Advancing achievement through value-added measures:
A study on English teacher preparation in Brunei

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Abstract

The outcomes of value-added measures (VAM) in an educational context are direct reflections of students' learning, as it isolates a teacher's contribution to a student's growth. This is an important composition to include in an evaluative framework. In 2009, Brunei Darussalam established the current national education system known as *Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad Ke-21* (National Education System for the 21st Century, SPN21). SPN21 was then followed by efforts to standardise and monitor teacher performance with the implementation of the Brunei Teachers' Standard (BTS) in 2014 using an instrument named Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA). This effort is strategically aligned to develop more effective teachers and teaching as part of the aspiration towards quality education as called upon by the ASEAN Council of Teachers (ACT). In the light of such promising framework, this chapter identifies avenues where VAM can be implemented to improve the outcomes generated from the BTS, with the use of the third generation of activity theory (Engeström, 2001). This research employs qualitative approach with the use of semi-structured interviews. Currently, BTS-TPA is nearing the end of its first cycle, making this the ideal time to reflect upon the system for further improvements. This chapter aims to facilitate reflection by presenting contextual concerns raised by English teachers in the ESL context, and identify avenues where VAM could be applied. These information would be invaluable to teacher trainees who are expected to be accountable for their teaching upon entering their designated school.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL); teaching English; value-added measures; activity theory; Brunei education reform

Introduction

In 2009, the education system in Brunei Darussalam underwent a major overhaul, leading to the establishment of the current *Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad Ke-21* (National Education System for the 21st Century, or more commonly referred to as SPN21). SPN21 is a shift from the teacher-centered to student-centered system, aiming to sufficiently prepare students for the changing demands of the 21st century (Ministry of Education, 2016a). This shift is also a direct response to the call made by the ASEAN Council of Teachers (ACT) in 2011 to improve the quality of education, which acts as a catalyst for ASEAN member states' journey towards the realisation of the ASEAN Economic Community (Junaidi, 2011). In keeping with these developments, major changes have been made to not only the curriculum and student assessments but also to the teaching standards, which have been officially titled the Brunei Teachers' Standards (BTS). Introduced and implemented in 2014, this framework includes a new appraisal system for teachers' performance, formally referred to as the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA).

This chapter will start with a brief discussion of TPA and the importance of value-added measures (VAM) in gauging the outcomes of students' achievement accurately. This will be followed with a background on activity theory, which is employed as a lens to section the contextual evidence for the necessity of VAM in English lessons in Brunei. The descriptive statistics will be used as points of departures for qualitative analyses, where activity theory is employed. Finally, the conclusion will include implications of the current study specifically for teacher trainees in Brunei, and further recommendations in the inclusion of VAM in teacher preparation, teacher standard setting and student achievement gauge. For this chapter, the term "teachers" will be used to refer to teachers currently in service and "teacher trainees" will be used to refer to prospective teachers undergoing or about to undergo training.

Teacher standard in Brunei Darussalam

The BTS-TPA framework aims to sustain the training and professional development of teachers in Brunei after attaining formal certifications for teaching. Such framework is essential as formal training alone is not a reliable indicator of effective teaching (Goldhaber, 2002; Jepsen, 2005; Harris and Sass, 2011). More definitive measures include what Harris and Sass (2014, p. 199) termed 'human capital measures' and 'non-cognitive personality traits'. In the BTS-TPA framework, these measures are termed 'teacher competency' and 'teacher performance' respectively, and thus it makes certain that these attributes are continuously developed and monitored for successful teaching (Chapman and Adams, 2002, cited in Junaidi, 2011). In terms of teacher competency, evaluation criteria include teachers' ability to engage with students, to craft well-designed content and methods, to cater to students' individual needs, to use assessments effectively, to adopt and adapt to professional practices and to conduct oneself in high personal and professional

standards. In the case of teacher performance, evaluations are carried out based on three broad categories, which are students' achievements based on the formative and summative assessments, student's learning and the teaching efficiency, both based on lesson observations by evaluators.

Biases in the evaluative procedures are combatted by having representatives from the Department of Schools Inspectorate or members of the School Management Team (SMT) to conduct evaluations in schools. Teachers can be recognised for their outstanding performances and those who need assistance can be identified and receive the necessary help.

Importance of VAM in performative technologies

The BTS-TPA is a framework that is commonly referred to as a performative technology in literature (Tang 2011; Ball, 2015; Englund and Frostenson, 2017). The performance evaluation process simplifies the complex context in which teachers perform (Helgøy and Homme, 2007), and aligns the expectations of the document along with the goal of the education system. However, the BTS-TPA does not give any indication of how much of a student's academic growth, or lack thereof, is due to the quality of the teacher. Therefore, an additional measure needs to be put in place alongside the BTS-TPA to ensure that the shortcoming of the framework is addressed.

Whilst the current evaluative framework, similar to many others in the education system (Harris, 2011), hinges on the notion that a teacher is not efficient if his/her students do not achieve high test scores, VAM considers test scores only as a measure of efficiency *after* taking into consideration the student's context as it reflects students' learning (Loeb, 2013). In other words, in the context where VAM is applied, a teacher who is able to increase the test results of a particular group of students having low proficiency in English from an F to a D grade is evaluated as being more efficient than a teacher who is able to maintain the test results of high proficiency in English students at a B grade. In short, VAM captures the practical realities that teachers face every day. This is especially important in the context of English teaching in Brunei because the proficiency of English varies greatly within the population (Wood, Henry, Malai Ayla and Clynes, 2011); the point of distinction being the type of school that the students attend. Those who enroll in private or the best government schools tend to have very high proficiency, whilst those from less recognised or rural schools often have rudimentary skills at best. Clearly, it is problematic should teachers be only prepared to perceive a certain level of achievement as successful teaching, such as attaining A-C credit in O Level English examinations, without considering the contextual opportunities and struggles faced by students.

Activity theory as framework

Activity theory was coined by Engeström (2001) inspired by Vygotsky's work that captures the contextual information of who and what are involved in a particular system. There are six nodes identified as being present in any activity. The most important element is the (1) Object, which refers to the party that is the most affected by the resultant performance of the activity system. In BTS-TPA, the Object is the student. Other elements include the (2) Subject, or the performer of the activity in question (i.e. the teacher), and the (3) Mediating Tool that enables the performance of activities (i.e. students' competence level, resources available to students). Another element, (4) Rules, governs the activity (i.e. BTS-TPA framework, curriculum restrictions, SPN21 expectations). Whereas (5) Community, refers to the society that surrounds the Subject (i.e. the school administration, the Ministry of Education, parents), and (6) Division of Labour, is the hierarchical division of responsibilities amongst relevant stakeholders (i.e. colleagues, internal and external evaluators).
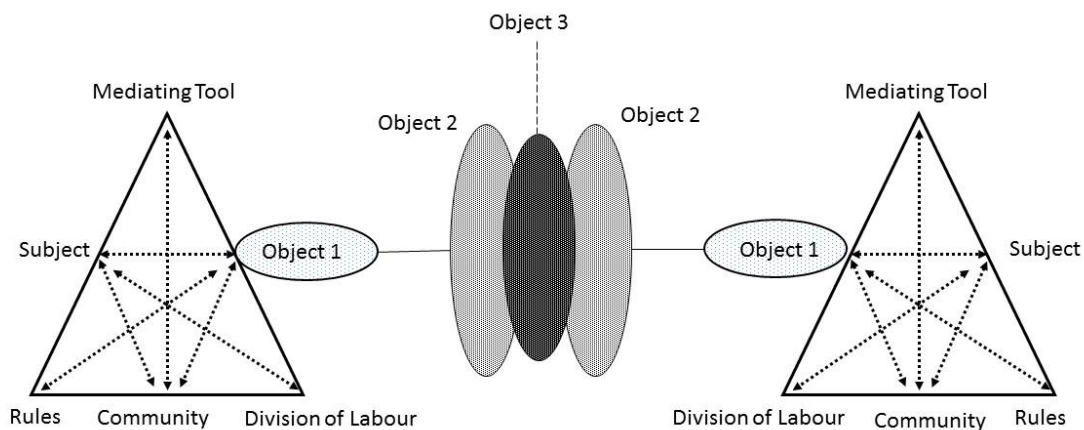

Figure 1: Third Generation Activity Theory adapted from Engeström (2001) demonstrating the interaction between two activity systems.

All the six nodes in the activity theory are interconnected. This, according to Engeström, Engeström and Kärkkäinen (1995), allows an observation of a particular system through multiple perspectives. This is significant as researchers can meticulously consider important aspects in a context and hence, arrive at a wholesome picture for the particular activity of interest. This information can be catalogued for proposed VAM sites, especially targeting parts of the teaching and learning activity that are most impactful to the overall outcome. This adoption is beneficial for the revision of the BTS-TPA framework that is highly constrained by time, prior to the start of the next cycle. The activity theory allows decision-makers to prioritise their amendments in the framework based on the input by local teachers as to where VAM is needed, and how much effect it has on the outcome of the system. Should the target node in the activity

system be identified as being the biggest barrier for the desired outcome of the BTS-TPA, it could perhaps be the first item on the agenda to be addressed by decision-makers. This ensures that the process of enhancing the framework will yield the best outcome for the next cycle.

Methodology

Participants

A set of criteria were established in order to limit the number of teachers who are eligible to take part in the study:

1. Teacher is a citizen or a permanent resident of Negara Brunei Darussalam.
2. Teacher has started his/her career before 2014 (the implementation of BTS-TPA framework).
3. Teacher has taught or is teaching Cambridge GCE O Level English, Cambridge IGCSE English or both.

A summary of the demographic of participating teachers for semi-structured interviews (Table 1) is provided. All teachers are assigned mixed-ability classes. Criterion (2) is particularly important as teachers who have taught more than 2 years have experienced pre-and post- BTS-TPA evaluation frameworks. There are 32 public secondary schools divided into six clusters in Brunei Darussalam, with 27 655 students and 3280 teachers (Ministry of Education, 2016b). Participating teachers in the current study are from schools located in clusters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 from the Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait Districts. No participants from cluster 6 responded to the call for participation, and the Temburong district schools were purposefully excluded from the study due to logistical reasons.

Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were administered both face-to-face and in online question-and-answer format, and took 30-60 minutes to complete. There are seven questions, including (1) and (2) on student performance, (3) effort to maintain and improve students' achievement, (4) overall impression of BTS-TPA on teaching and professional development, (5) the relevance and practicality of the framework, (6) impact of own academic background on teaching and professional development, and (7) impact of professional development courses on teaching and professional development. Teachers who would like to add information that they believe are relevant to the research were encouraged to elaborate their thoughts, even if they were not directly relevant to the questions asked.

Data analysis: Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews were recorded according to the preference of the teacher, either in audio or pen-and-paper format. Content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) was conducted on the 30 to 60-minute interview data with the use of activity theory as the framework for analysis. The data from teachers are classified into one of the six nodes in the framework, which are (1) Object, (2) Subject, (3) Mediating Tool, (4) Rules, (5) Community and (6) Division of Labour. Due to the nature of VAM being a context-based approach to the identification of factors contributing to or hindering from learning English, quotes from teachers in the different nodes will be discussed in a compartmentalised manner in the discussion section, although they are all intertwined. This is because the nature of context can be complex, and the framework simplifies the complexity to a certain extent and helps structure the discussion.

Results and discussion

Activity theory as a lens for analysis of quantitative results

Object of activity in current study

In the current activity system under study, the Object refers to students from English Language lessons. All the respondents claim that they teach in mixed-ability classes. Although the Object is the same, the Objective remains different in accordance with the ability of the students, as demonstrated in the extract below:

> "[For high achieving students, I] push the[m] to 'give more'. Teachers see the capability of students. Show A-grade writing from previous student and compare that with [their writing], in order to motivate them as they are seen as capable."

> Teacher 002

> "They are not used to English and they are afraid that their English and Malay are mixed. Teacher, is that right? I'm afraid that my English is not good. That is why I ask them why they don't want to speak in English. They are afraid that their tenses are not right, that they [code-]mix. I want them to at least try."

> Teacher 011

As can be derived from Teacher 002 and Teacher 011's remarks, the Objective of the activity system is to either improve the English proficiency level of the lower-ability students, or obtain the highest possible grade in their paper-and-pen-based examination results for higher-ability students. This generates a conducive environment for students' learning, as students are not subjected to pressures that are beyond

their capability. Should this be the case, however, it could also be too demotivating for the students. Despite the positive outlook embedded in this observation, the reports of these teachers present a worrying trend as teachers are seen to not adhere to the performative technology holistically – only the section where teachers cater to the individual needs, as was recommended by Clipa (2015). This is not necessarily a bad practice, but since Darling-Hammond (2002) found that student achievement is strongly correlated with the quality of teachers' performance, and that the BTS-TPA is the performative technology devised to ensure that the quality of teachers are at par with the expectations of education in the 21st century (Schleicher, 2012), the achievements of the students may be short-lived. This is because teachers may be able to improve the achievements of students as enough attention is directed to their specific needs, but equipping the students with 21st century skills to prepare them for the future is probably not high on the agenda.

Subject of activity in current study

The Subject refers to local English Teachers in government schools. All the teachers satisfy the criteria for the study wherein all teachers are either citizens or permanent residents of Brunei who started his/her career before the implementation of the BTS-TPA in 2014. They have therefore experienced both pre-and post-BTS-TPA evaluative frameworks. They have also taught, or are teaching Cambridge GCE O Level English, Cambridge IGCSE English or both.

Mediation tools for English language teaching

All the respondents claim that they teach in mixed-ability classes thus leading to automatic adaptation of their lessons so that they cater to all the ability levels of the students.

> "In every lesson there will always be some questions that are more difficult to challenge those who are of higher ability. … At the moment I am trying to make them work in group, the more able can hopefully help the less able."

Teacher 005

Teacher 005 uses two types of Mediation Tools in the English lesson: exercises with multi-level difficulty and encouraging group-work. These seem to be tools that are working for the students as well as the teachers. There are, of course, limitations such as time constraints in ensuring that all the questions, both easy and difficult ones, can be responded to in time as understandably lower-proficiency students do lack the ability to understand as quickly as their peers who have higher proficiency of the English language. Lower-ability students also seem to encounter many issues in learning English.

> "I usually have extra work for them, but you need to focus one at a time. … For some of them, even the spelling they don't know … We also have listening part [in the examination]. They are not used

to the native speaker's [speech] … Because at home they always hear Brunei Malay, and Tutong … And they also don't have computer at home. So I bring them to the computer lab[oratory]"

Teacher 011

A range of issues are identified by Teacher 011 for lower-ability students, from the inability to focus on multiple skill-sets taught in English lessons, recognise alphabets and spellings, the ability to complete comprehension questions, to understand accents in their listening task. The latter is perhaps due to the lack of resources to expose students to the varying accents of English such as internet access or simply a computer. To address this issue, Teacher 011 has taken the initiative to increase students' attention for learning by giving spelling exercises to those who struggle with the skill, and using the resources in the school to make up for what the students lack. The extract also demonstrates that these issues can partly be attributed to the influence of the first language used at home, the lack of resources to learn and the lack of motivation to try. These observations serve to highlight the inherent struggles of students and the tools that teachers use to mediate their learning. Feryok (2012) acknowledges the presence of some teachers who see students as having academic potential, but the lack of familial support and economic viability often constrain their budding growth. Students who cannot afford to even buy the basic necessities to learn English may not have the means to gain access to ICT, and thus develop their ICT skills. Their lack of familial support would also obstruct their ability to complete large volumes of work at home. Teachers may mean well, thinking perhaps more practice will help students learn quicker, however, this thinking is not necessarily practical.

Community of affected stakeholders

This lack of motivation was also seen to be caused by the Community surrounding the students, which includes their home environment – whether or not it is conducive for learning and practicing the English language, as demonstrated below:

"To me, once they reach home, that's it. They don't look at their book. Reviewing back is back to square one."

Teacher 008

"You can see a difference with students who live in rural areas – they lack exposure to English at home, which really slows down their learning [of the language]. It's really important to consider their socio-economic background as well when we ask why they perform poorly."

Teacher 015

Teacher 008's claim that students do not attempt to review their English lessons at home was due to the lack of support from the students' home environment where parents or siblings do not speak English. This is corroborated by Teacher 015, who notes that students from rural areas, which are known to be less familiar with English, perform worse than students who are exposed to more English usage in their home environments. Lack of exposure to English at home perhaps results in students recalling facts verbatim in the classroom, indicating memorisation rather than understanding – once the questions are altered, they are unable to provide sufficient answers. Students within unsupportive Communities will only be learning English in the classroom. This is the reality that teachers face on a daily basis, and they use a range of initiatives to mediate the learning of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, with low familial support, or both. Even when students do not get the support they need at home, schools present a safe place for them to learn, supporting the idea that teachers still act as agents of change (Feryok, 2012) who are sensitive to, and aware of, the students' needs due to their direct interactions and familiarity with the context in which the students are learning the English Language.

In addition to bearing the responsibility for many students' learning and being confined within the four-walled classroom, teachers also feel that their focus on the students' learning can sometimes be lost due to the immense volume of responsibilities they are expected to bear:

> "We do have the PLC (Professional Learning Community) … SBC (Subject-Based Committee) … on top of that we have approximately 15 hours of teaching per week … There are also school-based initiative[s] … "

> Teacher 001

> "At times [I get] demotivated by the [excessive] amount of time spent on [professional development courses, even though] they help to facilitate suitable lessons in the classroom according to my students' needs."

> Teacher 013

Teachers should be encouraged to have professional development training (OECD, 2015). However, there exists tensions between teachers' responsibilities and accountability for students' achievement (Solbrekke and Englund, 2011). While teachers appreciate the professional development opportunities, they often feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of responsibilities in the classroom, in the subject-community, from the department, the school and the ministry of education as a whole. These multi-layered expectations may hamper the efforts of teachers who would wish to do more for low-achieving students, or even in focusing on their development as a professional. Their responsibilities, in both teaching and training, have become

little more than a routine where teachers simply adhere to their beliefs in what should be done in order to better students' learning outcome (by attending to individual needs, recognising socio-economic constraints, providing tools for learning). After all, the primary concern of almost all stakeholders in an Asian education setting is still the examination results of the students (Wong, 2003 cited in Pham and Renshaw, 2013), which is based on the pen-and-paper examinations. In fact, one of the characteristics that is expected of teachers is their ability to always strive towards producing results for the students (Jeffrey and Troman, 2011). Thus, despite teachers' commitment to professional development efforts (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010) such as discussing recent developments in education, experimenting with various pedagogical tools, and incorporating innovative tools specifically for low achieving students, the BTS-TPA fails to recognise these efforts as they are not embedded in the measure of teacher competency in the framework.

Rules in the English Teaching system

There are multiple *Rules* that govern the outcome in English lessons for the participants; (1) the BTS-TPA framework for teacher evaluations, (2) curriculum restrictions for paper-and-pen examination results of obtaining grades A-C in GCE and IGCSE English examination, and (3) SPN21 expectations of honing 21st century skills in students, as predicted by Schleicher (2012), among other aims. These rules are currently perceived to be opposing one another as noted by these teachers:

> "Learning is a process, and to base the appraisal on a lesson is not fair … In English, students need to build skills … [and] are [the appraisers] knowledgeable enough to appraise such hard work from teachers? [Or of] the learning curve that the students are undergoing?

Teacher 003

Teacher 003 perceived the shortcomings of the BTS-TPA as being a system that is too inflexible to gauge teachers' competencies in skill-based subjects such as English Language, where many lessons are devoted to practices and not necessarily production of written work that can be assessed by the evaluator. An English Language teacher who has devoted a month towards preparing students in writing a full composition may have a quiet, non-interactive classroom when the appraiser observes the class. This will result in teachers being given low TPA grades because elements expected in the BTS-TPA were not observed. Teacher 003 is also concerned about having given enough preparation for the students for the impending IGCSE and GCE O level examination, especially for Year 11. Students are, as claimed by the teacher, ready at this stage to carry out more writing exercises and less skill-building practices i.e. less interactions with teachers and peers. This also leads to teachers being given low TPA grades. Should teachers supply more skill-building lessons and not write lessons in the fear of receiving low scores for a seemingly mundane lesson,

teachers will risk having unprepared students for their examination. Granted, honing 21st century skills in students will inherently allow a teacher to obtain higher appraisal grades, but the risk of students being unprepared for their examination – which remains to be the ultimate measure of a teacher (Wong, 2003 cited in Pham and Renshaw, 2013; Jeffrey and Troman, 2011) - remains high.

In addition, the continual concrete measure of students' achievement being based on pen-and-paper-based examination compromises the aim of the holistic learning of SPN21 where students are to develop 21st century skills which primarily revolves around creativity, proactivity, and problem-solving ability. The existing examination structure simply does not capture such skills, and is very much part of the previous system of education, the *dwibahasa*. This gives rise to the tension between the old framework for measuring students' achievement and new framework of expecting students to undergo holistic learning (Helgøy and Homme, 2007).

To put the tensions into perspective, teachers specifically in public schools in Brunei are pulled in three different directions; (1) the BTS-TPA framework for teacher evaluations, (2) curriculum restrictions for paper-and-pen examination results of obtaining grades A-C in GCE and IGCSE English examination, and (3) SPN21 expectations of honing 21st century skills in students. It is demonstrated in the discussion of *Object* and *Subject* earlier that teachers are focused on individual competency achievement of the students more so than they are on the various expectations of the BTS-TPA, and the sharpening of 21st century skills. The *Mediation Tool* discussion sheds light on why teachers are taking the role of agents of change in the school system, and the *Community* discussion explains why teachers think that their efforts may be in vain.

Division of labour for English Teaching system

The Division of Labour for teachers in schools is not restricted to mere lesson delivery. Teachers conduct formal and informal meetings amongst themselves to discuss issues faced in their lessons and share resources, and this has been very beneficial according to many of the respondents in the study. These are all positive efforts recognised as pursuing professional development (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010).

> "There are a lot of clashes going on like myself being the HOD, I'm observing 5 people including my assistant, it's really complicated for me to slot in during my free time. When I'm free they are free, and when I'm not free they have class."

Teacher 004

Teacher 004 is a School Management Team (SMT) member, and prior to being the HOD, she was also appraised by her then HOD. In both cases, she claims that finding the time to observe a lesson that works for both the evaluator and the teacher is a constant struggle. However, internal evaluators are still preferred

as opposed to external, who may have a limited grasp of the teaching and learning environment in the school. Clipa (2015) also noted that teachers prefer evaluators who are from the same school as they believe that their SMT members would know them better. This could also perhaps be due to the lack of adequate feedback received from external evaluators:

> "All of us teachers are aiming to help kids achieve better results all the time. But to constantly being evaluated in such a concrete way is not necessarily good. And to put one lesson into all these little boxes is just, to me, doesn't make much sense."

<div align="right">Teacher 005</div>

Teacher 005 acknowledges that the BTS-TPA system does have its merits as a platform for self-reflection and lesson-guide and this echoes Timperley and colleagues' (2007) observation. However, the lack of post-evaluation feedback renders the document useless, becoming 'just a paper', which reflects the thoughts of Stronge and Tucker (2003). Teachers expect feedbacks from the evaluators as they recognise the advantages of having an observer in his/her lessons. They already are aware of the factors that dampen the students' effort and ability to learn. They also constantly address the mediation tools that are lacking due to socio-economic and familial restraints. They experience the tensions between the *Rules in the English Teaching system*, and the problematic *Division of labour* where teachers are expected to adhere to conflicting expectations and carry out multiple roles assigned by the department, school, and the ministry. All these contradictions leave limited room for efforts to come to fruition.

The frustrations of the teachers reflected in both extracts from Teacher 004 and Teacher 005 can be traced to the underlying notion that authorities believe the implementation of such 'paper assessment' is the effective solution towards better quality teaching. It is assumed that somehow contradictions that exist in the education system will resolve itself when a top-down solution is implemented. This finding can be compared to that found by Zein (2016) where the impositions by the central authority seem to automatically be assumed as the solution to problems faced in the system. Teachers, their needs, voices and concerns, were often ignored in the process, even though they are the ones who are the front-liners for the education system and are familiar with the realities of teaching and learning. As was already previously discussed in the other nodes of the activity theory, many contextual factors – all familiar to teachers – are in constant interplay and they all contribute to, or compromise, the students' potential abilities to learn.

Capturing BTS-TPA in Activity Theory framework and proposal for VAM

An activity system captures the complexity that goes into performing an activity. The representation of the respondent-teachers' activity is in Figure 2, along with the contradictions marked by unchecked boxes:

Mediating Tool:
☑ Students' competence level
☐ Resources available to students

Subject:
☑ Secondary English Language Teachers

Object:
☑ High and Low Achieving Students

Objective:
☑ Highest Attainable Grade for Examination / English Language Proficiency Improvement

Rules:
☐ BTS-TPA Framework
☐ Curriculum restrictions
☐ SPN21 Expectations

Community:
☐ Administration
☐ Ministry of Education
☐ Society/Parents

Division of Labour:
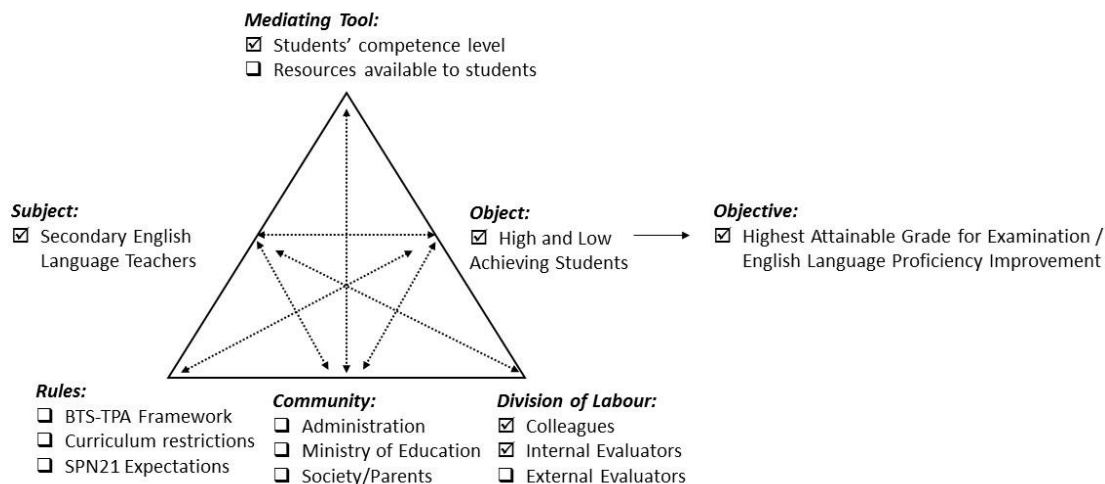☑ Colleagues
☑ Internal Evaluators
☐ External Evaluators

Figure 2: Representation of one activity system in the BTS-TPA procedure from the perspective of Secondary English Language Teachers.

The *Subject*, *Object* (and *Objective*) and partially *Mediating Tool*, and *Division* of *Labour* are in working order for this activity as represented by the checked boxes. Teachers are clear on their goals and recognise their students' needs in the English lesson as unique to every individual (Clipa, 2015). Teachers are not subjecting low-achieving students to daunting expectations that may break their spirit in learning, and not allowing high-achieving students to be complacent in their learning. This is seen as very motivating for students, and is high on the list of priority of teachers who participated in the study. Despite the fact that teachers feel burdened by the excessive amount of conflicting responsibilities, they accept the extra responsibility that results in professional development (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010), which includes sharing ideas and concerns with their colleagues in order to better their lesson preparation, delivery and reflection. They believe that internal evaluators are fair because they are aware of the environment in which the teacher is teaching – despite the fact that internal evaluators struggle to find the time to conduct evaluations, reflecting the findings by Clipa (2015).

However, the unchecked boxes in Figure 2 show that many elements, including partial *Mediating Tool* (resources available to students), all the *Rules, Community* and partially *Division of Labour* and not in working order. The *Rules* that teachers have to abide by are setting them up for failure – either in an evaluative sense for the BTS-TPA, or in the student-examination-achievement sense for the curriculum expectations, or in the sense of equipping students with holistic development skills expected in SPN21. As for the Community, tensions between responsibilities assigned by the school administration, the ministry of education and the lack of support from the society/parents of the students also compromise the teacher's ability to wholeheartedly devote their attention in honing skills that they know the students need in order to achieve the clear objective in the English lessons. The *Division of Labour* faces tension when external

evaluators are conducting the evaluation. As previously mentioned, this may lead to teachers performing superficially, just for the sake of obtaining a high score in the BTS-TPA performative technology.

These contradictions should not be taken negatively (Foot, 2001). Instead, policy-makers should take the opportunity to review the system through the lens of activity theory to address concerns raised by teachers and apply VAM in order to prepare for future appraisal cycles. In fact, this thought is reciprocated by Ng (2009) who strongly believes in incorporating teachers' voices in policy-making in the Asia-Pacific region, undoubtedly because teachers are the frontliners of the education system whose knowledge and experience are raw and untainted by bureaucratic endeavors – they only want what is best for their students. These teachers are specifically calling for the recognition of tensions that exist in the system that are hindering students' learning and teachers' teaching. VAM is particularly useful to be applied in the areas where tensions are high (i.e. the unchecked boxes) so as to make the BTS-TPA more useful to teachers, and sensitive to students' individual needs. Solbrekke and Englund (2011) also agreed with these observations and went so far as to claim that the emerging attitude toward such a performative technology is a result of the tension between (1) an administrator's or teacher's professional responsibility and (2) their accountability towards students' achievement and (3) outcome of the evaluation process.

Garcia and Menken (2010) also recognise the influences of context in education policies because the classroom itself is 'a complex dynamic system' (p. 255), making specific mentions of all the elements previously discussed in the activity theory analysis. The BTS-TPA could be made better after the incorporation of the VAM, which recognises contextual importance and the fact that the expectations surrounding teachers should be incremental. Since teachers are aware of the varying competence levels of the students in their mixed ability classes, teachers should first focus on the basic needs of the students in having conducive and safe learning environments by acknowledging their familial and socio-economic needs through the provision of resources. Teachers can then proceed to preparing students for the paper-and-pen examination, where students are expected to obtain grades A-C in GCE and IGCSE English examination. This is achievable due to the fact that students with varying competency standards, socio-economic needs, and familial backgrounds are addressed in different manners that are most suited to their needs. Only then should teachers focus their attention on preparing students for lifelong learning by adhering to the SPN21 expectations of honing 21st century skills. Lifelong learning, according to Clipa (2015), will only be beneficial and attainable when context is taken into consideration. Activity theory was used in this study to compartmentalise the important elements in the dynamic education system, and VAM will help to quantify the context. Thus, in every step of the way when VAM is applied, the evaluators of the teachers recognise the struggles of students, the unique contexts for learning and teaching and acknowledge the additional efforts of teachers.

Conclusion

It was found that teachers largely find that the elements found in BTS-TPA were relevant to the students' learning and teachers' teaching, and the teachers are aware of the different needs of the students and recognise the need for a change in the curriculum. This view could be influenced by the fact that performative technologies almost always prevail over time. It goes without saying that when these evaluation frameworks are endorsed by a more powerful structure that controls the school system, resistance will abate and new breed of teachers will soon emerge. These teachers, who are exposed to the new performative technology will inherently align themselves with the new measure of performativity (Anderson and Cohen, 2015) despite the previous experience, or even preference, of former evaluative frameworks. It is worth to also note that the holistic nature of the BTS-TPA framework as an assessment tool for teachers could potentially be useful for the overall improvement of the education quality given the fact that the listed attributes for which teachers are judged have been proven in previous literatures to be generally constructive to the learning and teaching environment (Harris and Sass, 2014).

However, teachers may have reservations in some of the elements in the BTS-TPA, specifically in reference to the lack of contextual recognition of the students. The one-size-fits-all paradigm adopted by the BTS-TPA is simply a tool to streamline the profession of teaching English for administrative purposes, not necessarily beneficial for the students as their struggles are not recognised. In truth, some evaluated teachers simply put up a fabricated front in order to obtain respectable outcomes in their appraisal form (Ball, 2003). After the evaluation, teachers may revert to their customary manner of teaching, interacting and assessing students. For example, English teachers who know that they can be penalised for codemixing in lessons may choose to only use one code during the observation, but codemixes in all his/her unobserved classes – not because teachers do not have high levels of competency in the English language, but because students' individual needs calls for such practice. This signifies that teachers know what front to put on display in accordance to the criteria presented, and that these performative technologies are the solid point of reference to reach ultimate teacher status.

The implication of the current study is three-fold. First, the study shows that being English teachers takes more than workable pedagogies. In fact, what is more useful is the recognition of the students' individual needs in order to accurately account for students' learning of English. The disparity between students' achievement in the English language, especially due to familial support and economic viability, is well-recognised by the teachers. Without the recognition of context, students often find themselves demotivated to learn a language that is both foreign and perceived to be useless as they are able to communicate nonetheless with their first language. Students would inevitably fall behind the national standard of English competency, and this would compromise their ability to compete fairly – both academically and

professionally in the future. Current training focuses on the elements gauged in the BTS-TPA, and as is evident in the current study, this is just not enough to help students stay motivated to improve their competency in the English language. Teachers need to reach out and get to know the students needs in order to cater to them, and not merely subject them to unnecessary pressure of achieving respectable grades in the English language using seemingly workable pedagogical practices. The English language itself is a skill-based subject, and the recognition of context would enable teachers to steer students in the right direction, provide them with the necessary help they need, and thus keep them motivated throughout their learning.

Second, the study also shows that teachers themselves are struggling to fulfil expectations subjected to various authorities and parties, including parents and students themselves. Without teacher trainings that addresses this impeding multi-directional expectations, new teachers would definitely experience burnout early in their career. This is especially true for English language teachers as majority of the government schools in the sultanate are English medium, the successful learning of Mathematics, History and Geography and other subjects that students are expected to learn heavily depends on their English language competency. Should the students remain unable to improve their English language proficiency, this will result in lower-than-average examination scores. Recognising that struggling students are often those from unsupportive familial background with low socio-economic status, such under-achievement will surely compromise their future endeavors and lower their chances in breaking the cycle of poverty and struggle. Therefore, teacher preparation should include the inter-disciplinary approach to the teaching of English as, after all, high proficiency in the language will positively influence the achievements in other subjects as well, which fulfils the expectations of the authorities in the education system. This will allow teachers to increase the relevance, and thus impact, of the teaching of English to the students. This fulfils the expectations of parents and students with regard to the learning of English.

The third implication is particularly important due to geographical association. As a member of ASEAN, where the working language is English, high proficiency in the English language is regarded as a tool that improve human capital movements across borders in the region. Contextual recognition is also relevant, albeit in a much bigger scale than in the school context identified in the study, as we are after all the most diverse region in the world. Discrepancies in terms of social, economic and academic profiles are to be expected. However, the importance of the English language does not waver as ASEAN continues to be a competitive force in the international arena. In order to sustain such competitiveness and simultaneously maintain the unique diversity in the region, the teaching and learning of the English language in the region should consider VAM in order reap the benefit of having both high competency in the working language of English, and also sustain the high diversity in the region.

Brunei Darussalam has always played an active role in ASEAN, leveraging on the position of the sultanate being in the upper bracket in the region for language-learning setting, particularly for the English language (Noor Azam, 2013). A range of initiatives have been carried out by Brunei for ASEAN, such as the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (2000), the Brunei-U.S. English Language Enrichment Project of ASEAN in 2012 and the English Teaching Apprenticeship Programme (2014). To sustain this contribution, further the effort for human resource capacity-building initiatives, and also maintain cultural diversity in the region, there is a dire need for a culturally responsive framework that allows for the balance between progress and pride. The former with the promotion of English proficiency in the region as the official language of ASEAN, and the latter with the maintenance of display of cultural adherence, environmental sensitivity and mother-tongue practices. It does not always have to be a trade-off, and Brunei can certainly take the lead towards balanced practice by implementing VAM in the teaching standard, especially for English language learning, from which other member states of ASEAN can follow suit.

Although the number of teachers who took part in this study is small and the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the rest of the teaching population in Brunei, or in ASEAN, it is enough to shed light on the adaptations that need to be performed in the preparatory training of teachers. Future studies may address this limitation by increasing the number of participants to ensure that their input is representative of the teaching workforce. It is also recommended that further research be undertaken to study the positions of other stakeholders in the BTS-TPA activity system.

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