeper and key informant to help researcher to get into the school. Deep information regarding place of study become a primary information for the researcher to make the selection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

### Second Trial

After reviewed all aspects of the site proposals; researcher decided to make a phone call to the first school principal and expressed the intention to make a case study there. Researcher also referred to the reflection notes for the first time visit. The phone call was received well and principal invited researcher to come to his school. Through telephone conversations, he expressed the willingness and also suggested a teacher ever gets excellence award in school and successfully guiding students form 3 for Arabic language subject achieving 100% passed in final examination for three years in a row. Before entering the field work study to research at the second time officially, researcher made an earlier discussion and expressed the willingness to Ustaz Aziz – another Arabic language teacher in the school that was considered as a 'key informant' in this case study. He promised to cooperate to researcher.

### The Headmaster As A 'Gate Keeper'

Upon entering the school office on the day appointed, researcher was welcomed with a good response and principal suggested Ustazah Siti to become the participant in the study. The principal introduced Ustazah Siti and once again made a suggestion to researcher to choose as a participant in this study. However, researcher still did not decided yet to choose her as a whole although it has been suggested by the principal himself. The principal's suggestion is not a final proposal for decision making in a case study. Firstly researcher need to examine some specific criteria on the prospective participant of the study before deciding to choose. This factor accordance with the requirements of a case study in qualitative (Marohaini, 2001; Merriam, 2009). However, the readiness and willingness of principle for consent is the first condition must been met. In this case, the principal has become a 'gate keeper' and thus becoming the main informant against the existence of a candidate to be selected as a participant in the study.

### Selection Participant of The Study

After choosing the place of study, the selection of the participant of the study was a very important process. According to Merriam (2009), a good selection of participants should cover research aspects of expertise in the field under review (*expert*), have the ability to talk to explain the opinion from the emic perspective (*expertise*) and are also available to help researcher obtain data for research (*willingness*). For getting data from the *emic* perspective; willingness and availability of study participant was needed (Merriam; 1990, 2009). When the researcher got information concerning the participant recommended studies, researcher also have the opportunity to interview with her colleagues with respect to personality and her attitude. Researcher started to have confidence in the candidate participant for this study based on the information obtained. Nevertheless it still too early for researcher to make decision to select participant of the study. After being introduced by Ustazah Siti (not real name – proposed participant), researcher was able to have an informal interview with her. When informed the purpose of the study, she welcomed very well. The researcher explained that the study participant was an expert in the field. The expertise of the participant is fundamental in the selection of the participant of the study (Merriam, 2009). As a teacher, the participant of the study was an experience on its own every process that occurred at the place of study naturally. Natural and naturalistic are important to this selection for deep and gain insight and holistic nature of the overall perspective of the participant review (*emic perspective*).

Researcher as a human nature instrument will attend, observe, evaluate, assess, question and explore fully the data and principles that are embedded and hidden in the study participant. Each motions, movements, speeches, actions, findings and expressions discovered by researcher is valuable qualitative data of a 'grounded theory'.

### Research Participant

Selected study participant was a teacher who taught Arabic language for form 1 in the school. She had 12 years teaching experience at four schools began in Sarawak. Based on first time informal interviews, researcher found that she was a diligent, experienced and can talk of expertise in the field. She described more and length when asked with a question. The characteristics of her proven an experience and proficiency levels in a formal recorded interview after researcher finished an observation. As a result of some information that mutual supported between the description of the principal, colleagues and other teachers about Ustazah Siti and topped with the commitment shown by her; then researcher decided to choose her as a participant in this study. Researcher had also explained about the purpose of the research, the research procedure, the form of involvement and the ethics of research participant as well as the implications of her involvement against the process of data collection for this study. Thus the process experienced by researcher prior to finalizing the selection of participant for data collection process.

### Research Period

In a good qualitative case study, researcher should not be able to set the time to finish his study. The level taken into consideration is when researcher reach '*point of saturation*', namely the extent saturation and persistent data. Involvement of researcher as an instrument in an actual study naturally within a '*prolonged engagement*' is very helpful in ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings (Merriam, 2009). For this study, researcher have to limit the time as appropriate to the need to answer two research questions and data collected from field work studies. The period occurred in this study included the presence of researcher formally eight times (not including the presence of informally) for collecting the required data pertaining to the practice of evaluation performed by the participant of the study while she carried out the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. Researcher made use of the formal interview session with the participant of the study adequately. Similarly, formal interviews with six students who attend class study. This step also involved classroom observations, discussions and informal interviews with the participant of the study, an informal interview with the headmaster, an informal interview with colleagues and discussions with other teachers and students.

### The Stage of Data Collection

The whole period of data collection for this study can be divided into three levels that have been accessed by researcher as an instrument:

**Firstly** stage covered the phase before observation in class. At this stage the researcher visited the location, made first meeting, informal discussion and communication by telephone. The main purpose of this stage is to recognize and nurture a relationship with the community in this school especially the administrator.

**Second** stage is the period for researcher to make the selection of the place of study, analysing the suitability of selection of the participant of the study place, and earned the trust of the school. This stage started from second and subsequent visits.

**Third** stage is the most important stage in the data collection, namely the observation study classes and interview with participant of the study. On this stage, the researcher strived to get deep parsing how assessment practice during the process of teaching and learning for Arabic language subjects carried out by participant of the study in the classroom. At this stage not only participant who observed and interviewed, but all relevant factors were taken into account including classrooms, equipment, the atmosphere in the room, ventilation, environment, students, material, supported documents, interruption from outside, time constraints, changing the time of appointments and so forth.

### Data Collection Method

Three methods of qualitative data collection; observations, interviews and documentary evidence was conducted in this study. Merriam (1990), Bogdan & Biklen (1992) and Wiersma (2000) also suggested this three data collection methods. It aimed to acquire as much descriptive data in the form to obtain an overview of holistic and naturalistic phenomenon about how the practice assessment carried out by the teacher while performing the process teaching and learning Arabic language form 1 in the classroom. All these three methods were extremely suitable for use as it will strengthen the data obtained each other (Patton, 1980; Marohaini, 1996; 1998). Wiersma (2000) named strengthening method between this data as '*triangulation*' and described as a '*qualitative cross-validation*' can be implemented between the various data sources or data collection methods.

## Observation

Observation involves looking at, observe, listen, made sketches and recording every movement, speech, mood, reactions and events going on in the site review. Too many activities was recorded for each event was observed necessary associate with information to answer the questions of the study. Researcher should let the emergent and naturalistic data without collected during observation sessions. This method was used as a research tool when it is able to function as planned research direction, spontaneous and structured can be recorded. (Marohaini, 2001). To facilitate the process of recording observations, researcher provide a special form attachments to register and examine the activities that occurred while teaching and learning process. A list of assessment types practices derived from a literature study guide to make observations. However it is only a guide only because the main objective of observations made was to see if the actual practices going on in the field study naturally. Researcher have tried to ensure that natural factors of a discovery was used as a basis in each session observation. To ensure that the verbatim statement was recorded entirely during the process of observation, researcher also recorded the conversation and teaching activities. The recording as a support tool and evidence only. Researcher focus more on what was seen, felt, heard and observed. The experience of making an observation is a highly critical session as each motions, speeches, reactions, environment, participant mode and most importantly the willingness of researcher as a main instrument are needed.

Everything elapsed without proper scrutiny and entry by researcher was a loss for the required data. Therefore, the readiness and concentration of researcher most vital to ensure that descriptive data, holistic and naturalistic can be collected as soon as possible. It cannot be planned but instead arises in the findings and is not likely to recur. Researcher provided annotation field, a summary and records of observations as a reference for analysed.

## Interview

Interview was very important to explain more about documentary evidences and observations. According to Merriam (2009), we interviewed participant because we wanted to issue what is in themselves about something cannot be observe. For example we cannot observe feelings, thought, attention, behaviour related to the past that affects her now and the actual situation might be blocked to see naturally during the presence of the researcher. We cannot see how people manage their life and we cannot imagine the meanings associated with what was going on in her life (Patton, 1980; Merriam, 1990). For that reason, Merriam (2009) explained that the best data collection techniques for case studies is through qualitative interviews conducted with participant of the study. Researcher's experience found a number of unplanned questions but touched by the participant. When repeated questions pertaining to the matters referred to, then the participant of the study described at length and more data collected for this study. From the findings, researcher come out with the theme a few practice mode of assessment conducted by participant when handling her students at that time. Interview data with participant of the study also supported by interviews with colleagues, other teachers and her students. The experience handling multiple data collecting process such as this showed researcher how in-depth descriptions of the emic perspective can be made through the interview. More interviews whether formal or not will give more description of the actual situation.

The figure below explained the strength of the interview conducted by researcher during the data collection process. It connected researcher with past experience with observation during the study through an explanation of students or colleagues through interviews. Hence, the strength of the interview has been help researcher for the purpose of analysis and triangulation data.

It showed the powerful of interview in tracing the practice carried out by the participant of the study beyond time and limitations. The double line arrows indicate a direct relationship between researcher with research participant, colleagues, students and the observation that produce qualitative data.

While the disconnect line arrows showed how researcher obtain data via the second or third parties namely colleagues, students and the impact of observation. This is will not achieve if researcher limit the observations and interviews with the participant of the study only. But through interviews, events that occurred since the last three years can be described by researcher through explanation over and over again and '*point of saturation*'. It appeared in some version of information from the participant and personnel around him. Such data could be collected because researcher as an instrument present himself, observing, interviewing and explore itself in realistic and naturalistic. The researcher is not possible to collect data such as this if only delegate other persons or by simply using intermediate paper questionnaires only.

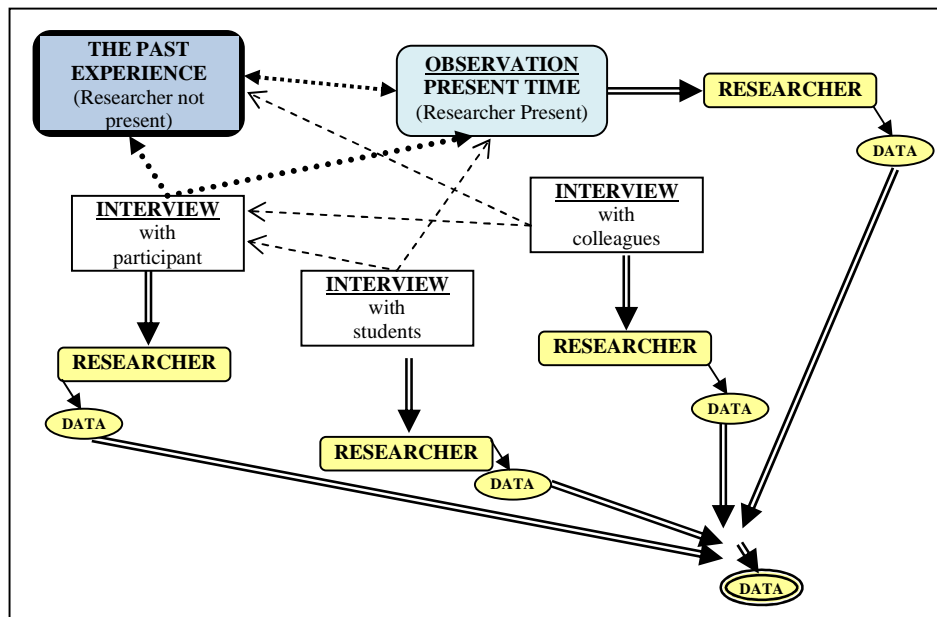


Figure 1: The role of the interview techniques provide data to researchers.

Methods of descriptive data collection through interviews is the most common way particularly in studies involving the observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In this study, an interview used in conjunction with the practice of assessment in the process of observation. Both important and mutually supportive. Without interview, data from the observation could not give a complete picture of what is observed. Each session of interview described information about teacher planning process, levels of questions posed and the skills trained by teacher during the process of teaching dan learning. Two types of interviews are used, namely formal guided and informal (Merriam, 2009). Informal interview done by submitting a question spontaneously in interactive, while formal interview has a list of questions or missile issues to the current talk show explored (Patton, 1980; Merriam, 1990). Formal interview transcript and a summary of the interview is also available for the process of analysis of the findings.

### Documentary Evidence

Data collection through this method involves several types of documents whether written, pictures and so on. The first type of document used is a document in the form of public records (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) is the school's official documents. It is intended to obtain information about the school's background, statistics the total number of teachers and students in General. The second type of document was researched document produced by an individual in particular study participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marohaini, 1996). The data in this document include teacher's lesson plan, steps in teaching, attachments prepared by teachers, additional questions are provided by teachers and distribution questions for practice drills in the classroom.

### Conclusion

Researcher have ensured clearly why the selection of the case study method and how the selection is made, the place and duration of the study participant study conducted. Similarly, the various methods of data collection conducted by the researcher themselves and how the analysis during and after data collection is performed. Finally, the researchers analysed the data for the purpose of making triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of data are presented in the form of writing research reports. What's important, qualitative data collection should be planned and implemented carefully according to the rational selection procedure began with the study design stage through analysing qualitative data. Qualitative data collection experience was obtained because the researcher were the main instrument and present in the field study with wholeheartedly.

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