

CHALLENGES IN INDONESIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING: IMPLEMENTING THE EMANCIPATED LEARNING CURRICULUM IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Bambang Yulianto¹, Sueb², Hasan Subekti³, Harmanto⁴, Puspita S Sukardani⁵, Wasilatul Murtafiah⁶, Layli Hidayah⁷, Siti Addinul Nasihah⁸

^{1,2,3,4,5,8}Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

⁶Universitas PGRI Madiun, Madiun, Indonesia

⁷Universitas Islam Malang, Malang, Indonesia

Email: sueb@unesa.ac.id

Abstract: This study explores the challenges faced by Indonesian language teachers in vocational schools (SMK) in implementing the Emancipated Learning Curriculum, focusing on three key areas: curriculum understanding, material management, and assessment practices. The curriculum emphasizes student-centered, contextual learning, yet its implementation presents obstacles for teachers. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving a survey of 40 teachers from East Java. The findings reveal that more than half of teachers have only a partial understanding of the curriculum, with experienced teachers struggling the most to transition from traditional methods. In material management, 70% of respondents reported inadequate or partially adequate resources, with rural teachers facing severe shortages. Assessment practices were dominated by traditional tests, while project-based and performance-based assessments were rarely used due to lack of training, logistical challenges, and systemic emphasis on standardized evaluations. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions, including practical training on curriculum application, development and equitable distribution of curriculum-aligned resources, and supportive policies for flexible assessments. Addressing these issues is critical for achieving the curriculum's goals of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and contextual learning. Future research should investigate long-term impacts and scalable solutions for effective curriculum implementation in diverse settings.

Keywords: Assessment Practices, Emancipated Learning Curriculum, Indonesian Language, Teacher Challenges, Vocational Education

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru bahasa Indonesia di sekolah vokasi (SMK) dalam menerapkan Kurikulum Pembelajaran Emansipasi, dengan fokus pada tiga bidang utama: pemahaman kurikulum, manajemen materi, dan praktik penilaian. Kurikulum menekankan pembelajaran kontekstual yang berpusat pada siswa, namun implementasinya menghadirkan hambatan bagi guru. Pendekatan metode campuran digunakan, melibatkan survei terhadap 40 guru dari Jawa Timur. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa lebih dari separuh guru hanya memiliki pemahaman parsial tentang kurikulum, dengan guru berpengalaman yang paling berjuang untuk beralih dari metode tradisional. Dalam manajemen material, 70% responden melaporkan sumber daya yang tidak memadai atau sebagian memadai, dengan guru pedesaan menghadapi kekurangan yang parah. Praktik penilaian didominasi oleh tes tradisional, sedangkan penilaian berbasis proyek dan berbasis kinerja jarang digunakan karena kurangnya pelatihan, tantangan logistik, dan penekanan sistemik pada evaluasi standar. Tantangan-tantangan ini menyoroti perlunya intervensi yang ditargetkan, termasuk pelatihan praktis tentang penerapan kurikulum, pengembangan dan distribusi sumber daya yang selaras dengan kurikulum, dan kebijakan pendukung untuk penilaian yang fleksibel. Mengatasi masalah ini sangat penting untuk mencapai tujuan kurikulum dalam menumbuhkan pemikiran kritis,

keaktivitas, dan pembelajaran kontekstual. Penelitian di masa depan harus menyelidiki dampak jangka panjang dan solusi yang dapat diskalakan untuk implementasi kurikulum yang efektif dalam beragam pengaturan.

Kata kunci: Praktik Penilaian, Kurikulum Pembelajaran Emansipasi, Bahasa Indonesia, Tantangan Guru, Pendidikan Vokasi

Submission	: March 1 st 2025
Revision	: April 26 th 2025
Publication	: April 30 th 2025

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the development and future of any nation. It serves as the foundation upon which societies build their economic, social, and cultural growth. In Indonesia, this understanding has driven continuous efforts to reform and improve the educational system to meet the evolving demands of the 21st century. Among the most significant of these efforts is the introduction of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum, known locally as “Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar.” This curriculum represents a paradigm shift in Indonesian education, moving away from traditional, rigid teaching models towards a more flexible, student-centered approach that emphasizes contextual and experiential learning (Salamah et al., 2024; Febriyatko et al., 2023; Suryati et al., 2023).

The Emancipated Learning Curriculum is designed to empower students by allowing them greater autonomy in their learning processes, encouraging critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It aims to prepare students not only to excel academically but also to thrive in real-world environments by engaging with learning materials and activities that are directly relevant to their lives and future careers. For vocational schools, or *Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* (SMK), where the primary goal is to equip students with specific skills for the workforce, the curriculum’s focus on contextual learning is particularly pertinent. Contextual Project-Based Learning (CPBL) can develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills for vocational school students (Samani et al., 2019; Yoto, 2017).

However, the implementation of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum in vocational schools, especially in the context of teaching the Indonesian language, faces several challenges. While the curriculum’s objectives are laudable, the transition from traditional methods to a more emancipated approach has not been seamless both for teachers and students (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Teachers, who are the primary agents of curriculum delivery, often struggle with understanding and applying the new principles in their classrooms. The Indonesian language, as a core subject as mandated by state constitution, faces unique difficulties in this regard. Unlike engineering-related and other practical subjects that directly relate to vocational skills, language education under the *Merdeka Belajar* framework must balance the need for linguistic proficiency with the curriculum’s broader goals of fostering critical thinking and contextual understanding (Sarah et al., 2024; Syarochil & Abadi, 2023).

One of the foremost challenges is the gap in teachers’ understanding of the curriculum itself. Many educators, particularly those who have been teaching for many years under the previous system, find it challenging to adapt to the new pedagogical approaches required by the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. The shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning environment demands a different set of skills and attitudes, including the ability to facilitate rather than direct learning, to create interactive and participatory classroom activities, and to integrate real-world contexts into language lessons (May & Ali, 2023; Rusydi, 2023; Lei & Medwell, 2022). This adjustment is often complicated by insufficient professional development opportunities and a lack of clear guidance on how to effectively implement the curriculum in diverse classroom settings.

Another significant issue lies in the alignment of teaching materials with the goals of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. Traditional textbooks and resources may not adequately support

the curriculum's emphasis on experiential learning and student autonomy. Teachers frequently face difficulties in sourcing or developing materials that are both contextually relevant and pedagogically sound (Rohmah, 2024). This problem is intensified in the context of vocational education, where the focus on practical skills can sometimes overshadow the importance of language education. As a result, Indonesian language teachers in SMK may struggle to find or create resources that align with both the curriculum's goals and the specific needs of their students. This shortage is especially problematic in vocational education, where balancing practical skills with language education is crucial (Çelik & Gül, 2024; Aryawan, 2023).

Moreover, the limited availability of resources in many vocational schools further complicates the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. While urban schools may have access to a wide range of teaching aids, digital tools, and supplementary materials, schools in rural or underprivileged areas often operate with minimal resources (Saragih & Marpaung, 2024; Soleha & Mujahid, 2024). This disparity creates an uneven playing field, where the quality of education a student receives can be heavily influenced by geographic and economic factors. For Indonesian language teachers, this means that even with a strong understanding of the curriculum and a willingness to innovate, the lack of necessary tools and materials can severely hinder their ability to deliver effective lessons.

The implementation of innovative curricula like the Emancipated Learning Curriculum also presents significant challenges in assessment and evaluation. The curriculum's focus on flexibility and student-centered learning requires a shift from standardized testing to more authentic, process-oriented assessments. However, teachers continue to rely heavily on conventional tests, as they often lack training in developing alternative assessments such as project-based, performance-based, or peer/self-assessment methods (Anggraini et al., 2024; Saifani & Adawiyah, 2023). Developing fair, comprehensive, and contextual assessment tools demands new knowledge and skills that many teachers have not yet acquired.

If these challenges remain unaddressed, the core goals of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum—namely fostering critical thinking, creativity, and contextual understanding—risk being undermined. Teachers may revert to conventional teaching methods, students may experience disengagement and confusion, and the curriculum itself may be viewed as ineffective or impractical. This failure would not only hinder student learning outcomes but also perpetuate educational inequalities, particularly in vocational schools serving disadvantaged areas. As such, addressing these systemic and instructional barriers is not merely a matter of policy success but is crucial for ensuring equitable access to quality education and preparing students for real-world competencies.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to conduct in-depth research to identify the specific obstacles that vocational school teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of the Indonesian language under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. This research seeks to explore three main objectives: to what extent vocational school teachers understand and apply the principles of appropriate language learning within the context of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum; how teachers manage and align teaching materials with curriculum goals; and how they approach evaluation and assessment in this new educational framework.

This paper, therefore, not only aims to contribute to the academic discourse on educational reform in Indonesia but also to offer tangible insights that can help educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers enhance the quality of language education in vocational schools. As Indonesia continues to strive for educational excellence, understanding and overcoming the challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum will be essential for ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or location, have access to the high-quality, relevant education they deserve.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The theoretical frameworks underscore the diverse challenges in the implementation of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum in vocational schools, particularly in the context of teaching the Indonesian language. Key issues include gaps in teacher's understanding, the availability of teaching resources, and heavy reliance on traditional assessment methods instead of differentiated approach.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, including practical training for teachers, the development and equitable distribution of relevant resources, and systemic support for innovative assessment strategies.

Challenges in Curriculum Understanding

Teachers' conceptual understanding of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum plays an important role in the successful implementation of the new curriculum. However, research highlights the gaps in this understanding, even among experienced teachers who accustomed to traditional methods. Many teachers are struggling to transition from teacher-centered (previous and called as traditional curriculum) to student-centered pedagogies, which require facilitating active participation, critical thinking, and contextual applications (May & Ali, 2023; Rusydi, 2023). The adjustment is further hindered by limited professional development opportunities that fail to address practical classroom applications (Lei & Medwell, 2022).

Vocational education adds another layer of complexity, as teachers are required to integrate appropriate language instruction with practical skills training (Sarah et al., 2024; Syarochil & Abadi, 2023). While younger teachers may exhibit better adaptability, experienced educators often express resistance, reflecting a broader trend observed in educational reform globally (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). Insufficient guidance and resources exacerbate this issue, leaving many teachers to rely on outdated methods that conflict with the curriculum's objectives.

Material Management

The alignment of teaching materials with the goals of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum is a persistent challenge. Traditional textbooks, often designed for rote learning, fail to support the curriculum's focus on experiential learning and student autonomy (Rohmah, 2024). Teachers frequently encounter difficulties in sourcing or developing materials that meet both the curriculum's requirements and their students' needs, particularly in SMKs where practical skills are emphasized (Çelik & Gül, 2024; Aryawan, 2023).

This issue is compounded in rural and underprivileged areas, where resource disparities are pronounced. While urban schools benefit from greater access to teaching aids, digital tools, and supplementary materials, rural schools often operate with minimal resources (Saragih & Marpaung, 2024). Teachers in these settings are often forced to create their own materials, a time-intensive process that detracts from their instructional responsibilities. As Soleha and Mujahid (2024) note, resource constraints in rural vocational schools exacerbate inequities, leaving teachers ill-equipped to implement the curriculum effectively. Internationally, successful educational reforms, such as Singapore's curriculum-aligned resource development, highlight the importance of providing teachers with high-quality, accessible materials. Recent studies highlight significant disparities between Indonesia's education system and more successful models like Singapore's. While Singapore excels in STEM education, teacher quality, and curriculum alignment (Anistasya et al, 2024; Efendi & Hsi, 2020).

Assessment Practices

Assessment remains one of the most challenging aspects of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. The shift from traditional standardized tests to flexible, formative evaluations requires significant changes in how teachers approach assessment. Teachers are now expected to evaluate not only linguistic proficiency but also students' ability to apply language skills in real-world contexts, think critically, and demonstrate creativity (Anggraini et al., 2024). However, traditional methods persist, with many teachers defaulting to familiar practices due to limited training and resources (Saifani & Adawiyah, 2023).

The Independent Learning Curriculum's emphasis on differentiated and process-oriented assessments faces resistance from deeply ingrained traditional practices (Anggraini et al., 2024). While self-assessment and peer evaluation are promoted as effective tools for fostering student autonomy, their implementation is hindered by logistical constraints and a lack of teacher confidence in designing and managing such assessments (Soleha & Mujahid, 2024). Furthermore, vocational

schools present unique challenges, as assessments must balance technical and linguistic competencies. Teachers often find it difficult to integrate these dimensions into holistic evaluation methods. International studies, such as those by Black and Wiliam (1998), emphasize the transformative potential of formative assessments but also highlight the need for extensive training and systemic support to ensure their effectiveness. Without these interventions, the curriculum's innovative assessment strategies may remain underutilized, particularly in under-resourced schools.

Systemic and Contextual Challenges

The implementation of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum is further complicated by systemic and contextual factors. Geographic and economic disparities play a significant role in determining the quality of education students receive. Urban schools are generally better equipped to adopt innovative practices, while rural schools face infrastructural and financial barriers that impede curriculum implementation (Saragih & Marpaung, 2024). These disparities create an uneven playing field, where the benefits of educational reform are not evenly distributed. Cultural factors also influence curriculum adoption. In Indonesia, traditional hierarchies in education emphasize teacher authority and standardized metrics of success, creating resistance to student-centered approaches and flexible assessments (Yoto, 2017; Sarah et al., 2024). Overcoming these cultural barriers requires systemic shifts in both teacher training and public perceptions of education.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the challenges faced by Indonesian language teachers in vocational schools (SMK) under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. The research was conducted in two phases: a survey followed by in-depth interviews. The survey involved 40 Indonesian language teachers from various SMKs across East Java, selected through purposive sampling based on accessibility and regional mapping. The sample represented a diverse range of vocational schools, including both urban and rural settings. Teachers were required to have a minimum of two years of teaching experience, ensuring familiarity with both traditional methods and the new curriculum.

The survey consisted of 25 closed-ended questions on a Likert scale, focusing on teachers' curriculum understanding, material management, and assessment challenges. Additionally, 5 open-ended items allowed respondents to elaborate on specific implementation issues. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two curriculum experts and one senior teacher educator. Their feedback helped refine the clarity, relevance, and representativeness of the items in relation to the study objectives. The instrument was then piloted with five teachers not included in the main study to check for item clarity and internal consistency. Minor revisions were made to improve wording and reduce ambiguity. Reliability analysis was also conducted, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, indicating high internal consistency.

Following the survey, 10 teachers who reported significant challenges were selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews provided a deeper exploration of the teachers' experiences, particularly in areas related to material preparation, resource utilization, and student assessment. The interviews followed a guiding protocol and were conducted online or face-to-face, depending on availability.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and cross-tabulations to identify trends and relationships between variables. The qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the responses to identify recurring themes relevant to the three research foci: curriculum understanding, material preparation, and assessment practices. Data triangulation was applied to enhance validity by comparing findings across survey and interview sources, ensuring a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Emancipated Learning Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the challenges identified in the teaching of the Indonesian language within the framework of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum in vocational schools (SMK) in East Java. The analysis is organized around three key areas: understanding of the curriculum, material management, and evaluation/assessment practices. These findings are contextualized within the broader educational landscape in Indonesia, drawing on existing research and trends.

Conceptual Understanding of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum

The survey results highlight that a majority of teachers face significant challenges in understanding and implementing the Emancipated Learning Curriculum's principles. The data is summarized in Table 1, showing responses categorized by years of teaching experience and their perceived understanding of the curriculum's core concepts.

Teaching Experience	Understand	Partially Understand	Do Not Understand
2-5 Years	25%	60%	15%
6-10 Years	15%	50%	35%
>10 Years	10%	40%	50%

Table 1 reveals that more than half of the teachers (26 out of 40) reported partial understanding of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum concept, highlighting a significant gap in comprehension across the sample. Teachers with over 10 years of experience demonstrated the highest percentage of those who do not understand the curriculum (50%), reflecting difficulties in transitioning from traditional to student-centered pedagogical practices. In contrast, teachers with 2-5 years of experience exhibited greater adaptability, with only 15% indicating a complete lack of understanding. While, less experienced teachers tend to be more open to new methodologies and curriculum changes (Brody & Hadar, 2015), experienced teachers may struggle to adapt to pedagogical shifts, particularly those emphasizing student-centered learning. (Gutman, M., & Oplatka, 2021). These findings underscore the need for targeted professional development strategy, particularly for more experienced teachers, to bridge the gap in conceptual understanding and enhance their ability to apply the curriculum effectively. The implementation of new curricula, such as Indonesia's Emancipated Curriculum, faces issues including the persistence of traditional teaching methods and the need for digital learning resources (Ellen & Sudimantara, 2023).

Interviews further illuminate this challenge. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience expressed that their previous training and teaching experiences were deeply rooted in traditional approaches, making it harder for them to transition. One participant stated:

"For years, I've relied on structured lesson plans and lectures. The new one demands student autonomy, but I'm not sure how to guide that."

In contrast, younger teachers with 2-5 years of experience exhibited greater flexibility, likely due to their recent exposure to modern pedagogical trends during their pre-service training as well as technology advancement. The current policy to mandate the pre-service teachers attend the pre-service teacher education (PPG) has seen a shift from traditional (theory-based approaches) to contemporary and competency-based approaches that promotes professional skills (Mustadi et al., 2021). The findings echo earlier studies that shows the difficulties faced by long-serving teachers in adapting to educational reforms in Indonesia. Education reforms even often fail when professional development does not address the practical challenges faced by teachers. It was found that teachers' attitudes toward change are a critical determinant of reform success, with less experienced teachers often displaying a more positive attitude toward student-centered approaches (Revina et al., 2020). To address these challenges, researchers recommend hands-on training, targeted professional development, and a reorientation of the education system to produce high-quality teachers. While recent studies advocate for hands-on training, the surveyed teachers reported that existing training

sessions are often theoretical, lacking in practical application for classroom scenarios (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024).

The Indonesian education system has historically prioritized a uniform, top-down approach, leaving little room for teachers to explore innovative practices. The Emancipated Learning Curriculum disrupts this tradition, emphasizing localized and student-driven learning (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024). However, such a shift is hindered by some key reasons. First issue is the inadequate structured support that many teachers reported minimal access to detailed guides or mentoring programs to facilitate their understanding of the curriculum. Another issue is teachers highlighted that adapting to the curriculum demands additional time for planning and preparation, which conflicts with their already heavy workloads. The other issue is the cultural expectations in Indonesia that teacher authority in the classroom is traditionally emphasized. Teachers are struggling to shift from traditional didactic approaches where teacher's autonomy is dominant to active learning student-centered methods, highlighting the need for clear guidelines and adequate support (Nihayah et al., 2023).

The findings highlight the need for targeted measures, such as practical training programs, collaborative peer learning, and mentorship initiatives, to enhance teachers' understanding and effective application of the curriculum. Recommendations include hands-on training programs should focus on practical implementation, providing clear examples of how to transition to student-centered methods. Creating teacher networks where educators can share best practices may help more experienced teachers adapt by learning from younger peers. The other recommended idea is mentorship systems, pairing less experienced teachers with veterans can facilitate mutual learning, balancing innovative approaches with practical classroom management techniques. Mentoring practices is believed improve teachers' didactic structure and student-centered approaches with continuing support for further improvement (Arslan & Şahinoğlu, 2023). These approaches can enhance teachers' understanding and effective application of new curricula, ultimately improving student outcomes.

The challenges in understanding the Emancipated Learning Curriculum stem from systemic gaps in training, practical support, and cultural readiness for pedagogical reform. While younger teachers show promise in adapting, their more experienced counterparts require tailored support that acknowledges their established practices while introducing actionable ways to transition to the new curriculum. Addressing these issues among educators is important to realizing the curriculum's objectives of empowering students through experiential and contextual learning. In addition, the observation gives insights for relevant to focus on exploring stakeholder engagement, emotional support mechanisms for teachers, and ongoing improvement strategies to refine the curriculum's implementation (Hanayanti et al., 2023).

Material Management for Vocational Education: Urban vs. Rural

The survey revealed that a significant portion of teachers face challenges in managing teaching materials for language teaching under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. The findings are summarized in Table 2, which categorizes responses based on the type of school location (urban vs. rural) and the availability of resources.

School Location	Adequate	Partially Adequate	Inadequate Resources	Total (N)
Urban	8 (40%)	10 (50%)	2 (10%)	20
Rural	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	12 (60%)	20

The data highlights significant disparities in material availability for the teaching of language between urban and rural vocational schools (SMK) under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. Overall, 29 out of 40 reported that the materials available were either partially adequate or entirely inadequate to support the Indonesian language education relevant with the objective of the curriculum. Urban teachers fared better, with 40% indicating they had access to adequate resources,

compared to only 15% of rural teachers. In rural areas, 60% of respondents reported severe inadequacy in teaching materials, often relying on outdated textbooks or self-created resources.

This disparity underscores the systemic inequalities in resource distribution, where urban schools benefit from better infrastructure and governmental support, while rural schools face compounded challenges due to logistical and financial constraints. Schools in rural area often rely on outdated textbooks or self-created resources (Kawuryan et al., 2021; Ramdhani et al, 2012), which might affect the learning process and relevance under the current curriculum. These findings align with previous studies highlighting that rural schools in Indonesia often lack the materials needed to implement modern curricula, exacerbating inequities in educational outcomes. Despite government efforts, there remains a large gap in access to education between developed and disadvantaged areas, with assistance programs not fully reaching areas in need (Aprilia et al., 2024).

To address these challenges, it is essential to focus on developing and ensuring the equitable distribution of curriculum-aligned resources, upgrading ICT infrastructure to provide centralized access to teaching materials, and delivering targeted professional development to help teachers adapt resources effectively. The data highlights a significant gap in material availability between urban and rural schools. Urban teachers reported better access to updated textbooks and digital resources, benefiting from proximity to educational hubs and stronger governmental support. This aligns with existing research that underscores the advantages urban schools enjoy in terms of infrastructure and resource allocation. Conversely, rural teachers face considerable obstacles, with 60% citing inadequate materials, reflecting systemic inequities that exacerbate the difficulty of implementing the curriculum. These disparities are particularly problematic for vocational schools in remote areas, where resource shortages severely hinder the delivery of effective education. This trend underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to bridge these gaps and address the educational inequities faced by rural teachers and students.

Interviews with teachers further clarified the scope of these challenges. Teachers in rural areas stated that many textbooks are obsolete and still follow traditional frameworks, emphasizing rote learning rather than the contextual and experiential learning emphasized by the curriculum. One teacher remarked:

"Most of them (books) are outdated. They don't match the goals (of the curriculum) [...] so I often have to create my own materials, which takes a lot of time and effort."

This sentiment was echoed by urban teachers, albeit to a lesser extent. While urban schools have better access to resources, many teachers still find the materials misaligned with the curriculum's focus on practical applications and student-centered learning. Although curriculum reforms are designed to foster student-centered learning and enhance teacher autonomy, their implementation is often hindered by teachers' entrenched beliefs in curriculum completion and reliance on didactic teaching methods (Nihayah et al., 2023). Collectively, studies have emphasized critical needs for clear guidelines, sufficient support systems, and addressing teachers' underlying beliefs to ensure the successful implementation of curriculum reforms. Additionally, they stress the importance of providing supplementary teaching materials and ongoing professional development to equip teachers with the skills and resources necessary to effectively implement new curricula (Soepriyanti & Waluyo, 2018).

Material availability and alignment as critical factors influencing the successful implementation of curriculum reforms. Their study found that teachers across Indonesia struggle to find materials that support student autonomy and critical thinking, especially in non-STEM subjects like language. Similarly, highlighted that vocational schools often prioritize technical materials over general subjects like Indonesian language, further marginalizing efforts to integrate innovative pedagogical approaches in language education. Resource disparities, inadequate facilities, and limited training exacerbate these challenges, especially for English language instruction in rural schools (Jasrial et al., 2023). While teachers generally express a willingness to embrace curriculum changes, many face difficulties in implementing new practices and frequently revert to traditional methods due to a lack of adequate support (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024).

In rural contexts, these challenges are amplified by infrastructural limitations, including unreliable internet access and insufficient funding. Some rural schools have managed to successfully integrate technology into their teaching practices, resulting in enhanced student engagement and improved learning outcomes (Pradana & Josiah, 2024). The findings of this study corroborate these observations, emphasizing the urgent need to address resource disparities to ensure equitable education. The disparities in material availability and alignment reflect broader systemic challenges in Indonesia’s education system. Despite efforts to decentralize education under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum, resource distribution remains uneven. Urban schools, which often benefit from greater governmental and community support, are better positioned to adapt to curriculum changes. In contrast, rural schools face compounded challenges due to logistical and financial constraints.

Another contextual challenge is the lack of standardized guidelines for material development. Teachers reported several issues related to inconsistencies from education authorities in aligning materials with the curriculum’s goals. This gap leaves many educators, particularly in under-resourced schools, to rely on outdated textbooks or create their own materials. While some teachers view this as an opportunity for creativity, the additional workload detracts from their primary teaching responsibilities. The absence of standardized guidelines and inadequate training forces many educators to depend on outdated textbooks or develop their own materials (Hanayanti et al., 2023). This issue is particularly acute in multigrade rural classrooms, where tailored resources are often unavailable (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024).

The findings highlight the critical need for targeted interventions to address material-related challenges. Recommendations include developing and distributing curriculum-aligned materials. The government and educational stakeholders should prioritize the development of teaching materials specifically designed to support the goals of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. These materials should be distributed equitably to ensure that rural schools are not disadvantaged. Leveraging technology as it can transform access of resources and be used to provide teachers with access to a centralized repository of curriculum-aligned resources. Teacher training on material adaptation should include training on how to adapt existing materials to align with the curriculum’s principles. Such training can empower teachers to create engaging and contextually relevant lessons without being overwhelmed by the workload. Furthermore, improving teachers' digital literacy and offering consistent support through sustainable capacity-building initiatives are essential (Cayabas Jr & Sumeg-ang, 2023; Ellen & Sudimantara, 2023). Such strategies are designed to equip teachers with the skills to develop engaging and contextually relevant materials that align with curriculum goals and promote 21st-century learning principles.

Material management under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum presents significant challenges, particularly in rural areas where resource availability is severely limited. While urban schools are better positioned to adapt, the misalignment of existing materials with the curriculum’s goals is a pervasive issue across all regions. Addressing these challenges requires systemic efforts to develop and distribute curriculum-aligned resources, promote the use of technology, and train teachers in material adaptation. Without these interventions, the potential benefits of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum may remain out of reach for many students, particularly those in underprivileged areas. Future research should explore the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as digital resource platforms and localized material development programs, in mitigating these challenges.

Evaluation and Assessment Practices

The findings reveal substantial challenges in implementing evaluation and assessment practices aligned with the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. The survey data summarized in Table 3 provides a breakdown of teachers' self-reported ability to adapt their assessment methods under the new curriculum.

Table 3. Assessment practices by teachers under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum					
Assessment Practices	Often Used	Sometimes Used	Rarely Used	Never Used	Total

Traditional tests (e.g., quizzes, exams)	26 (65%)	10 (25%)	4 (10%)	0 (0%)	40
Project-based assessment	8 (20%)	18 (45%)	12 (30%)	2 (5%)	40
Performance-based assessment	10 (25%)	12 (30%)	15 (37.5%)	3 (7.5%)	40
Peer and self-assessment	5 (12.5%)	10 (25%)	15 (37.5%)	10 (25%)	40

The data reveals that traditional tests remain the dominant form of assessment among teachers in vocational schools, with 65% of respondents using them frequently. In contrast, only 20-25% of teachers often utilize project-based or performance-based assessments, despite these being central to the Emancipated Learning Curriculum's goals. Peer and self-assessment practices are even less common, with 62.5% of teachers rarely or never employing them. These findings indicate a reliance on familiar methods that prioritize standardized reporting, driven by a lack of training and clarity on implementing alternative assessments. Teachers expressed difficulty designing and grading subjective outputs like projects and performances, compounded by logistical challenges such as large class sizes and limited time. This reliance on traditional assessments underscores the need for targeted training on flexible evaluation methods and systemic support to align assessment practices with the curriculum's emphasis on critical thinking and real-world application.

The data indicates a heavy reliance on traditional assessments, such as quizzes and exams, even though the Emancipated Learning Curriculum encourages flexible, formative approaches like project-based and performance-based assessments. This reliance reflects teachers' comfort with familiar methods and their perceived difficulty in implementing alternative assessments. Studies reveal that traditional assessment methods remain dominant in schools, despite efforts to promote more innovative practices. Teachers frequently rely on paper-and-pencil tests and written assignments, even when these methods are at odds with curriculum goals prioritizing critical thinking and real-world application (Frey & Schmitt, 2010; Neibling, 2014). Although performance-based assessments are utilized to some degree, particularly in language arts and upper grade levels, formative assessment practices are notably less prevalent (Frey & Schmitt, 2010). Teachers encounter significant challenges in adopting alternative assessment methods, such as difficulties in developing appropriate instruments, establishing clear indicators, and designing effective rubrics (Retnawati et al., 2016).

Interviews with teachers revealed that this gap is driven by three key factors. First, teachers reported a lack of training on alternative assessment methods. As one teacher stated: *"We are told to evaluate creativity and problem-solving, but there's no clear guidance on how to do it effectively or how to grade it fairly."*

Second, teachers expressed concerns about the practicality of implementing non-traditional assessments. Many found it challenging to manage large class sizes and ensure consistency in evaluating subjective outputs like projects or performances. Third, there is a persistent pressure to produce measurable outcomes for standardized reporting, which traditional assessments are better suited to provide. The findings show that Although formative assessment is gaining prominence in educational policies, its implementation remains challenging for teachers, primarily due to large class sizes and time constraints (Defianty & Wilson, 2024). The Kurikulum Merdeka (Emancipated Learning Curriculum) adds further complexity, as teachers grapple with understanding its principles, designing student-centered learning activities, and creating competency-based assessments (Wardana, 2024).

In the context of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum, these challenges are further compounded by Indonesia's longstanding reliance on standardized tests. While the curriculum advocates for holistic and flexible assessments, the educational system's focus on exam results creates a tension that discourages the adoption of innovative evaluation strategies. A significant disparity exists between academic interest in diverse assessment methods and the actual development of innovative assessment instruments, emphasizing the need for evaluation tools that align with the curriculum's objectives (Hadiastriani & Djarot, 2024). Despite these obstacles, the curriculum has demonstrated positive impacts, including enhanced student creativity and improved readiness to meet professional demands (Setiolyuliani & Andaryani, 2023).

There are some contextual factors contribute to the challenges in implementing alternative assessments in vocational schools. First, the lack of clarity in curriculum guidelines leaves teachers uncertain about how to design and execute assessments that align with the curriculum's goals. While the curriculum emphasizes critical thinking and real-world application, many teachers face challenges in understanding and implementing new assessment systems, particularly in creating instruments to evaluate attitudes, skills, and authentic performance (Retnawati et al., 2016). Second, logistical constraints such as large class sizes, limited time, and inadequate resources further hinder the adoption of flexible assessments. Teachers in rural schools, in particular, reported that they often lack the tools and infrastructure needed to conduct project-based or performance-based evaluations effectively. Finally, cultural factors play a role in shaping assessment practices. The high-stakes nature of exams in Indonesia creates a systemic bias toward traditional assessments. Both teachers and parents often view standardized tests as the primary measure of academic success, making it difficult for schools to shift toward more holistic evaluation methods. Contextual factors such as student-related challenges, time limitations, and resource constraints impede the implementation of Assessment for Learning practices (Arrafii, 2021). Teachers also struggle with maintaining validity, reliability, and objectivity in authentic assessments while managing the additional time and effort these assessments demand (Saputra et al., 2019).

The findings highlight several areas where targeted interventions are needed to bridge the gap between curriculum expectations and current assessment practices:

1. **Training on Alternative Assessments:** Professional development programs should focus on equipping teachers with the skills and tools needed to design and implement project-based, performance-based, and peer/self-assessments effectively. These programs should include hands-on workshops and practical examples tailored to the vocational school context.
2. **Supportive Assessment Policies:** Policymakers should create assessment frameworks that balance the need for standardized reporting with the flexibility required for holistic evaluations. This could include incorporating project-based assessments into national guidelines and providing clear rubrics for subjective evaluations.
3. **Resource Allocation:** Schools, especially in rural areas, need better access to resources and infrastructure to facilitate non-traditional assessments. This includes providing technology, training, and additional staffing support to manage the increased workload associated with flexible evaluation methods.

Assessment practices in vocational schools under the Emancipated Learning Curriculum remain heavily reliant on traditional methods, reflecting systemic and contextual challenges. While project-based and performance-based assessments are encouraged, their adoption is limited by a lack of training, logistical constraints, and cultural biases toward standardized tests. Teachers encounter significant challenges in understanding and applying new assessment systems, particularly in developing instruments for evaluating attitudes, implementing authentic assessments, and formulating clear indicators (Retnawati et al., 2016). Although the Emancipated Learning Curriculum seeks to promote critical thinking and creativity, its implementation is often hindered by resource limitations, insufficient teacher training, and the continued reliance on traditional teaching methods (Hanayanti et al., 2023).

However, the present study is not without limitations. Its focus on East Java and a sample of 40 teachers limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-economic and institutional contexts. Additionally, the data on assessment practices relied on self-reporting, which may be subject to bias or overestimation. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating observational methods, involving more diverse geographic settings, and longitudinal designs to evaluate the sustained impact of alternative assessments. Nevertheless, this study provides valuable initial insights into the practical barriers faced by teachers and offers a foundation for further investigation and policy refinement. Without systemic interventions, the curriculum's goals of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and real-world application risk being undermined across diverse vocational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant challenges faced by Indonesian language teachers in vocational schools (SMK) in implementing the Emancipated Learning Curriculum. The findings indicate that many teachers struggle with understanding and applying the curriculum's student-centered principles, managing and aligning appropriate teaching materials, and adopting flexible assessment practices that reflect the curriculum's goals. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where resources are limited, and teachers often lack the necessary support and training. To address these issues, it is recommended that targeted professional development programs be developed, focusing on the practical application of the curriculum's principles in diverse classroom settings. Additionally, there is a pressing need for the development and distribution of curriculum-aligned teaching materials, particularly in under-resourced regions. The Ministry of Education and other stakeholders should also consider revising assessment policies to better support the adoption of holistic and formative evaluation methods that align with the curriculum's emphasis on experiential learning.

The primary limitation of this study is its focus on a specific geographic region (East Java) and a relatively small sample size, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across Indonesia. Future research should expand the scope to include a broader range of regions and a larger sample of teachers to validate and refine these findings. Additionally, further studies could explore the long-term impacts of the Emancipated Learning Curriculum on student outcomes in vocational schools, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness and areas for improvement.

REFERENCE

- Anggraini, Y., Setiawati, S., & Sari, I. P. (2024). Assessing 4C Competencies in English Language Learners: Tools, Challenges, and Implications. *EBONY: Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature*, 4(2), 125-137.
- Anistasya, Susanti, R., Safitri, E.R., & Gulo, F. (2024). Studi Analisis Sistem Pendidikan Jenjang Sekolah Pertama di Singapura dan di Indonesia. *EduInovasi: Journal of Basic Educational Studies*.
- Aprilia, E., Afindi, A., & Saputra, H. (2024). Kasus Pendayagunaan Sumber Daya Pendidikan. *Jurnal Pendidikan, Bahasa dan Budaya*, 3(4), 112-124.
- Arsyad Arrafii, M. (2023). Assessment reform in Indonesia: Contextual barriers and opportunities for implementation. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 43(1), 79-94.
- Aryawan, F. N. (2023). Overcoming the Challenges of Vocational Education in Indonesian SMK: Ideas on Curriculum Improvement, Teaching Quality, And English Language Teaching. *Journal of Practice Learning and Educational Development*, 3(3), 243-252.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: principles, policy & practice*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Brody, D. L., & Hadar, L. L. (2015). Personal professional trajectories of novice and experienced teacher educators in a professional development community. *Teacher development*, 19(2), 246-266.
- Carrete-Marín, N., Domingo-Peñafiel, L., & Simó-Gil, N. (2024). Teaching materials for rural schools: challenges and practical considerations from an international perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 7, 100365.
- Çelik, E., & Gül, İ. (2024). Teachers' Opinions on the Problems Encountered in Internship Practices in Special Education Vocational Schools. *Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, 7(1), 1-24.
- Defianty, M., & Wilson, K. (2024). Beating Barriers to Formative Assessment in a Testing-Oriented Nation. *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society*, 11(1), 1-12.
- Efendi, M. Y., & Hsi, N. L. (2020). The comparison of elementary curriculum education between Indonesia and Singapore. *Journal Of Teaching And Learning In Elementary Education*, 3(1), 22-36.
- Ellen, K. K., & Sudimantara, L. B. (2023). Examining Emancipated Curriculum Development in Middle Schools: A Case Study. *PANYONARA: Journal of English Education*, 5(2), 165-188.

- Febriyatko, A., Rahmawati, C. D., Fatimah, K., & Batalemba, I. (2023). Titik Temu Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara Dengan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar (Studi Komparatif). *BASA Journal of Language & Literature*, 3(1), 1-10.
- Frey, B. B., & Schmitt, V. L. (2010). Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practices. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 5(3).
- Gutman, M., & Oplatka, I. (2021). "Maintaining the image of a desired teacher": major issues of late-career senior teacher educators. *Educational Studies*, 47(5), 538-553.
- Hadiastriani, Y., & Djarot, P. (2024). Bibliometric Insights into Assessment Practices in the Merdeka Curriculum: Identifying Opportunities for New Assessment Development. *JSEP (Journal of Science Education and Practice)*, 8(1), 14-38.
- Hanayanti, H., Tahapary, N. L., Basalama, P. N., & Miniaty, Y. (2023). Exploring Challenges in Applying the Merdeka Curriculum at Schools. *MATAI: International Journal of Language Education*, 4(1), 115-121.
- Hunaepi, H., & Suharta, I. (2024). Transforming education in Indonesia: The impact and challenges of the Merdeka belajar curriculum. *Path of Science*, 10(6), 5026-5039.
- Kawuryan, S. P., Sayuti, S. A., & Dwiningrum, S. I. A. (2021). Teachers Quality and Educational Equality Achievements in Indonesia. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14(2), 811-830.
- Lei, M., & Medwell, J. (2022). The changing role of chinese english-as-foreign-language teachers in the context of curriculum reform: Teachers' understanding of their new role. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 904071.
- May, Y. T., & Ali, U. (2023). Kemampuan Dasar Guru yang Profesional dalam Mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *Daskalos: Penelitian Tindakan Kelas*, 1(1), 36-44.
- Mustadi, A., Surya, P., & Chen, M. Y. (2021). Pre-service teacher education reform in Indonesia: Traditional and contemporary paradigms. In *Educational Innovation in Society 5.0 Era: Challenges and Opportunities* (pp. 80-90). Routledge.
- Nasution, I. N., & Indrasari, S. Y. (2024). Twenty Years of Change: A Systematic Literature Review of Indonesian Teachers' Responses to Curriculum Change. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian dan Kajian Kepustakaan di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran*, 10(1), 100-112.
- Neibling, J. (2014). *Teachers' Conceptions Toward Type of Assessment: Grade Level and State Tested Content Area* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas).
- Nihayah, R. W., Dina, W. F., Wijayanti, D., & Asyah, A. N. (2023). How does granting teacher autonomy influence classroom instruction? Lessons from Indonesia's curriculum reform implementation. *Jurnal Penelitian Kebijakan Pendidikan*, 16(1).
- Pradana, M. R. A., & Josiah, T. (2024). Application of Technology in Educational Management in Rural Schools. *Ensiklopedia: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Inovasi Pembelajaran Saburai*, 4(01), 37-43.
- Qiftiyah, M., & Hidayati, A. N. (2024). Analisis Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar. *Al Banin: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, 1(2), 134-145.
- Ramdhani, N., Ancok, D., Swasono, Y., & Suryanto, P. (2012). Teacher quality improvement program: Empowering teachers to increasing a quality of Indonesian's education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 69, 1836-1841.
- Retnawati, H., Hadi, S., & Nugraha, A. C. (2016). Vocational High School Teachers' Difficulties in Implementing the Assessment in Curriculum 2013 in Yogyakarta Province of Indonesia. *International journal of instruction*, 9(1), 33-48.
- Revina, S., Pramana, R. P., Bjork, C., & Suryadarma, D. (2023). Replacing the old with the new: long-term issues of teacher professional development reforms in Indonesia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 12(4/5), 262-274.
- Rohmah, Z., Hamamah, H., Junining, E., Ilma, A., & Rochastuti, L. A. (2024). Schools' support in the implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum in secondary schools in Indonesia. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2300182.
- Rusydi, A., Subroto, W. T., & Sakti, N. C. (2023). Influence of Self-Efficacy and Resilience on Subjective Well-Being: A Study of the New Curriculum Implementation in Indonesia. *IJORE: International Journal of Recent Educational Research*, 4(5), 597-609.

- Şahinoğlu, A., & Arslan, A. S. (2023). Examining of Teachers' Practices Supported by Mentoring Application. *Continuing Professional Education: Theory and Practice*, 77(4), 66-87.
- Saifani, A. S. I., & Adawiyah, R. (2023). The Analysis of the Educational Unit Assessment Strategy on the Independent Learning Curriculum at the Schools. *JlIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 6(6), 4275-4287.
- Salamah, U., Listiyani, Y., & Mustafiyanti, M. (2024). Analisis Konsep Dan Struktur Kurikulum Merdeka Dan Merdeka Belajar. *Khatulistiwa: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Sosial Humaniora*, 4(2), 123-129.
- Samani, M., Sunwinarti, S., Putra, B. A., Rahmadian, R., & Rohman, J. N. (2019). Learning strategy to develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills for vocational school students. *Jurnal Pendidikan Teknologi dan Kejuruan*, 25(1), 36-42.
- Saputra, E. R., Hamied, F. A., & Suherdi, D. (2019, June). A case of authentic assessment in indonesian secondary EFL classroom context: Teachers' struggle. In *Eleventh Conference on Applied Linguistics (CONAPLIN 2018)* (pp. 198-201). Atlantis Press.
- Saragih, O., & Marpaung, R. (2024). Tantangan dan Peluang: Studi Kasus Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Mandiri Berubah Kabupaten Tapanuli Utara. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Indonesia (JPPI)*, 4(3), 888-903.
- Sarah, S., Suprihatiningrum, J., Gunawan, Y. I. P., & Salam, F. W. (2024). Construction and validation of a scale to measure Islamic primary school teachers' readiness in implementing emancipated curriculum referring to the technological pedagogical and content knowledge. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian dan Kajian Kepustakaan di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran*, 10(3), 1255-1267.
- Setiolyuliani, S. E. P., & Andaryani, E. T. (2023). Permasalahan Kurikulum Merdeka dan Dampak Pergantian Kurikulum K13 dan Kurikulum Merdeka. *Pedagogika: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Kependidikan*, 3(2), 157-162.
- Soepriyanti, H., & Waluyo, U. (2019). Barriers to the implementation of the 2013 English curriculum in high schools in Mataram City: mapping teachers' problems, needs, and supplementary literacy materials for the 2013 English curriculum. In *Proceedings of the 65th TEFL in International Conference (65)* (Vol. 1, pp. 446-452).
- Soleha, Z., & Mujahid, K. (2024). Analisis Hambatan dan Tantangan: Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Kehidupan Sehari-hari Guru. *TSAQOFAH*, 4(1), 563-574.
- Suryati, D., Salamah, U., & Mustafiyanti, M. (2023). Efektivitas Penggunaan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Sebagai Pengganti Kurikulum 2013 Dalam Dunia Pendidikan. *Concept: Journal of Social Humanities and Education*, 2(4), 142-152.
- Syarochil, A. I., & Abadi, M. (2023). Problematics of The Implementation of The Emancipated Curriculum (IKM) In Indonesian Language of Class X. *JP (Jurnal Pendidikan): Teori Dan Praktik*, 8(1), 1-8.
- Wardana, M. D. K. (2024). Classroom Teachers' Problems and Strategies in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. *Academia Open*, 9(1), 10-21070.
- Yoto, Y. (2017). Preparing skilled labor in industry through production-based curriculum approach in vocational high school. In *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 1887, No. 1). AIP Publishing.