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Exploring English Teachers' Challenges in Evaluating Students' Learning Outcomes: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by English teachers in evaluating student learning outcomes in Vocational High Schools (SMK) and to identify the strategies employed to address these challenges. The study adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations of English teachers. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving processes of coding, theme development, and data interpretation. The research focuses on challenges related to assessing language skills, disparities in student ability, time constraints, the development of evaluation instruments, and the provision of feedback. The strategies examined include the use of assessment rubrics, the adaptation of evaluation formats, time management, the creation of appropriate instruments, and the provision of feedback and follow-up instruction. This research is expected to provide insight into the practices of evaluating English learning outcomes in Vocational High Schools and serve as a reference for teachers to improve the quality of their learning assessments

1. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in developing students' knowledge, skills, and competencies. The success of learning can be gauged by the extent to which students achieve established learning objectives. According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), learning objectives encompass dimensions of knowledge and cognitive processes, which serve as the foundation for determining student learning outcomes. In a similar vein, Black and Wiliam (2009) explain that assessment can support learning by providing

information used to improve the teaching and learning process. Thus, learning outcomes serve not only as indicators of student achievement but also as a basis for teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and determine appropriate follow-up actions.

Evaluation is a systematic process used to determine the extent to which students have achieved established learning objectives. According to Faiz et al. (2022), testing, measurement, assessment, and evaluation serve interrelated functions in determining students' progress and learning outcomes. Measurement yields quantitative information; assessment involves collecting and interpreting data on student abilities; and evaluation is used to make judgments based on the results obtained. UNESCO further emphasizes that assessment outcomes can be utilized to monitor learning progress and refine instructional strategies. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to conduct evaluations objectively, accurately, and in alignment with learning objectives, ensuring that the results can serve as a basis for determining appropriate follow-up actions for instruction.

In the implementation of evaluation, teachers play a crucial role in designing assessment instruments, gathering information, interpreting learning outcomes, and determining subsequent instructional steps. Black and Wiliam (2009) explain that assessment involves the process of collecting, interpreting, and utilizing evidence of student achievement to inform future learning actions. This indicates that evaluation is not merely intended for assigning grades; rather, it helps teachers understand students' progress, needs, and learning difficulties. Furthermore, teachers must select assessment methods and instruments that align with learning objectives and use evaluation results to refine their teaching strategies. However, fulfilling these responsibilities can present challenges for teachers—particularly in ensuring that assessments are conducted appropriately and that the resulting data can effectively enhance the quality of instruction.

Evaluating learning outcomes is a complex process, as teachers must account for differences in students' abilities, needs, and characteristics. Furthermore, teachers are required to establish appropriate assessment indicators and criteria, while also developing valid and reliable assessment instruments. According to Brookhart (2011), teachers need sufficient assessment knowledge and skills to conduct evaluations effectively. In practice, constraints such as limited time, large class sizes, and the necessity of maintaining objectivity and consistency can further complicate the teacher's task. Consequently, this complexity can pose a challenge in obtaining accurate evaluation results that truly reflect students' learning achievements.

In practice, teachers can face various challenges in evaluating student learning outcomes, such as designing appropriate assessment instruments, determining success criteria, and assessing aspects of knowledge, skills, and attitudes based on learning objectives. Brookhart (2011) explains that teachers require adequate assessment knowledge and skills to conduct evaluations effectively. Furthermore, teachers must provide meaningful feedback, process and interpret assessment results, and use these insights to determine subsequent instructional steps. Additional challenges may arise when assessment requirements do not fully align with the specific conditions and practices of the classroom. Consequently, it is important to explore teachers' experiences in navigating these challenges to better understand the underlying factors and the strategies employed to address them.

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The challenges teachers face in evaluating student learning outcomes can be influenced by both internal and external factors. Xu and Brown (2016) explain that teachers' assessment practices are shaped by their assessment knowledge and skills, professional experience, and the context in which the assessment takes place. Other factors that may affect the evaluation process include class size, workload, limitations in facilities and resources, access to professional development, as well as school support and assessment policies. Furthermore, the diverse abilities and characteristics of students also influence the choice of methods and the implementation of evaluations. Consequently, the challenges associated with evaluation are not solely linked to a teacher's competence, but also to the environmental conditions and the support available within the learning process.

Challenges in evaluating learning outcomes can affect the accuracy of information regarding student abilities, making it difficult for teachers to identify their learning needs. According to Black and Wiliam (2009), assessment data should be used to determine subsequent instructional steps so that the learning process can be improved. If evaluation results are inaccurate or feedback is provided too late, teachers may struggle to determine instructional strategies that align with their students' needs. In other words, accurate and timely evaluation is essential for helping teachers plan future instruction, provide meaningful feedback, and support the enhancement of learning quality.

Student learning. Xu and Brown (2016) explain that the implementation of assessment is influenced by a teacher's knowledge, skills, and work context. Furthermore, Hasim et al. (2018) found that primary school English teachers in Malaysia still struggle to distinguish between formative and summative assessments. Meanwhile, Yolanda and Rodliyah (2024) examined the challenges faced by EFL teachers in Indonesia in implementing formative assessment. These three studies indicate that the evaluation of learning involves challenges related to teachers' assessment competencies and practices. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the challenges teachers encounter in evaluating student learning outcomes, the underlying factors, and the strategies employed to address these challenges, using a qualitative approach.

Previous research has addressed teachers' assessment literacy, the distinctions between formative and summative assessment, and the challenges teachers face in implementing formative assessment (Xu & Brown, 2016; Hasim et al., 2018; Yolanda & Rodliyah, 2024). However, aspects concerning the underlying causes, firsthand experiences, and strategies employed by teachers to overcome various challenges in evaluating learning outcomes require further, in-depth investigation. Furthermore, as prior studies have focused on different areas and contexts, they do not yet provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges involved in evaluation.

Consequently, a qualitative approach is necessary to explore teachers' experiences, perspectives, and strategies within the context of real-world classroom conditions. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers encounter when evaluating student learning outcomes and to offer insights that may help improve instructional evaluation practices.

Based on the description above, this study was conducted to explore the challenges teachers face in evaluating student learning outcomes at Vocational School Pekanbaru , identify the factors contributing to these challenges, and understand the strategies teachers employ to overcome them. Through a qualitative approach, this research aims to

provide an in-depth overview of teachers' experiences in conducting learning evaluations and to offer insights for improving the quality of student learning outcome assessments.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design to explore the challenges faced by English teachers in evaluating student learning outcomes in Vocational High Schools (SMK). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research aims to understand the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to a social issue. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on their experience and involvement in the evaluation of learning.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. Interviews were used to explore the teachers' experiences, challenges, underlying factors, and strategies regarding the evaluation of student learning outcomes, while observations were conducted to examine evaluation practices directly within the classroom.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Data validity was strengthened through methodological triangulation by comparing the findings from interviews and observations. The study also adhered to ethical principles, including obtaining participant consent, securing research permits, and ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identities.

3. Result

1. Difficulty in Assessing English Productive Skills

One of the challenges encountered in evaluating English learning outcomes is the difficulty teachers face in assessing students' productive skills—specifically speaking and writing. Unlike multiple-choice questions, which have relatively clear-cut answers, the assessment of productive skills requires the simultaneous consideration of several aspects, such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, the organization of ideas, and the coherence of written text. In the context of English instruction at vocational high schools (SMK), this challenge can become even more complex because students' proficiency levels are not always uniform. Some students may be able to comprehend written material but struggle when required to express ideas orally. Conversely, students who are quite fluent in speaking may not necessarily be capable of producing well-structured written work. This situation necessitates that teachers establish assessment criteria aligned with both the learning objectives and the specific characteristics of each skill.

Teachers must also ensure that assessments are conducted consistently. In the absence of a clear rubric, evaluation may rely too heavily on the teacher's subjective judgment. Therefore, the use of an analytical rubric—which breaks down each aspect of a skill—can help teachers provide assessments that are more transparent and focused.
Brown (2004) explains that the assessment of language proficiency must be tailored to the specific skills and competencies being measured. For instance, the assessment of speaking may take into account fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and the

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ability to convey meaning. This perspective underscores the importance of having clear assessment criteria when evaluating students' productive skills.

Implication: Teachers need to develop assessment rubrics that align with learning objectives and apply consistent criteria when evaluating speaking and writing skills.

2. Disparities in Students' English Proficiency Levels

A second challenge relates to the varying levels of English proficiency among students. Within a single vocational high school (SMK) classroom, students may possess different levels of mastery regarding vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and communication skills. These differences can affect students' ability to complete tasks and demonstrate learning outcomes in alignment with the intended learning objectives. Teachers face difficulties in determining forms of assessment that can fairly measure student ability without compromising the competency standards that must be met. Assessment instruments that are too challenging may prevent students with foundational-level skills from demonstrating their understanding. Conversely, instruments that are too simple may fail to adequately capture the capabilities of more advanced students.

This situation is also linked to the specific characteristics of vocational education. Students in different vocational tracks may have distinct needs regarding their use of English. For instance, students in a hospitality program might require skills in customer service-oriented conversation, whereas students in an engineering program might more frequently encounter English-language work instructions or technical texts. These varying needs add a layer of complexity when determining the appropriate form and context for assessment.

Tomlinson (2014) outlines the concept of "differentiated instruction"—the adjustment of the learning process based on students' readiness, interests, and individual characteristics. This perspective is highly relevant for understanding the importance of accounting for the diversity of student abilities when designing tasks and assessments, all while ensuring that the target competency objectives remain intact.

Implications: Teachers need to consider students' readiness levels, provide a variety of relevant tasks, and ensure that assessments continue to measure the intended competencies.

3. Time Constraints in Conducting Evaluations

The third challenge is the limited time available to conduct comprehensive evaluations. Teachers are responsible not only for delivering course material but also for designing assessment instruments, grading student work, providing feedback, recording assessment results, and planning follow-up instruction. When class sizes are large, this entire process can be extremely time-consuming.

This challenge is particularly evident in the assessment of speaking and writing skills. Evaluating speaking requires providing each student with the opportunity to demonstrate their communicative abilities, while evaluating writing involves examining content, structure, linguistic accuracy, and the coherence of ideas. When instructional time is limited, teachers may struggle to provide in-depth, individual assessments for every student.

Time constraints can also affect the quality of feedback. Teachers might focus more on assigning a final grade than on providing specific explanations regarding errors and how to correct them. Consequently, the evaluation risks functioning merely as a way to measure learning outcomes, rather than as a tool to help students improve their English language proficiency.

Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasize the importance of formative assessment in supporting the learning process by providing information that can be used to improve instruction. This perspective suggests that evaluations are most effective when the results are used not just for grading, but also for identifying learning needs and determining appropriate follow-up actions.

Implications: Teachers can utilize efficient rubrics, prioritize feedback based on students' specific needs, and break evaluations down into several stages to keep the assessment process focused and manageable.

4. Difficulty in Developing Objective Assessment Instruments and Criteria

The fourth challenge lies in designing evaluation instruments that align with learning objectives and establishing clear assessment criteria. An effective instrument must measure the specific competencies intended for assessment, while the assessment criteria should enable teachers to consistently distinguish between different levels of student achievement. In English language instruction, this challenge arises because language competence encompasses various facets that cannot always be measured by a single type of instrument. Written tests may be used to assess a student's grasp of grammar or reading comprehension, yet they do not necessarily reflect the student's ability to communicate orally. Conversely, a presentation task can demonstrate speaking proficiency, but it does not directly measure the full scope of reading and writing comprehension.

Furthermore, overly broad assessment criteria can lead to inconsistent interpretations. For instance, the term "good" in a speaking rubric may not carry the same meaning for every evaluator unless it is accompanied by clear descriptions regarding fluency, linguistic accuracy, and intelligibility. This can make it difficult for teachers to provide consistent assessments, especially when evaluating a large number of students.

Brookhart (2013) emphasizes the importance of rubrics that clearly outline criteria and descriptions for various levels of performance quality. Rubrics help communicate learning expectations, guide the assessment process, and provide more specific information regarding the quality of a student's work.

Implications: Teachers should align their assessment instruments with learning objectives, utilize rubrics with measurable indicators, and review the suitability of these instruments before employing them for evaluation.

4. Discussion

The results of this study focus on the challenges English teachers face in assessing student learning outcomes, as well as the strategies that can be employed to address them. Challenges related to the assessment of speaking and writing skills, disparities in student ability, time constraints, the development of assessment instruments, and the provision

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of feedback indicate that the evaluation of English language learning requires systematic planning.

The use of assessment rubrics serves as a key strategy for enhancing the consistency and clarity of evaluation criteria. This aligns with Brookhart (2013), who emphasizes the importance of clear criteria and performance descriptions within a rubric. Furthermore, tailoring evaluation methods to meet individual student needs is consistent with the *differentiated instruction* approach proposed by Tomlinson (2014)—an instructional framework that accounts for the readiness and unique characteristics of each learner.

Time constraints can be mitigated through the implementation of gradual, formative evaluations. Black and Wiliam (1998) explain that formative assessment enables teachers to utilize learning outcomes to refine the instructional process. Meanwhile, selecting instruments that are well-aligned with the specific skills being assessed is essential for ensuring the quality of language assessment, a concept discussed by Brown (2004) through the principles of validity and reliability.

Providing feedback is another critical aspect of evaluating learning outcomes. Hattie and Timperley (2007) assert that effective feedback helps students understand their learning progress and the specific steps required for improvement. Consequently, evaluation results should not merely be used to assign grades; rather, they should serve as a foundation for implementing remedial actions, enrichment activities, and refinements to instructional strategies.

Overall, the evaluation of English language learning outcomes in vocational high schools (SMK) requires the integration of clear assessment criteria, appropriate instruments, effective time management, and constructive feedback. However, any conclusions regarding the specific strategies actually employed by teachers must be grounded in evidence from interviews and direct observations to ensure that the discussion accurately reflects conditions in the field.

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the challenges faced by English teachers in evaluating student learning outcomes in Vocational High Schools (SMK), as well as the strategies that can be employed to address these challenges. The challenges examined include the assessment of speaking and writing skills, disparities in student ability, time constraints, the development of evaluation instruments, and the provision of feedback. Relevant strategies include the use of assessment rubrics, the tailoring of evaluation formats to meet student needs, effective time management, the creation of appropriate instruments, and the provision of feedback followed by subsequent instructional actions.

This research underscores the importance of evaluation that is well-planned, fair, and oriented toward the improvement of learning. English teachers should utilize evaluation results not merely to determine student achievement, but also to identify learning difficulties and design remedial or enrichment activities. Future research is encouraged to explore teachers' experiences in greater depth—through interviews and observations across various Vocational High Schools—to gain a more comprehensive understanding of evaluation practices in English language instruction.

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