

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES, PRACTICE, AND CHALLENGES

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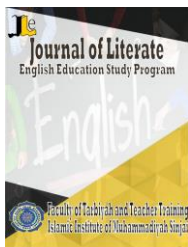
Abstract

This study explores how English teachers at vocational high schools understand and apply authentic assessment within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, Data were analyzed using thematic analysis by identifying key patterns from semi-structured interviews with two teachers, then triangulated through passive classroom observations to validate and enrich the findings. The findings show that both teachers have a good understanding of authentic assessment and are able to apply it through meaningful and relevant learning activities. They use methods such as projects, presentations, and practical tasks that reflect real-world skills. However, the study also found several challenges, including limited facilities, low student motivation, and time management difficulties due to large class sizes. These factors make it harder to implement authentic assessment effectively. Despite these obstacles, both teachers showed strong enthusiasm for using authentic assessment and highlighted the need for more training and support from the school. The study concludes that while authentic assessment is very relevant for vocational English education, its success depends on adequate resources, supportive policies, and continuous professional development.

Keywords: authentic assessment; English teachers; vocational high schools; Kurikulum Merdeka; English language teaching (ELT)

Abstrak

Naskah Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pemahaman guru bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) mengenai asesmen autentik serta implementasinya dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan mengidentifikasi pola-pola kunci dari wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan dua guru, kemudian dianalisis secara triangulasi melalui observasi kelas pasif untuk memvalidasi dan memperkaya temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua guru memiliki pemahaman yang baik tentang asesmen autentik dan mampu mengaitkannya dengan praktik pembelajaran yang bermakna dan kontekstual. Mereka menerapkan asesmen autentik melalui proyek, presentasi, dan tugas praktik yang mencerminkan keterampilan dunia nyata. Namun, penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi berbagai tantangan seperti keterbatasan fasilitas, rendahnya motivasi siswa, dan kendala dalam manajemen waktu akibat jumlah siswa yang besar. Kendala-kendala tersebut memengaruhi efektivitas pelaksanaan asesmen autentik di kelas. Meski demikian, kedua guru tetap menunjukkan antusiasme tinggi dalam menerapkan asesmen autentik dan menyatakan perlunya pelatihan lanjutan serta dukungan institusional. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa asesmen autentik sangat relevan dalam pembelajaran bahasa



Inggris di SMK, namun membutuhkan dukungan sarana, kebijakan, dan pengembangan profesional agar dapat diimplementasikan secara optimal.

Kata Kunci: *asesmen autentik; guru bahasa Inggris; sekolah menengah kejuruan; Kurikulum Merdeka, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.*

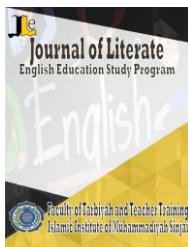
1. Introduction

The implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* has brought about significant changes in educational paradigms, necessitating a shift towards more relevant and practical assessment methods (Salma & Prastikawati, 2021). Vocational schools, in particular, require assessment strategies that accurately reflect the skills needed in real-world scenarios (Prasetyo et al., 2024). This is where the importance of authentic assessment comes into play, ensuring that students are evaluated on their ability to apply knowledge and skills in meaningful contexts (Ahmad et al., 2021). Authentic assessment moves away from traditional, rote-memorization based tests and embraces tasks that simulate real-life situations (Ridwan et al., 2023). By engaging students in authentic tasks, educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their capabilities and readiness for future careers (Hu & Ying, 2023). Therefore, the integration of authentic assessment is not merely a pedagogical choice but a crucial step in preparing vocational students for the demands of the modern workforce. This approach ensures that students are not only acquiring theoretical knowledge but also developing the practical skills necessary for success.

In the context of English classrooms, the need for authentic assessment is particularly acute, as it directly supports the development of communicative competence and practical application (Nguyen & Phan, 2020). English language learning should extend beyond grammar rules and vocabulary lists, focusing instead on enabling students to use the language effectively in various real-world contexts (Chen, 2022). Authentic assessment in English classrooms can involve tasks such as presentations, role-playing, and project-based assignments that require students to use English in a practical and meaningful way (Huang & Jiang, 2020). By assessing students' ability to communicate effectively in English, educators can better gauge their readiness for international interactions and workplace scenarios. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the language and enhances students' confidence in using English as a tool for communication (Yuzar, 2020). Ultimately, the implementation of authentic assessment in English classrooms at vocational high schools is essential for cultivating well-rounded, competent graduates who are prepared to thrive in a globalized world (Nugraha et al., 2022).

Despite the recognized benefits of authentic assessment, many teachers still face challenges in understanding and implementing it effectively (Mursyida et al., 2020). Some teachers may find it difficult to design tasks that accurately reflect real-world scenarios and align with curriculum objectives. The shift from traditional testing methods to authentic assessment requires a significant change in pedagogical mindset, and many teachers may need additional training and support to make this transition successfully (Lippmann, 2021). Additionally, the implementation of authentic assessment can be time-consuming, requiring teachers to develop detailed rubrics and provide individualized feedback to students (Gallardo-Fuentes et al., 2025). Furthermore, teachers need to ensure that authentic assessment tasks are fair and equitable, providing all students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge (Mariappan & Osman, 2023).

Moreover, the success of authentic assessment relies on the teacher's ability to create a supportive and engaging learning environment (Nurhayati & Herman, 2020). This includes fostering a classroom culture that values collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). By addressing these challenges and providing teachers with the necessary resources and support, vocational high schools can ensure that authentic assessment is implemented effectively and that students are well-prepared for future success (Churiyah et al., 2022). Teachers' knowledge of



authentic assessment is pivotal, as it shapes their capacity to design and implement effective learning experiences (Asante, 2023). Furthermore, authentic assessment can inspire and motivate students to enhance their skills and knowledge in real-world contexts, allowing them to apply what they learn in the classroom to practical activities (Pamela et al., 2020). This alignment between assessment tasks and professional life highlights the importance of authentic assessment in recreating professional endeavors within the classroom (Sokhanvar et al., 2021).

Several issues can be identified concerning authentic assessment in vocational high schools (Putri et al., 2021). Firstly, teachers' understanding of authentic assessment may vary significantly, leading to inconsistent implementation across classrooms (Aziz et al., 2020). This variability can undermine the effectiveness of the assessment process, as some teachers may not fully grasp the principles and techniques involved (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021). Secondly, there is often a noticeable gap between the curriculum's demands for authentic assessment and its actual implementation in the classroom. This gap can result from various factors, including a lack of resources, inadequate training, or time constraints. Lastly, there is limited research specifically focusing on the vocational high school context in Indonesia, which further exacerbates these challenges. The lack of context-specific studies makes it difficult to develop and implement effective authentic assessment strategies tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of vocational students in Indonesia (Helmy et al., 2021).

Understanding teachers' perception is key to successful curriculum implementation. Gaining insight into practical challenges and strategies is crucial in conducting authentic assessments. By identifying the areas where teachers need support and addressing any misconceptions they may have about authentic assessment, educational institutions can ensure more consistent and effective implementation.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, which is optimally suited to explore and interpret intricate human behaviors, perceptions, and practices within their existing contexts (Hossain et al., 2022). The central aim of this research is to explore how English teachers in vocational high schools perceive authentic assessment and how their perceptions shape their instructional practices, especially considering the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This curriculum reform emphasizes competency-based learning, student-centered instruction, and the practical application of knowledge and skills. The descriptive qualitative approach enables the researcher to acquire thorough insights into the teachers' individual interpretations, pedagogical approaches, and challenges encountered while integrating authentic assessments into English language teaching (Atmarizon et al., 2020). Rather than focusing on hypothesis testing or variable measurement, this methodology prioritizes detailed, descriptive data that accurately reflect the complexities of educational experiences as reported by educators (Prasetyo et al., 2024). Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations to ensure triangulation of information and a more comprehensive understanding of the subject (Ahdiyanti & Waluyati, 2021). The qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to discern patterns and categories pertinent to the teachers' conceptual understanding, instructional decision-making, and assessment practices (Latif & Wasim, 2022). Participant selection, research site, data collection instruments, and analytical techniques were intentionally chosen to align with the interpretivist paradigm, ensuring that teachers' perspectives and experiences remained central to the analysis (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The following subsections provide a more detailed discussion of this study's methodological framework, including the research design, participants, setting, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply explore and analyze English teachers' understanding of authentic assessment (Luisen & Deloy, 2022). The research aims to uncover how this understanding directly influences their classroom practices, providing a rich description of the nuances involved in real-world educational settings. The choice of a descriptive qualitative design is particularly fitting as it allows for an in-depth investigation of teachers' perceptions and practices within their natural teaching environments (Subarna et al., 2022).

By utilizing this approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between teachers' conceptual knowledge of authentic assessment and their actual instructional methods. This methodology facilitates a nuanced understanding of how theoretical understanding translates into practical application, capturing the detailed perspectives and approaches of educators in vocational high schools (Firdianis et al., 2020).

2.2 Research Subject

The participants in this study were two English teachers from a private vocational high school in Surakarta. These teachers were selected based on their active engagement and experience in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, the new national curriculum. This ensured that the insights gathered would be directly relevant to the research objectives, focusing on the practical application of authentic assessment within a reformed educational framework. The selection was conducted using purposive sampling, a technique chosen for its ability to identify and recruit individuals with specific knowledge and experience pertinent to the research topic (Syafuddin, 2020).

Prior to their involvement in the study, each teacher was thoroughly informed about the research objectives, procedures, and their rights as participants (Dahal et al., 2024). Informed consent was obtained from both teachers, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's purpose (Mohajer et al., 2023). Throughout the research process, measures were taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, including anonymizing their identities in all reports and publications (Wang & Li, 2024). This approach upheld ethical standards, ensuring that the research was conducted with respect for the participants' autonomy and well-being.

By focusing on teachers actively involved in the Kurikulum Merdeka, the study aimed to capture the practical challenges and innovative strategies employed in real-world settings. The detailed insights from these participants provided a rich understanding of how authentic assessment is perceived, implemented, and adapted within vocational high schools. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the impact of curriculum reform on teaching practices and assessment methods, contributing valuable knowledge to the field of education (Arhin et al., 2021; Ayubi et al., 2021)

2.3 Research Setting and Time

The research was conducted in a private vocational high school in Surakarta. Data collection occurred over one month in early 2025 from February to March.

2.4 Data Collection Technique

The data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews and classroom observation sheets. Interview questions were designed based on indicators of authentic assessment to gather detailed insights into teachers' perceptions. Classroom observations focused on how assessment is conducted in real classroom activities, providing a practical view of assessment implementation (Arhin et al., 2021).

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary data analysis technique. The procedure involved transcribing the collected data and manually coding it to identify recurring themes, such as perceptions of authentic assessment, its implementation in the classroom, and the challenges encountered. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation was conducted through a comparison

between the insights gained from interviews and the observations made during classroom activities (Seyfi et al., 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers' Perspective of Authentic Assessment

Based on the interview with the teacher, it can be seen that the teacher has a good understanding of authentic assessment. The teacher explained that authentic assessment is a type of evaluation that has developed in a clear and detailed way. According to the teacher, authentic assessment truly measures students' real abilities. By using this kind of assessment, teachers can better see each student's individual skills. That's why the teacher believes authentic assessment is important, as it helps evaluate how well students are doing, not just in terms of knowledge, but also in their attitudes and skills. The teacher's understanding is also shown through their ability to explain the different characteristics of authentic assessment. According to the interview, Ms. FZ stated that:

"In my opinion, authentic assessment evaluates students' ability to solve real-life problems. It should involve practical tasks like presentations and projects, not just memorization."

And also stated from Ms. MM *"Authentic assessment supports all four English skills by offering more meaningful learning. Students remember better when learning is connected to their daily lives, unlike traditional tests that are easily forgotten."*

From the teacher's perspective of authentic assessment, it is clear that they support the use of authentic assessment and believe it can be applied in evaluating students. According to the teacher, authentic assessment helps monitor each student's overall abilities and provides a more realistic view of what students can do.

Interviews with teachers about their views on authentic assessment show that they have a strong understanding of the concept. They were able to explain the definition and describe its key features clearly. Teachers see authentic assessment as a valuable tool that can greatly improve student learning because of its detailed and process-oriented nature. According to them, authentic assessment helps assess students' ability to solve real-life problems through practical tasks like presentations and projects. It also allows for more meaningful learning experiences, particularly in developing all four English skills, by connecting learning to students' daily lives.

This view aligns with previous studies, such as Al Ayubi et al. (2021), who found that authentic assessment enhances EFL learning by promoting student-centered and contextualized tasks. Inayah et al. (2019) similarly emphasized that authentic assessment increases student engagement and motivation through relevant, real-world performance. Saputra et al. (2019) also reported that while EFL teachers struggle to implement authentic assessment consistently, they acknowledge its benefits in fostering critical thinking and meaningful learning. The teachers in this study clearly distinguished between authentic and traditional assessments, noting that authentic assessment focuses not only on learning outcomes but also on the process, and is more flexible in meeting the diverse needs of learners. This is in line with Wiggins (1990), who argued that authentic assessment reflects real-life tasks that are intellectually engaging and instructionally relevant.

3.2 The Implementation of Authentic Assessment

After conducting interviews with two teachers, the study continued with classroom observations to explore more deeply how authentic assessment is implemented in practice. These observations were guided by the insights gathered during the interviews. The process began with teachers designing assessment instruments that were aligned with the learning objectives and adapted to students' abilities, ensuring that the assessments remained focused and relevant. From both the interviews and observations, it became clear that the study mainly focused on the preparation stage, the scope, and the types of assessment being used. Preparing for authentic assessment is not a simple task—it involves considering several important elements such as the core competencies to be

achieved, the classroom context, and the students' capabilities. Based on these factors, teachers then developed lesson plans that supported both the teaching and assessment processes. Additionally, detailed rubrics were created to guide the evaluation of student performance in an objective and structured way. All of the assessments conducted throughout the semester were then compiled into a final report, providing a comprehensive picture of each student's learning progress. Overall, this process highlights that implementing authentic assessment requires careful planning and a systematic approach, with a strong emphasis on aligning the learning process with evaluations that genuinely reflect students' development. According from the interview with Ms. FZ stated that

'I give performance-based assignments, projects, and presentations to the students to observe their applicative skills in mastering English.' Ms. MM stated that *'The projects and presentations that I usually implement with the children include creating a CV through Canva, job interview simulations, procedural text projects, and etc.'*

It can be concluded that both teachers used project-based learning as an implementation for authentic assessment. Because according to them, with direct practice, students can develop their potential in the real world. Additionally, as teachers, they can see the ways or processes of how their student complete tasks directly. The use of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in English education contributes significantly to the development of students' 21st-century skills, including digital literacy, creativity, and critical thinking. It also supports teachers' ability to adapt to educational changes in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Yuniarto et al., 2022; Suryati et al., 2023, as cited in Sudarso, 2024).

3.3 Teachers' challenges in Implementing Authentic Assessment

Based on observations from interview data with two educators regarding their perspectives and experiences in implementing authentic assessment, a number of challenges were found to be faced by teachers. In practice, the implementation of authentic assessment does not always run smoothly. Several obstacles arise, including inadequate facilities. This, in turn, leads to a lack of student motivation, as facilities play an important role in supporting the implementation of authentic assessment. If not addressed properly, this issue can hinder the optimization of the learning process.

Ms. FZ and Ms. MM experienced various challenges as teachers who applied authentic assessment in their classes. Ms. FZ stated that

'The facilities and resources at the school where I work are insufficient to support the implementation of authentic assessment. For example, not all classrooms have LCD projectors and sound systems. The school where I teach does not have a language lab yet. This school is still quite new and requires a lot of development and facility enhancement.' As stated by Ms. MM, because the facilities do not support teaching, some students also feel unmotivated. *'The students' involvement is minimal when they are asked to practice, especially in using English in front of the class.'*

Based on the results of observations it was found that the teacher experienced difficulties in the facilities to support the implementation of authentic assessment. O'Malley and Pierce (1996) as cited in Isnayani (2020), Authentic Assessment is an evaluation process that involves multiple forms of performance measurement reflecting the student's learning achievement, motivation, and attitudes. In other words, this kind of assessment requires teachers to measure all domains of students' skill (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) during the learning process. Thus, the lack of adequate facilities can affect students' motivation in learning English in the classroom.

Teachers often struggle to implement authentic assessment effectively due to time constraints, as preparing, administering, and evaluating such assessments require significantly more time and effort compared to traditional methods, as stated by Ms. FZ

'It greatly affects because the number of students is quite large, as a teacher I must manage my time as best as possible if the assigned task requires a presentation in front of the class.'

Based on the observations, it was found that teachers experience difficulties in managing their time. This could be due to teachers feeling that they need a lot of time to prepare all the necessities to

implement authentic assessment itself, where most authentic assessments also involve practices and projects to be developed for each student. Additionally, teachers must closely observe each student with different abilities, which means teachers need to pay close attention to each student, leading to wasted time and making them less focused, resulting in a suboptimal assessment process.

3.4 Teachers' Reflection on the Use of Authentic Assessment

Teachers shared that authentic assessment helps make English learning more practical and closely related to real-life situations. Ms. MM mentioned that it also boosts students' motivation and allows teachers to better assess learning progress. This is in line with findings by Inayah et al. (2019), who found that using real-world tasks in assessment increases student engagement. Both teachers said they were eager to learn more about how to use different types of tasks like portfolios and role plays and how to evaluate them effectively. Saputra et al. (2019) also highlighted that many teachers need more support in designing and applying authentic assessments.

The teachers emphasized that planning and adjusting the assessment to match classroom conditions is important. Ms. FZ pointed out that limited school facilities and students' varied abilities are challenges to consider. Similarly, Suwartono and Zulehah (2024) noted that the school environment often affects how well authentic assessment can be applied. Both teachers also hoped for stronger support from their institutions. Ms. FZ suggested more training programs and better infrastructure, while Ms. MM emphasized the need for government policies that prioritize authentic assessment to help students prepare for real-world language use. This supports what Al Ayubi et al. (2021) found—that institutional backing plays a key role in successful implementation. Overall, the teachers agreed that authentic assessment is beneficial, but it requires continuous training and support to be applied effectively.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, English teachers in vocational high schools have a good understanding of authentic assessment. They see it as a tool that helps them assess students more accurately and in ways relevant to real-life situations. This assessment supports students in developing English skills for both academic and work-related needs. However, teachers still face challenges such as limited school facilities, time management issues, and large class sizes. These factors make authentic assessment harder to implement effectively, which can reduce student motivation and increase teachers' workload. Despite this, both teachers continue to use authentic assessment through project-based activities like presentations, simulations, and practical assignments. They believe these methods help students connect learning with everyday experiences. Both teachers also expressed a need for more training and support from schools and the government, including better facilities and clearer curriculum guidelines. In summary, authentic assessment is viewed positively and is already used meaningfully, but it requires enough time. This study, however, is limited in its scope, as it only involved two teachers from one vocational high school. The findings may not fully represent the broader practices and challenges experienced in other contexts or regions. Future research could involve a larger and more diverse group of participants across different vocational schools to explore variations in the implementation of authentic assessment. Further investigation could also focus on students' perspectives and how authentic assessment affects their motivation, performance, and readiness for the workplace., proper preparation, and institutional support to work better, especially in vocational schools.

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