

## **Competency Level of Special Education Integration Program Teachers in Conducting Assessment on Students with Learning Disabilities**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research was to identify the level of knowledge, skills and attitude of the Integrated Special Education Program (PPKI) teachers in conducting assessment of students' learning disabilities in four primary schools in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This research is based on Theory of Behaviorism founded by Thorndike and Iceberg Competency Model. The research design was quantitative with the population consisting of 50 PPKI teachers while the samples of the research were 44 teachers selected by simple random sampling method. The instrument was a questionnaire adapted from Sulaiman (2008) and confirmed with Alpha Cronbach. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentage, frequency and mean. The results showed that the level of knowledge of PPKI teachers was high with mean score, the level of skill was moderate, and the level of attitude was high. It is concluded that PPKI teachers have good knowledge of the assessment process on students with learning disabilities but require additional training and courses to improve their skills.

**Keywords:** Teachers' Competency, Learning Assessment, Students with Learning Disabilities.

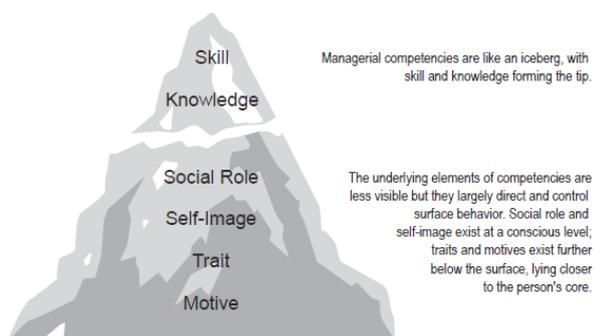
### **INTRODUCTION**

Assessment refers to a systematic process of obtaining information regarding the knowledge, performance and development of students in school. The assessment process involves recording, collecting, separating, evaluating and translating information in improving students' achievement (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013). The implementation of the assessment process helps teachers in identifying weaknesses in students and planning teaching strategies and approach that suits their abilities. Therefore, every teacher should have high level of competency to conduct an effective assessment process. Based on the Iceberg Competency Model, competency is defined as a person's latent characteristics shown in someone's career performance (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). This model emphasized on the aspects of knowledge, skills and attitude of an individual that help in performing a task.

Congress, (1975) stressed on the non-discriminatory assessment of children with special needs. Based on this law, an assessment conducted to special needs children need to consider their personal traits and tailored according to their abilities (Abdullah et al., 2006). In addition, the implementation of the special education system in Malaysia is based on the Education Act and regulations of education (special education) which is described in the code of practice for Special Educational Needs. Referring to the code

of practice, each special needs student in pre-school, primary and secondary schools must undergo a planned assessment process according to a prescribed procedure. Therefore, students with learning disabilities should involve in the assessment process in schools to record their progress and achievements. However, there are students from various categories of abilities where the level of development and their achievement are different from other typical students. This matter has become a challenge to teachers in Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) in planning and selecting appropriate form of assessment in regards to each student with learning disabilities.

According to Sulaiman (2008), teachers' ability in producing assessment tools is vital as quality assessment tool will help teachers to identify students' weaknesses during the learning process. With this regard, the planning and the development of an appropriate assessment tool should be provided according to the capacity and ability of the students with learning disabilities in order for the assessment process to be carried out effectively. This matter is also stated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which points out that the assessment carried out on special needs students should be appropriate to the age, characteristics and their behavior. Thus, PPKI teachers should possess a high level of competency in relation to the assessment process to ensure effective implementation which then helps to improve the performance of students with learning disabilities.



**Figure 1. The Iceberg Competency Model**

The assessment process will assist teachers to gauge in the effectiveness of the learning process; thus helping teachers to implement improvement measures in their teaching and learning process (Caturwangi et al., 2017). Knowledge and skills that are obtained will help the teachers in gaining information and planning appropriate methods in carrying out the assessment. This statement is supported by Ibrahim and Sani (2012) study which stated that the ability of teachers in carrying out the teaching and learning process can best be accomplished if teachers possess a high level of competency in their teaching field. Alper & Mills (2001) stated that the purpose of an assessment is to produce teachers who have specific skills about a student's performance, especially special needs students. Therefore, every PPKI teacher should acquire high level of assessment skills as students with learning disabilities require specific teaching methods in view of their abilities; which are way different compared to a typical student.

This study is conducted to review the level of knowledge, skills and attitude of PPKI teachers in four primary schools in Kuala Lumpur in conducting assessment process to students with learning disabilities. This study will address the following issues:

What is the PPKI teachers' knowledge level in conducting assessment process to students with learning disabilities ?; What is the PPKI teachers' skills level in conducting assessment process to students with learning disabilities ?; What is the PPKI teachers' attitude in conducting assessment process to students with learning disabilities?

## METHOD

The study is a survey involving 50 PPKI teachers from four schools in Kuala Lumpur as the population of the study. The samples were a total of 44 PPKI teachers selected from a simple random sampling. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that has been adapted from Sulaiman (2008). The validity of the questionnaire was verified by two experts in the

field of special education. A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire items with the value of the Alpha Cronbach reliability coefficient recorded at 0.96 to 0.98. A five-point Likert scale was used which is 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Slightly Disagree 4-Agree and 5- Strongly Agree. Questionnaire data was collected through Google form and descriptively analysed based on frequency, percentage and mean using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

This is a study based on the Behaviourism theory founded by Thorndike. The theory stated that learning is a common process that involves the stimulation and reaction to produce a change in behavior. Based on this theory, students will be given stimulation during the learning process and the assessment will be conducted in stages from low to high level assessment. Therefore, assessment is one of the learning processes implemented in schools that are related to the principles of Behaviourism.

In addition, this study is also based on Iceberg Competency Model (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) which explains on competency. This model is divided into two sections. The first section is above the water level with the components of competency and skills, while the lower section is the behavioral component or attitude that represents values, social roles, self-image and character. Based on the Iceberg Competency Model in Figure 1, it can be seen that the overall competency components, which are knowledge, skills and attitudes, affect an individual in performing a given task.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### *Demographic Information*

This study involved 44 respondents who taught at four primary schools in Kuala Lumpur. Based on the findings, 8 respondents were male (17.4%) and the remaining 36 respondents (78.3%) were female. While for the age, there were 16 respondents (34.8%) aged between 20-30 years, 23 respondents (50%) aged between 30-40 years, four respondents aged between 40-50 years (8.7%) and there was one respondent who is more than 50 years-old (2.2%). From the teaching experience among the PPKI teachers, there were six respondents whose teaching experience was between 1-5 years (13%), while 20 respondents had 6-10 years teaching experience (43.5%), 17 respondents had 11-15 years teaching experience (37%) and there was a respondent whose teaching experience exceeded 16 years (2.2%).

**Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Respondents (n = 44)**

Demography Aspect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	8	17.4%
Female	36	78.3%
<b>Age</b>		
20-30 years	16	34.8%
30-40 years	23	52.3%
40-50 years	4	9.1%
50 years and above	1	2.3%
<b>Teaching experience</b>		
1-5 years		
6-10 years	6	13%
11-15 years	20	43.5%
16 years and above	17	37%
	1	2.2%

**Table 2. PPKI teachers' knowledge in conducting assessment to students with learning disabilities.**

NO	ITEM (KNOWLEDGE)	Mean	SD	Int
B1	I know the basic concepts of assessing students with learning disabilities.	3.73	1.042	High
B2	I know about the curriculum-based assessment.	3.68	1.006	High
B3	I know the assessment methods, approach and techniques for students with learning disabilities.	3.61	.945	Moderate
B4	I know how to bring out existing knowledge among students with learning disabilities.	3.61	.868	Moderate
B5	I know the assessment objective for students with learning disabilities.	3.66	.987	Moderate
B6	I know the appropriate type of assessment that fits students with learning disabilities.	3.77	1.008	High
B7	I am knowledgeable in fostering an appropriate assessment tool to students with learning disabilities learning.	3.70	1.025	High
B8	I am knowledgeable in conducting assessment practice process to students with learning disabilities.	3.68	1.006	High
B9	I am knowledgeable in documenting results of the assessment to the students with learning disabilities.	3.73	.973	High
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>3.69</b>	<b>.984</b>	<b>High</b>

*PPKI teachers' knowledge in conducting assessment on students with learning disabilities.*

This section has nine items related to PPKI teachers' knowledge in conducting assessment on students with learning disabilities. The result of the study is indicated in Table 2.

Based on Table 2, the findings showed most of the knowledge questions items were high and medium with an overall mean ( $M = 3.69$  and  $SD = 0.984$ ). This proved that the knowledge level among PPKI teachers was high. The highest mean score is at ( $M = 3.77$  and  $SD = 1.008$ ), which in the statement item B6 "I know the appropriate type of assessment that fits students with learning disabilities". This explains that PPKI

teachers know how to choose and use different types of appropriate assessment for students with learning disabilities in school.

Meanwhile, there were two items that recorded the lowest mean score on statement B3 and B4. Based on the mean readings ( $M = 3.61$  and  $SD = .945$ ) in statement B3 "I know the assessment methods, approach and techniques for students with learning disabilities", it showed moderate level of knowledge among PPKI teachers with regards to assessment methods, approach and techniques. This statement explains that PPKI teachers have limited knowledge in implementing suitable assessment methods, approach and techniques appropriate for students with learning disabilities.

**Table 3. PPKI teachers' skills in conducting assessment for students with learning disabilities**

NO	ITEM (SKILLS)	Mean	SD	Int
C1	I am able to conduct an appropriate assessment for students with learning disabilities.	3.57	1.065	Moderate
C2	I am able to carry out curriculum-based assessment	3.75	1.014	High
C3	I am able to create appropriate type of assessment tools that are suitable with the level of students with learning disabilities.	3.48	1.000	Moderate
C4	I am able to conduct assessment using various methods	3.64	.967	Moderate
C5	I am able to evaluate and analyze the assessment results for students with learning disabilities.	3.64	1.036	Moderate
C6	I am able to evaluate assessments results for students with learning disabilities in order to improve teaching and learning process in school.	3.75	1.081	High
C7	I am able to record the essential items in the assessment.	3.59	1.041	Moderate
C8	I am able to diversify the type of assessments used during teaching and learning.	3.55	1.022	Moderate
C9	I am able to control the classroom environment while conducting assessment.	3.59	1.127	Moderate
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>3.62</b>	<b>1.039</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Further findings of statement B4 "I know on how to bring out existing knowledge among students with learning disabilities" showed ( $M = 3.61$  and  $SD = .868$ ). The finding explains that the knowledge of PPKI teachers in bringing up existing knowledge among students with learning disabilities is at a moderate level. This may due to the teachers facing challenge to understand the existing knowledge among students with learning disabilities as there is diversity of abilities among the students in the same class.

However, it is a necessity for teachers to acquire knowledge as teaching process could never be done in an effective manner should they are not knowledgeable in the field of teaching. According to Zanzali and Atjeng (2010), they stated that knowledge and its acquisition is the most important aspect for a teacher in delivering teaching and learning in school. Salleh et al. (2009) also explain in their study that each teacher should acquire high level of knowledge and skills to ensure that students with learning disabilities can be assisted during the process of teaching and learning in schools. In addition, Othman (2016) also state that all teachers in schools should master the assessment knowledge to ensure that the assessment process can be carried out effectively. Therefore, assessment knowledge is essential for every PPKI teacher in order to ensure that the achievement of students with learning disabilities can be assessed fairly and appropriately in the extent of his/her ability.

*PPKI teachers' skills in conducting assessment to students with learning disabilities.*

There are nine items related to PPKI teachers' skills in carrying out evaluations on students with learning disabilities. The findings are as shown in the table 3.

The findings recorded for the total mean in the skills item was at 3.62 and the standard deviation was at 1.039. This showed the skill level among the PPKI teachers were at moderate level. The highest mean score value was recorded on two items, which are C2 and C6. C2 statement "I am able to carry out curriculum-based assessment" showed the mean reading and standard deviation of 3.75 and 1.014 respectively. This explains that PPKI teachers are able to assess students with learning disabilities based on the Special Education Learning Disabilities curriculum. The mean score and standard deviation value for statement C6 "I am able to evaluate assessments results for students with learning disabilities in order to improve teaching and learning process in school" was at 3.75 and 1.081 respectively. The result shows that PPKI teachers are able to evaluate assessment results for students with learning disabilities; thus implementing improvements measures in their teaching and learning process.

The item that recorded the lowest mean score was C8 "I am able to diversify the type of assessments used during teaching and learning" with the mean and standard deviation reading of 3.55 and 1.022 respectively.

**Table 4. PPKI teachers' attitude in conducting assessment to students with learning disabilities.**

NO	ITEM (ATTITUDE)	Mean	SD	Int
D1	I am always prepared to conduct assessments to students with learning disabilities.	3.55	.875	Moderate
D2	I am willing to attend extra courses related to assessment	4.02	.762	High
D3	I conduct assessment based on my dedication even there is no encouragement from any parties.	3.89	.655	High
D4	I will take my own initiatives to level up my knowledge and skills with regards to assessment.	3.52	.876	Moderate
D5	I will carry out the assessment and use it as an opportunity to improve the teaching and learning process.	3.95	.608	High
D6	I believe the result of the assessment will assist in the development of students with learning disabilities.	4.09	.709	High
D7	I am confident that the implementation of assessment is able to improve my quality as a PPKI teacher.	4.11	.655	High
D8	I believe the assessment process will be more effective with teachers' patience and tolerance towards students with learning disabilities.	4.07	.661	High
D9	I am confident that cooperation and sharing of ideas among teachers can facilitate me in conducting assessment on students with learning disabilities.	4.16	.680	High
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>3.93</b>	<b>.720</b>	<b>High</b>

The result indicates that PPKI teachers have moderate skill level in implementing various forms of assessment during the teaching and learning process. This is because the teachers used the same assessment type during the teaching and learning process in school.

Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003) stated that the teachers' skill level in conducting evaluation will have direct impact on the assessment process conducted in the classroom. Therefore, a teacher with a low skill level in conducting evaluation may not be able to carry out a proper assessment process for the students. This statement is supported by the study by Ali (2014) which explained that teachers with improper skill level will impact the development of the students. This indicates the importance of PPKI teachers' skill level in evaluating assessment towards the development and achievement of the students with learning disabilities. Apart from that, the study conducted by Bandu and Jelas (2012) also stated that the lack of training and skills development resulting in teachers not majoring in special education are not competent in the assessment implementation.

*PPKI teachers' attitude in conducting assessment to students with learning disabilities.*

This section has nine related items in accordance to PPKI teachers' attitude in conducting assessment to students with learning disabilities. The findings are shown in table 4.

The PPKI teachers' attitude in conducting assessment to students with learning disabilities is positive with a mean and standard deviation of 3.93 and .675. The highest mean score value was 4.16 and the standard deviation was .680 in the item D9 "I am confident that cooperation and sharing of ideas among teachers can facilitate me in conducting assessment on students with learning disabilities". This indicates that the primary school PPKI teachers involved in this study do cooperate and change ideas among themselves in implementing the assessment process in school.

Meanwhile, the lowest mean score of 3.52 and the standard deviation of .876 were in item D4 "I will take my own initiatives to level up my knowledge and skills with regards to assessment". The findings show that PPKI teachers are not interested in improving their knowledge and skills through their own effort. It is likely that they depend on the higher authority initiatives to level up their knowledge and skills through courses and in service trainings.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that PPKI teachers are motivated and possess positive attitude towards the implementation of assessment towards students with learning disabilities. The teachers' attitude is one of the most important aspects of a PPKI teacher to ensure that the learning process can be conducted effectively. This statement is supported by the study by Derapa and Mohamed (2018) which stated that learning process can be carried out smoothly and

effectively toward students should the teacher has the knowledge and positive attitude. In addition, teachers who possess a positive attitude are also believed to be able to produce the best task in the learning process at school. This is stated through a study by Haron (2006) that attitude is the will to perform task, trust and confidence that he or she could perform the task at his or her best.

## Discussion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the competency level of PPKI teachers in conducting the assessment for students with learning disability is at a satisfactory level with score min ( $M = 3.69$  and  $SD = 0.984$ ) for the level of knowledge and ( $M = 3.93$  and  $SD = .720$ ) for the level of teachers' attitude. However, the result of the study indicates that stage of proficiency teachers PPKI was on stage with min overall ( $M = 3.62$  and  $SD = 1.039$ ).

From the results regarding PPKI teachers' levels of knowledge which are considered high, it is found that teachers need to acquire knowledge as teaching process could never be done in an effective manner should they are not knowledgeable in the field of teaching. According to Zanzali and Atjeng (2010), they stated that knowledge and its acquisition is the most important aspect for a teacher in delivering teaching and learning in school. Salleh et al. (2009) also explain in their study that each teacher should acquire high level of knowledge and skills to ensure that students with learning disabilities can be assisted during the process of teaching and learning in schools. In addition, Othman (2016) also state that all teachers in schools should master the assessment knowledge to ensure that the assessment process can be carried out effectively. Therefore, assessment knowledge is essential for every PPKI teacher in order to ensure that the achievement of students with learning disabilities can be assessed fairly and appropriately in the extent of his/her ability.

Meanwhile, the questionnaires also recorded the ability of PPKI teachers in conducting assessment on students with learning disabilities. Different from the level of knowledge, the level of skills of these teachers is moderate. Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003) stated that the teachers' skill level in conducting evaluation will have direct impact on the assessment process conducted in the classroom. Therefore, a teacher with a low skill level in conducting evaluation may not be able to carry out a proper assessment process for the students. This statement is supported by the study by Ali (2014) which explained that teachers with improper skill level will impact the development of the students. This indicates the importance of PPKI teachers' skill level in evaluating assessment towards the development and achievement of the students with learning disabilities.

Apart from that, the study conducted by Bandu and Jelas (2012) also stated that the lack of training and skills development resulting in teachers not majoring in special education are not competent in the assessment implementation.

In addition, the findings regarding the attitude of PPKI teachers in conducting assessment show a high level. It can be concluded that PPKI teachers are motivated and possess positive attitude towards the implementation of assessment towards students with learning disabilities. The teachers' attitude is one of the most important aspects of a PPKI teacher to ensure that the learning process can be conducted effectively. This statement is supported by the study by Derapa and Mohamed (2018) which stated that learning process can be carried out smoothly and effectively toward students should the teacher has the knowledge and positive attitude. In addition, teachers who possess a positive attitude are also believed to be able to produce the best task in the learning process at school. This is stated through a study by Haron (2006) that attitude is the will to perform task, trust and confidence that he or she could perform the task at his or her best.

In this regard, every PPKI teacher should constantly work to improve their skills in the assessment in order to help the development of students with learning disabilities. Sulaiman (2008) suggests in his study that teachers can further improve their skills by reading scholarly reference books, internet, and discussions with other teachers and attend courses related to the assessment. This proposal was supported in the study by Derapa and Mohamed (2018) stating that through relevant courses and programmes, teachers are able to increase their teaching competency in school. Through these efforts, it would enhance PPKI teachers' skills thus making them a skilled teacher with quality. Sofyan and Yowono (2014) also suggested in their study that all teachers should be mentored by administrators using assessment strategies and instruments appropriate to the ability of the students. Therefore, the parties concerned such as the administrators, State Education Department and the Ministry of Education should consistently provide opportunities for PPKI teachers to attend courses or in-service training to enhance their knowledge and skills in the assessment.

Basically, each PPKI teacher should possess a high level of competency in performing assessment to students with learning disabilities at their respective schools. The PPKI teacher's ability and capability to carry out a planned and systematic assessment is one of the essential elements that can derive confidence and credibility of a teacher. Every individual is required to have a high level of competency especially among educators as high level of knowledge, skills, attitude will produce an effective teaching and learning. Competency can also form an individual to act effectively and to be able to perform tasks with best results.

## CONCLUSION

Competency is the most important aspect for a PPKI teacher in conducting an effective assessment to students with learning disabilities. It is due to the facts that PPKI teacher is the most eligible party to assess and evaluate students with learning disabilities as they are individual with immediate relation to the students in school. The implementation of appropriate assessment process based on the ability of students with learning disabilities will assist them towards their development and achievement in school despite providing equal educational opportunities similar to a typical student.

Every PPKI teacher should constantly work to improve their skills in the assessment in order to help the development of students with learning disabilities. The parties concerned such as the administrators, State Education Department and the Ministry of Education should also consistently provide opportunities for PPKI teachers to attend courses or in-service training to enhance their knowledge and skills in the assessment.

Basically, each PPKI teacher should possess a high level of competency in performing assessment to students with learning disabilities at their respective schools. The PPKI teacher's ability and capability to carry out a planned and systematic assessment is one of the essential elements that can derive confidence and credibility of a teacher. Every individual is required to have a high level of competency especially among educators as high level of knowledge, skills, attitude will produce an effective teaching and learning. Competency can also form an individual to act effectively and to be able to perform tasks with best results.

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