

School-Based Assessment in Malaysian Schools: The Concerns of the English Teachers

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The Malaysian government has proposed to implement SBA (school-based assessment) in public schools with an attempt to replace the current public examinations. However, as SBA has yet to be in full swing, relatively little is known about the concerns of the teachers who would directly be involved in implementing SBA. This paper presents the findings from a survey on 40 English teachers who are currently teaching in Malaysian public schools. The items in the questionnaire elicited information on the stages of concerns of the respondents' concern regarding the adoption or implementation of any educational innovation. The constructs are indifference, informational-personal, management, consequence-collaboration and refocusing. It is from these identified constructs that the categories for the questions are built. Findings from the study indicate that the respondents are concerned about the innovation and that their concerns are multidimensional regardless of their experience in the innovation. The findings not only enlighten to the Malaysian English teachers themselves, but also the professional development trainers in monitoring teachers' concerns, during the process of educational change, such as the SBA. Thus, informed decisions can be made while planning for the in-service teacher trainings on SBA. Several implications on the in-service trainings are drawn in order to ensure the smooth-running of the SBA. Future works, suggested on expanding similar research on other educational innovations, can be carried out.

Keywords: SBA (school-based assessment), teachers' concerns, SoCQ (stages of concern questionnaire)

Introduction

Toffler is often quoted for his claim that the greatest challenge in the 21st century is not learning, but unlearning and relearning. The term "change management" has a long place in the context of continuous improvement. However, more often than not attempt at change fail. Cheung (2001) claimed that there were various reasons why changes, such as innovations fail. He commented that of the various reasons, one reason, concerns of the staff involved in the innovation attempt, seemed to be the most important.

According to Wilhelm and Chen Pei (2008), since the mid-1970s, a number of Asian countries have been concerned with economic reforms which in turn have brought about various improvements in the education system. Malaysia is of no exception. Examples of some of the improvements included the use of English language as the medium of instruction for maths and science from 2004 to 2009, the revamp of primary education examination in Standard Five and the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in all subjects except English language. A new assessment system for Malaysian public schools will be implemented by the end of 2010 to replace the current centralized examination. Thus far, all major public examinations in

Malaysia are centralized by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate which is under the Malaysian Ministry of Education. This means, each year the preparation and administration of the major public examinations, such as Lower Secondary School Examination, Malaysian Certificate of Examination and High School Examination are under the close monitoring of the Examination Syndicate. Their close monitoring includes the preparation of the exam papers, the administration of the exams during the examination weeks and the marking of the exam papers. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the new assessment system promotes a combination of centralized and SBA. Malaysian TED (Teacher Education Division) is entrusted by the Ministry of Education to formulate policies and guidelines to prepare teachers for the new implementation of assessment. As emphasized in the innovation of the student assessment, continuous SBA is administered at all grades and levels. Additionally, students sit for common public examinations at the end of each level.

It is also a fact that the role of teachers in the new assessment system is vital. Teachers will be given empowerment in assessing their students. Nonetheless, the empowerment also comes with the requirements of sufficient knowledge and skills in using various informal methods of testing and psychometric testing, such as diagnostic general ability and aptitude test (Teacher Education Department, Ministry of Education, 2007). Nonetheless, it was quite alarming to note that, as reported by Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009) based on a preliminary study they conducted, the oral SBA was not implemented, according to guidelines and objectives provided by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate. Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009) concluded that this might indirectly provide evidence of teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in conducting SBA, such as the oral English assessment, despite of the availability of the guidelines and objectives.

Several countries, such as Finland, New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong, have implemented SBA. Despite their years of experiences in implementing the SBA, several researches have been carried out from time to time in order to investigate relevant aspects of the SBA. This fact was made obvious by the substantial amount of documented research in the literature (Board of Studies, 1998; Choi, 1999; Daugherty, 1995; Hill, Brown, Rowe, & Turner, 1997; James & Corner, 1993; Yung, 2001; Cheung, 2001). Generally, a vast amount of researches in the various countries signify the need for an on-going evaluation of the SBA. Similar to any other innovations, the effectiveness of the SBA depend on a variety of variables, such as those concerning the teachers and learners. With the constant change, it is only imperative for SBA to be evaluated from time to time.

In the context of Malaysia, studies which focus on the concerns of the teachers on SBA need to be carried out. Most of the researches conducted have mainly focused on school-based oral assessment (Hamzah & Sinnasamy, 2009; Gurnam, 2009, 2007; Azleena, 2007). As indicated by an Internet search on MYTO (Malaysian thesis online) done on March 21, 2009, no results were found on research done on SBA in Malaysia. However, at present time, a doctoral candidate is conducting a research on the Malaysian teachers' readiness towards SBA scheme in selected Malaysian teacher training institutes (Shanusi, 2007). Thus, the conduct of the present study is seen as timely as it could provide relevant information on SBA in Malaysian public schools.

As SBA is a fairly new innovation in the Malaysian education system which is also a directive from the Ministry of Education, there is a possibility that some teachers may have concerns which deserve due attention from the ministry. As posited by Wilhelm and Chen (2008, p. 80):

ELT curricular reform efforts in Asia are impressive but have taken, for the most part, a top-down approach. Long-lasting change will depend upon the beliefs, responses, and efforts put forth by participants as they strive to meet the challenges of change.

Their claim was further supported by Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009, p. 14) who quoted Tan Sri Dr Murad Mohammad Nor, the former Education Director General as claiming, “The most important part in the implementation of any plan, is the teachers. However good the plan, it will be of no use if the teachers do not implement it well”.

According to Zaltman, Duncan, and Holbek (1973), change process may be analyzed at two levels: individual and organizational. As the primary concern of this paper is to investigate the concerns of the teachers on the new assessment system, the change process is analyzed at the individual level. Hall and Hord (2001, p. 7) concurred that in attempting or monitoring change, “Leaders of organizational change need to devise ways to anticipate and facilitate change at the individual level”.

As claimed by Cheung (2001) and Hall, George, and Rutherford (1977), Stages of Concern Model is probably the most cited individual-oriented model in research on the concerns of teachers when implementing changes. According to Hall et al., concern is “the composite representation of feelings, preoccupation, thought, and consideration given to a particular issue or task” (p. 5). They further elaborated that the concerns of teachers were both multidimensional and developmental. In other words, the concerns could be categorized into distinct stages and the concerns change according to the respective teacher’s development in implementing the innovation.

Table 1

A Brief Description of the Stages as Categorized by Hall et al. (1977)

Stage	Description
Stage 1 (Awareness)	Little concern about or involvement with the innovation is indicated.
Stage 2 (Informational)	A general awareness of the innovation and interest in learning more detail about it is indicated. The person seems to be unworried about herself/himself in relation to the innovation. She/he is interested in substantive aspects of the innovation in a selfless manner such as general characteristics, effects and requirement for use.
Stage 3 (Personal)	Individual is uncertain about the demands of the innovation, her/his inadequacy to meet those demands and her/his role with the innovation. This includes analysis of his/her role in relation to the reward structure of the organization, decision-making and consideration of potential conflicts with existing structure and personal commitment. Financial or status implications of the program for self and colleagues may also be reflected.
Stage 4 (Management)	Attention is focused on the processes and tasks of using the innovation and the best use of information and resources. Issues related to efficiency, organizing, managing, scheduling and time demands are utmost.
Stage 5 (Consequence)	Attention focuses on impact of the innovation on students in her/his immediate sphere of influence. The focus is on relevance of the innovation for students, evaluation of students’ outcomes, including performance and competencies and changes needed to increase students’ outcomes.
Stage 6 (Collaboration)	The focus is on coordination and cooperation with others regarding use of the innovation.
Stage 7 (Refocusing)	The focus is on exploration of more universal benefits from the innovation, including the possibility of major changes or replacement with a more powerful alternative. Individual has definite ideas about alternatives to the proposed or existing form of the innovation.

Note. Source: Cheung, 2001, pp. 106-107.

Hall et al. (1977), further concluded that Stages 1 to 3 could be identified as “self-concerns”, Stage 4 as “tasks concerns about the innovation” and Stages 5 to 7 as “impact concerns regarding the students”.

They also postulated that the teachers’ concerns involved developmental changes. As elaborated by them, teachers’ concerns would be most intense during the initial stage of the innovation. However, as teachers become more experienced with the innovation, they will be more intense with the tasks concerns before finally being more intense with the impact concerns. At this juncture, Hall et al. (1997) suggested that the seven stages were sequential and formed a simple structure (Joreskog, 1970). In other words, “Correlations among the seven

latent SoCQ variables in a correlation matrix are expected to decrease as one moves away from the main diagonal” (Cheung, 2001, p. 107).

At present, a substantial amount of documented research has employed SoCQ (stages of concern questionnaire) to measure teachers’ concerns on innovations (Cheung, Hattie, & Ng, 2001; Cheung, 2001; Aneke & Finch, 1997; Cicchelli & Baecher, 1989; Marsh, 1988; Kimpston & Anderson, 1985). Interestingly, Cheung et al. (2001) discovered that Hall et al.’s data were inconsistent with the ones they discovered. Hence, to improve the model fit, they proposed a regrouping of the items into a 22-item 5-stage model (Cheung, 2001).

In the newly revised SoCQ by Cheung et al. (2001), the informational stage was merged with the personal stage. Likewise, the consequence and the collaboration stages were also combined. The following are the characteristics of the revised SoCQ by Cheung et al.: Stage 1, indifference; Stage 2, informational-personal; Stage 3, management; Stage 4, consequence-collaboration; and Stage 5, refocusing.

It is the objective of this paper to examine the Malaysian English teachers’ stages of concern on SBA using the newly revised SoCQ by Cheung et al. (2001). The following are the research questions:

- (1) What are the respondents’ stages of concerns according to their experience in SBA?
- (2) What are the trainings needed by the respondents?

Methodology

A study on the Malaysian English teachers’ concerns on the implementation of the SBA was conducted. A total of 40 English teachers who were teachers from various Malaysian public secondary schools took part as respondents. Cheung et al.’s revised SoCQ was adopted in the attempt to collect relevant data on the teachers’ concerns. All the 22 items were re-worded in order to ensure relevancy with the respondents’ background as English language teachers. According to Cheung and Ng (2000), the 5-stage 22-item questionnaire has alpha reliability estimates of 0.79 for indifference, 0.82 for informational-personal, 0.76 for management, 0.75 for consequence-collaboration and 0.84 for refocusing.

The revised SoCQ was distributed to a convenience sample of 40 English teachers who were pursuing their Master’s degree in one of the Malaysian public universities. A total of nine males (22.5%) and 31 females (77.5%) have experiences in SBA which ranged from five months to 21 years.

The responses to the 22 SoCQ items were first coded in a Lickert scale of one (“Strongly disagree”) to five (“Strongly agree”). The reliability of the responses to individual items and to the five stages was then examined on the basis of item-total correlations and coefficient alphas respectively. Correlation analysis was also done to determine the relationship between the relevant demographic data and the respective stages of concerns.

Findings and Discussion

As stated earlier, the respondents for the study were English language teachers who have been teaching between five months and 21 years. Additionally, their experience in SBA ranged from five months to 18 years. Nonetheless, the mean for their teaching experience is 9.4 years and experience in SBA is 5.4 years. A comparison between two groups of teachers, those with less and those with more than five years of experience in SBA was seen as suitable in determining the stages and intensity of their concerns. There were 25 teachers with five years of experience and 15 with more than five years of experience in SBA.

The 5-stage 22-item questionnaire in the study has the alpha reliability estimates (α) of 0.76 for indifference, 0.86 for informational-personal, 0.83 for management, 0.69 for consequence-collaboration and

0.79 for refocusing. The item-total correlations of the 22 items varied between 0.60 and 0.91 which indicated the reliability of teacher data. In addition, the subscales ranged from 0.69 to 0.86 which reflected the reliability of the subscales. It was important to note that the questionnaire was adopted from CHEUNG et al.'s (2001). Hence, all the items were as suggested by them. Table 2 summarizes the reliability test of the SoCQ employed in the study.

Table 2

Reliability Estimates for the SoCQ Subscales and Items

Subscale/Item	Total correlation
Stage 1, Indifference ($\alpha = 0.855$)	
Not concerned about SBA	0.83
Occupied with other things	0.82
Not interested in learning about SBA	0.78
Stage 2, Informational-personal ($\alpha = 0.832$)	
What teachers are required to do	0.91
Time and energy commitments required	0.91
How SBA marks are moderated	0.80
How teacher's role will change	0.73
Stage 3, Management ($\alpha = 0.832$)	
Not having enough time	0.87
Inability to meet all SBA requirements	0.86
Time spent on non-academic matters related to SBA	0.64
How to complete SBA tasks efficiently	0.76
Stage 4, Consequence-collaboration ($\alpha = 0.691$)	
Develop working relationships with other SBA teachers	0.64
Let other teachers know the benefits and operations of SBA	0.78
Concerned about the impact of SBA on students	0.71
Let students understand their role in SBA	0.70
Coordinate teaching with other SBA teachers	0.75
Know how other teachers are implementing SBA	0.60
Stage 5, Refocusing ($\alpha = 0.785$)	
Revise the current SBA to improve its effectiveness	0.82
Revise certain design of SBA	0.87
Modify SBA on students' learning experiences	0.80
Find out how to supplement, enhance, or replace SBA	0.73
Use feedback from students to change SBA	0.60

Table 3 signifies the summary of the respondents' responses.

It is obvious that the respondents were concerned with SBA. This is indicated by the high mean score (> 3.5) in most stages and items. Additionally, the findings proved that their concerns were multidimensional. This is indicated by the high mean scores in various stages. Nonetheless, what is more interesting to note is that of the five stages, Stages 2 and 4, and Stage 5 have the highest means (all items have the mean of more than 3.5).

Figure 1 displays the stages of concern between two groups of teachers with less and more than five years' experience in SBA. As it could be seen from Table 3, the peak is indicated by Stages 2, 4 and 5. It could be deduced that the respondents experienced all the five stages of concern concurrently. Interestingly, despite of the difference in the degree of concern as indicated by the different means, both groups of respondents also shared similar concerns regardless of their experiences in SBA. One line indicates respondents with more than five years' experience, while the other line indicates those with less than five years experience. Both lines

indicate peak at Stage 2, 4 and 5 respectively despite of their differences in the means.

Table 3

Summary of the Respondents' Feedback

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Stage 1, Indifference ($\alpha = 0.855$)		
Not concerned about SBA	1.92	1.12
Occupied with other things	3.49	1.52
Not interested in learning about SBA	1.92	0.92
Stage 2, Informational-personal ($\alpha = 0.832$)		
What teachers are required to do	3.95	1.18
Time and energy commitments required	4.38	1.06
How SBA marks are moderated	3.92	0.83
How teacher's role will change	4.30	0.78
Stage 3, Management ($\alpha = 0.832$)		
Not having enough time	3.27	1.10
Inability to meet all SBA requirements	2.81	1.10
Time spent on non-academic matters related to SBA	3.41	1.17
How to complete SBA tasks efficiently	3.59	1.12
Stage 4, Consequence-collaboration ($\alpha = 0.691$)		
Develop working relationships with other SBA teachers	3.78	0.75
Let other teachers know the benefits and operations of SBA	3.76	0.83
Concerned about the impact of SBA on students	4.22	0.75
Let students understand their role in SBA	4.19	0.71
Coordinate teaching with other SBA teachers	3.68	0.88
Know how other teachers are implementing SBA	3.57	1.01
Stage 5, Refocusing ($\alpha = 0.785$)		
Revise the current SBA to improve its effectiveness	4.38	0.79
Revise certain design of SBA	4.38	0.64
Modify SBA on students' learning experiences	4.46	0.69
Find out how to supplement, enhance, or replace SBA	4.22	0.89
Use feedback from students to change SBA	4.41	0.69

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the concerns of 40 English language teachers teaching in Malaysian public schools on the implementation of SBA. Findings from the study indicated that the respondents were concerns about the innovation and that their concerns were multidimensional. Additionally, although the means for the respective stages of concern differ, they still had similar concerns regardless of their experience in the innovation. This was indicated by similar peaks shared by both groups of respondents in informational-personal, consequence-collaboration and refocusing as signified in Figure 2. Interestingly, similar observation was made by Cheung et al. (2001) in their study.

To begin, the respondents from both groups of teachers indicated that they had some concern at the following stages: Stage 2, informational-personal; Stage 4, consequence-collaboration; and Stage 5, refocusing. As a start, the respondents' concern at Stage 2, informational-personal stage indicated that although they were aware of SBA, particularly about its characteristics, effects and requirements, they still had some uncertainties

about the demands of SBA. In particular, the respondents had their worries about their ability to meet the demands (mean 3.95) and their role (mean 4.30). This finding confirmed Hamzah's and Sinnasamy's (2009) findings that teachers had difficulties in implementing the SBA. Their concern at Stage 4, consequence-collaboration on the other hand, indicated their worries about the impact the assessment would have on their students (mean 4.22) and got their students to understand the students' role in SBA (mean 4.19). Finally, the respondents' concern at Stage 5, refocusing further confirmed their earlier concerns at Stages 2 and 4 as they were requesting for necessary changes to the existing implementation of the SBA. It was evident that the respondents requested that feedback from their students on the innovation should be considered (mean 4.41) and that necessary modifications to the innovation might be necessary (mean 4.46). Weir (1994) claimed that the implementation of formative assessment, such as the SBA, required serious changes in teachers' perceptions of their own role in relation to their students and their classroom practice. As the other items in Stage 5 also showed high mean score, this was an obvious indication that the ministry needed to consider necessary revision and modifications to the SBA.

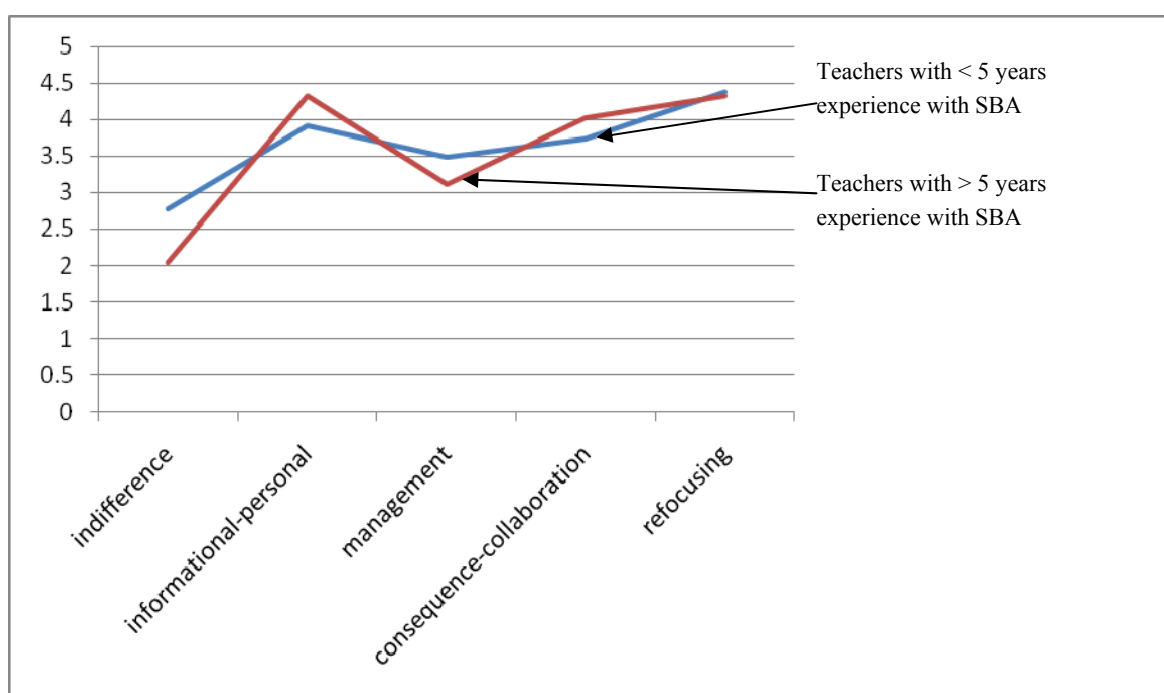


Figure 1. The stages of concern between two groups of teachers.

Most importantly, equal intensity shown by Stage 5 (refocusing) indicated that there might be issues with the innovation. As put forth by Cheung et al. (2001, p. 115), "... multiple-peak concerns profiles usually imply that the advocated innovation is inappropriate or there are problems in the implementation process". At this juncture of the discussion, it was important to highlight that "The multiple-peak profile... signals the need for immediate attention...teachers wanted to change... but they lacked a good understanding of the characteristics, benefits, requirements, and operation..." (Cheung et al., 2001, p. 115). Additionally, the respondents were uncertain about the role they needed to play in SBA. This suggested that in-service trainings were much needed in order to ensure the smooth-running of SBA. As it was, the respondents were aware of the importance of cooperation. Their awareness could be maximized in potential in-service trainings as an attempt to minimize their intense concern at Stage 5. It was feared that if no in-service trainings were provided, there was a

possibility that the teachers would implement SBA “Superficially, go back to more comfortable old assessment practices, or develop a negative attitude toward SBA” (Cheung et al., 2001, p. 5).

When the two groups of respondents’ concerns were compared, it was worth to note that they experienced all the five stages of concerns concurrently and that they had similar concerns. The low Stage 1 (reliability intensity less than three) indicated that all of the respondents were concerned about SBA and were eager to learn more about it. Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009) also discovered similar finding when their respondents indicated positive perception of the SBA. Their concern at Stage 3 might be indicative of the areas which required further training and development. The respondents claimed that they needed training on time management when it came to implementing SBA. For instance, they claimed that they did not have enough time (mean 3.27) and that they spent time on non-academic matters related to SBA (mean 3.41). They also indicated a need for exposure on how to conduct the assessment more efficiently (mean 3.59). Their quest for such training indirectly confirmed their Stage 1 concern which was their need to learn more about SBA. As Cheng (2009, p. 113) put it:

... teacher knowledge is the result of teacher learning, and teacher learning is the way to acquire and develop teacher knowledge. Any growth in knowledge will help teachers get to know the gaps in their professional competence and compel them to learn.

Implications

The study has further confirmed the findings of previous researchers on SBA, such as Cheung et al. (2001) and Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009). Besides the study conducted by Cheung et al. (2001), this study has also indicated the questionnaire’s high reliability values, thus suggesting that the SoCQ is a dependable instrument when measuring the concerns of teachers during the process of educational innovation. Besides describing the stages of concerns with the innovation in the education system, the instrument is also able to provide feedback on the necessary areas of concern which indirectly suggests possible revision, modifications and trainings.

Several implications could be derived based on the findings. There were indications that the teachers were aware about SBA. However, the respondents were uncertain about the role they needed to play in SBA. At this juncture, it is obvious that in-service trainings are much needed in order to address this urgency. As claimed by Ferguson-Patrick (2009, p. 2), “Most staff development and school improvement activities continue to leave teachers’ knowledge and skills essentially untouched”. In this instance, there is evidence that the teachers’ knowledge and skills in implementing SBA is still quite poor despite of the guidelines and objectives provided by the ministry. More hands-on sessions, such as workshops and open discussions on the challenges and issues in implementing the assessment, need to be carried out. The feedback gathered from the teachers as well as the students should be able to provide relevant information to the ministry with their attempt to decide on the necessary changes and modifications to the existing assessment’s policies and guidelines.

It is worth noting that the teachers involved in the study also indicate their concerns in terms of the management of the assessment. One area they claimed critical is time management. As claimed by Hamzah and Sinnasamy (2009) who quoted Weir (1994), teachers had negative feelings towards SBA due to two common reasons: it was imposed on them and time-constraint. Another area in need of attention is the worry that the teachers have on their collaboration with their students and colleagues. The teachers indicate a need for their students to understand the students’ role in SBA. It is also highlighted that coordination with other teachers implementing the assessment is necessary but not as efficiently practiced. Hence, this suggests that possible

trainings should be conducted focusing on the time management, students' exposure to the assessment and techniques or strategies on how teacher collaboration can be done will be helpful.

Additionally, as there were also indications on the variations of the teachers' stages of concern, trainings which were to be provided could be focused on minimizing the teachers' intense concern at Stage 5. It was concluded that the teachers strongly felt that the current assessment needed relevant revision and modification. They did suggest that feedback from the students be taken into consideration and relevant modifications be necessary to suit the students' learning experiences. Indirectly, this opens up for opportunities for further research. More in-depth investigation which focuses on the student feedback on SBA and the students' learning experiences are deemed necessary.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has achieved its purpose, describing the stages of concerns of the respondents' regarding the adoption or implementation of an educational innovation—SBA. The findings did not only describe the stages as it also provided the identification of necessary trainings on SBA and revisions to the existing implementation system. Finally, the suggestions for future research on SBA completed the study.

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