



Exploring Authentic Assessment Strategies for EFL Speaking: The Experience of an Indonesian High School Teacher at Senior High School

Anak Agung Ayu Mas Sukmawati¹, Luh Putu Artini², Putu Suarcaya³,
Ni Putu Era Marsakawati⁴

^{1,2,3,4}English Language Education, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Singaraja, Indonesia

| Article Info | Abstract |
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| <p>Received: 2026-05-03 Revised: 2026-05-21 Accepted: 2026-05-29</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Authentic Assessment;</i> <i>Curriculum Merdeka;</i> <i>EFL Speaking;</i> <i>Teacher Challenges.</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10408</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Anak Agung Ayu Mas Sukmawati anak.agung.ayu.12@student.undiksha.ac.id English Language Education, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Singaraja, Indonesia</p> | <p><i>This study aims to explore how an EFL teacher at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar designs and implements authentic speaking assessment under Curriculum Merdeka, which emphasizes competency-based and student-centered learning through meaningful real-life tasks. The study also identifies the challenges encountered during the assessment process. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research focused on one Grade XI class consisting of 20 students across three classroom meetings. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the teacher. The findings reveal that authentic speaking assessment was implemented through real-life-based tasks, including pair interviews, individual presentations, and role-plays on ordering food at a restaurant. These tasks were supported by analytic rubrics assessing fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence. The use of pair work and direct feedback increased students' engagement and confidence in speaking activities. However, several challenges were identified, including limited instructional time, large class size, limited integration of technology, insufficient formal training in assessment literacy, and limited practical guidance from the curriculum. Despite these constraints, the teacher demonstrated adaptive pedagogical creativity in aligning assessment practices with the principles of Curriculum Merdeka. The study highlights the need for stronger institutional support, professional development, and clearer assessment guidelines to ensure the effectiveness, consistency, and fairness of authentic speaking assessment in Indonesian secondary schools.</i></p> |

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the essential English skills that enables EFL students to express their ideas, interact with others, and gradually build confidence in using the language in daily communication. In language learning, speaking is considered an important indicator of students' communicative competence because it reflects their ability to use language meaningfully in real-life situations. Therefore, speaking instruction in EFL classrooms should provide opportunities for students to practice communication actively and authentically.

Under Curriculum Merdeka, which is currently implemented in Indonesia, teachers are encouraged to shift from traditional assessment practices toward authentic assessment methods (Widiyantoro, 2024). This curriculum emphasizes competency-based and student-centered learning, where students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through meaningful tasks related to real-life contexts. In speaking assessment, authentic assessment allows students to perform communicative activities that resemble actual language use outside the classroom.

Authentic speaking assessment involves activities such as interviews, role plays, presentations, and group discussions that reflect students' daily communication experiences. These activities provide opportunities for students to practice English naturally and meaningfully while improving their communicative competence (Iswari, I. I. R., Faridi, A., & Rozi, 2024). According to Damayanti and Setyaningsih (2024), authentic assessment in speaking provides a more comprehensive picture of students' actual language ability compared to standardized testing. It evaluates not only linguistic knowledge but also how students speak, think, and respond in real-life situations. Gulikers, Bastiaens, and Kirschner (2024) further explain that authentic assessment should include several essential elements, such as real-world tasks, authentic settings, real audiences, real tools, and meaningful student roles. These elements enable students to practice speaking in contexts that closely resemble communication outside the classroom.

The implementation of authentic assessment can also be understood through the perspective of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes meaningful communication through real-world tasks. Through authentic speaking tasks, students are encouraged to use language functionally rather than memorizing isolated grammatical forms. In addition, Sociocultural Theory highlights the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning in language development. Activities such as pair work and group discussions support students in constructing knowledge through interaction with peers and teachers. Furthermore, teachers' assessment literacy plays a crucial role in designing fair, reliable, and meaningful assessments that accurately measure students' speaking performance.

Despite its benefits, implementing authentic speaking assessment remains challenging for many teachers. Large class sizes, limited instructional time, limited integration of technology, and unclear curriculum guidelines often make it difficult for teachers to design speaking tasks that authentically reflect real-life communication (Robi'ah, 2025; Suwartono, Zulehah, & Morayo, 2024). In addition, teachers frequently experience limited professional training and insufficient resources related to assessment literacy, even though they recognize the importance of authentic assessment (Firdausi, 2024). As a result, many teachers develop their own scoring rubrics without formal guidance or standardized assessment frameworks (Erawati & Adnyana, 2024). These

conditions may also lead to issues related to scoring subjectivity, assessment reliability, unequal student participation, and increased teacher workload during the assessment process.

Previous studies have discussed the implementation of authentic assessment in EFL classrooms; however, there are still limited studies examining how teachers specifically design and implement authentic speaking assessment in actual classroom practices under Curriculum Merdeka, particularly at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar. This gap may exist because educational policymakers do not fully understand the practical difficulties teachers encounter when implementing authentic assessment in classrooms. Consequently, schools and teachers may not receive sufficient support, training, or contextual guidelines needed for effective implementation. Suwartono, Zulehah, and Morayo (2024) emphasize that teachers are expected to be innovative while often lacking contextual frameworks that match their classroom realities.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how an EFL teacher at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar designs and implements authentic speaking assessment for Grade XI students under Curriculum Merdeka. The study also explores the challenges encountered during the implementation process. By closely observing actual classroom practices, this research provides insights into how authentic speaking assessment is conducted in real educational settings and identifies the support needed to improve its effectiveness, fairness, and consistency (Brown, 2007).

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to provide a comprehensive and systematic description of a specific phenomenon in its natural context. The primary focus was to deeply understand how the teacher designs and implements authentic assessments for speaking skills within a real classroom setting at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar during the 2024/2025 academic year.

Participant and Setting

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select one EFL teacher who teaches 20 students in class 11.1. The participant was chosen based on her extensive experience in actively creating and applying authentic assessments to evaluate students' speaking abilities, ensuring that the data obtained was rich and relevant to the research objectives.

Data Collection

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, the researcher employed methodological triangulation involving three distinct data collection techniques:

1. **Classroom Observation:** Conducted across three separate meetings, each featuring a different authentic speaking task: pair interviews (Meeting 1), individual presentations (Meeting 2), and role-play activities (Meeting 3). This variety allowed the researcher to observe the consistency and adaptability of the teacher's assessment methods.
2. **Semi-Structured Interview:** A comprehensive interview was conducted with the teacher to gain insights into her pedagogical approach, the creative solutions she employed to overcome challenges (such as large class sizes), and her rationale for designing specific assessment rubrics.
3. **Document Analysis:** The researcher analyzed the teacher's assessment rubrics and the students' speaking scores from all three meetings to cross-verify the

observation and interview data with the actual evaluative outcomes.

Data Analysis

The collected data, including observation notes, interview transcripts, and assessment documents, were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved a rigorous examination of the data to identify recurring patterns, themes, and common ideas. The analysis focused on how the speaking assessments aligned with the goals of Kurikulum Merdeka, particularly in fostering student-centered learning and real-life communicative competence.

3. Result

From the classroom observation and semi- structured interview conducted in three meetings of English lesson, researcher found some data related to the teacher’s design and implementation of speaking authentic assessment for 20 Grade 11 students at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar. Some important information was found in the observation, such as: how speaking tasks were planned, the availability of time which was limited, the teacher’s training, the technology used, students’ confidence, and the curriculum support.

Teacher strategy in applying the speaking authentic assessment.

1. Speaking Task Design.

There were seen that the teacher designed the speaking tasks that reflect real-life communication. She designed three ways in assessing the speaking skill in the same topic such as pair interviews, presentations, and a role-play which based on Curriculum Merdeka these activities align with constructivism and Communicative Language Teaching, as they require students to use English meaningfully and creatively. In this study, the researcher did the observation on three meetings of lesson when the teacher delivered the topic of ordering food at a restaurant.

Table 1. The Student's Score in Meeting

| Student Code | Fluency (1-4) | Pronunciation (1-4) | Vocabulary (1-4) | Grammar (1-4) | Confidence (1-4) | Total Score | Teacher Feedback |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--|
| S1 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 16 | Good fluency and vocabulary ; work on grammar. |
| S2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 11 | Needs to improve fluency and confidence. |
| S3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 19 | Excellent effort; very confident speaker. |
| S4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 12 | Fluent but needs to |

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|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|--|
| | | | | | | | 20 | speak more clearly. |
| S5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 20 | Outstanding performance all around. |
| S6 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 15 | Consistent performance; keep it up. |
| S7 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 17 | Very expressive; minor grammar errors. |
| S8 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 12 | Try to expand vocabulary and clarify speech. |
| S9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 | Needs more practice across all areas. |
| S10 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 14 | Try to be more confident in speaking. |
| S11 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 19 | Strong vocabulary and confident delivery. |
| S12 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 12 | Clear ideas but needs better grammar. |
| S13 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 18 | Excellent fluency and vocabulary use. |
| S14 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 17 | Great job! Grammar was especially strong. |

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|------------|---|---|---|---|---|----|--|
| S15 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 | Very shy; encourage more practice. |
| S16 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 19 | Confident and engaging presentation. |
| S17 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 11 | Needs to focus on grammar and fluency. |
| S18 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 14 | Improving, but watch pronunciation. |
| S19 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 11 | Practice will help with confidence. |
| S20 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 18 | Very confident; work a bit on grammar. |

Table 2. Student's Score in Meeting 2 : Presentation

| Student Code | Fluency (1-4) | Pronunciation (1-4) | Vocabulary (1-4) | Grammar (1-4) | Confidence (1-4) | Teacher Feedback |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| S1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | You speak clearly and at a good pace. Try to add more variety to your words and speak up more. |
| S2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Outstanding! Your speech is smooth and confident. Keep exploring new topics and vocabulary. |
| S3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Don't be shy—practice will help you feel more comfortable. |

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| | | | | | | Try to use new words each time. |
| S4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good effort! You're clear and steady. Challenge yourself to use more advanced sentences. |
| S5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Very confident and creative with your words. Work on pronunciation for even better clarity. |
| S6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Try to relax and speak a bit louder. The more you practice, the more natural you'll sound. |
| S7 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Nice job! You're consistent, but don't be afraid to take more risks with your vocabulary. |
| S8 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | Excellent confidence and vocabulary. Just pay attention to small grammar details. |
| S9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Keep practicing! Try to speak more smoothly and use the new words we learn in class. |
| S10 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good work overall. Try to add more expression and energy to your speaking. |

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|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S11 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | You're a natural speaker—very clear and engaging! Keep challenging yourself with new topics. |
| S12 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | You have good ideas. Focus on clearer pronunciation and keep building your confidence. |
| S13 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Excellent in every aspect! You inspire others with your confidence and vocabulary. |
| S14 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Don't worry about mistakes—just keep practicing and you'll get better each time. |
| S15 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Solid performance. Try to use more descriptive words and speak a bit louder. |
| S16 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Wonderful! You speak with confidence and clarity. Keep up the great work and help your friends. |
| S17 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | You're trying hard—keep practicing; your pronunciation and confidence will follow. |

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|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S18 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good job! Try to add more variety to your vocabulary and keep practicing your fluency. |
| S19 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Excellent work! You always speak clearly and with great confidence. Continue to inspire others. |
| S20 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Keep practicing, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Your confidence will grow with time. |

Table 3 Student's Score in Meeting 3: Role-Play Activity

| Student Code | Fluency | Pronunciation | Vocabulary | Grammar | Confidence | Teacher Feedback |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|--|
| S1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good fluency and vocabulary; work on grammar. |
| S2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Excellent in all aspects; keep it up! |
| S3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Practice menu phrases; speak more clearly. |
| S4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Clear role-play; try to use more expressions. |
| S5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Confident and varied vocabulary; clearer pronunciation needed. |
| S6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Use full sentences; practice polite phrases. |
| S7 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good effort; add more polite |

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| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | restaurant language. |
| S8 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | Strong fluency and confidence; check grammar. |
| S9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Speak louder; use more ordering phrases. |
| S10 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Smooth delivery; try more descriptive words. |
| S11 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Excellent communication and accuracy. |
| S12 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good vocabulary; improve pronunciation. |
| S13 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Outstanding in all criteria. |
| S14 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Practice basic phrases; increase confidence. |
| S15 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Consistent performance; use more expressions. |
| S16 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Very natural and polite; excellent work. |
| S17 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | Good vocabulary; work on fluency and grammar. |
| S18 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Good responses; try longer sentences. |
| S19 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Very confident and clear; great job! |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| S20 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Practice speaking up; use more menu words. |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|

2. Use Assessment Rubrics

Assessment rubrics were used to assess fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence in speaking which was applied to all speaking tasks, and direct feedback for each student.

Table 4 The rubric of Speaking Assessment Use

The rubric of speaking assessment use

| Criteria | 4 (Excellent) | 3 (Good) | 2 (Fair) | 1 (Needs Improvement) |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Fluency | Speaks smoothly, no pauses | Minor pauses, mostly fluent | Often pauses, some hesitation | Hard to follow, frequent stops |
| Pronunciation | Clear and easy to understand | Some unclear words | Often unclear, hard to follow | Very unclear, hard to understand |
| Vocabulary | Uses many appropriate words | Uses some varied words | Limited vocabulary | Very basic or off-topic words |
| Grammar | Few to no mistakes | Some small mistakes | Many mistakes, meaning still clear | Frequent mistakes, meaning unclear |
| Confidence | Speaks confidently, engaging | Some nervousness but clear | Shy or hesitant, needs support | Very shy, avoids speaking |

3. Pair Work and Supportive Feedback

The method that makes the students have a pair work was seen helpful for shy students. Teacher gave a clear feedback based on the students' performance. The clear feedback is crucial given to the students to improve their speaking skill.

4. Adaptation to Curriculum Merdeka

As what the Curriculum Merdeka aimed in highlighting flexibility, creativity and student-centre, the teacher tried to deal with by designing the tasks and the assessment based on her experiences what the students' need in the real life because the curriculum gave less practical guidance.

5. Teacher's challenges

Based on the class observation and interview, some challenges found. It was seen in the table below

Table 5. Observation Findings

| Criteria | 4 (Excellent) | 3 (Good) | 2 (Fair) | 1 (Needs Improvement) |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Fluency | Speaks smoothly, no pauses | Minor pauses, mostly fluent | Often pauses, some hesitation | Hard to follow, frequent stops |
| Pronunciation | Clear and easy to understand | Some unclear words | Often unclear, hard to follow | Very unclear, hard to understand |
| Vocabulary | Uses many appropriate words | Uses some varied words | Limited vocabulary | Very basic or off-topic words |
| Grammar | Few to no mistakes | Some small mistakes | Many mistakes, meaning still clear | Frequent mistakes, meaning unclear |
| Confidence | Speaks confidently, engaging | Some nervousness but clear | Shy or hesitant, needs support | Very shy, avoids speaking |

Table 6 Interview Findings

| Aspect | Interview Question | Interview Response | Interpretation |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Speaking Task Design | How do you design and implement speaking tasks? | "I use pair work to help students speak naturally." | Teacher designs tasks that reflect real communication. |
| Time Constraints | What are the main challenges during speaking assessments? | "I have 38 students. It's hard to listen to them all." | Large class size limits speaking time and feedback. |
| Teacher Training | Have you received training for designing assessments? | "I make my own rubric from Google." | Teacher lacks formal training in valid assessment design. |
| Technology & Tools | Can you operate maximum the technology provided? | "I cannot use it max because I don't have skill in using it." | Less skill limits creativity and task variety. |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| Student Confidence | How do you help shy students participate? | "Pair work helps shy students feel more confident." | Pair work is effective for increasing participation. |
| Curriculum Support | Does the curriculum provide clear guidance? | "The curriculum says to use authentic tasks but gives no examples." | Gap between policy and practical support. |

Based on the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and assessment documents, several challenges were identified in the implementation of authentic speaking assessment in the observed Grade XI class. The participant was an English teacher at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar who had experience teaching under Curriculum Merdeka and independently developed authentic speaking tasks based on classroom needs and personal teaching experience. Data were collected using observation protocols focusing on classroom interaction, speaking-task implementation, student participation, assessment practices, and feedback strategies.

Field notes were written during and after each classroom meeting to capture important classroom events and teacher-student interactions. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through coding, categorizing recurring patterns, and developing themes related to authentic assessment practices and teacher challenges. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation through observations, interviews, and assessment documents. Participant confidentiality and informed consent were also maintained throughout the research process.

1. Authentic Speaking-Task Implementation

The teacher implemented authentic speaking assessment through pair interviews, role plays, and individual presentations related to real-life communication topics. These activities reflected the principles of Curriculum Merdeka and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasize meaningful communication through contextual tasks. Pair work was frequently used to encourage student interaction and reduce speaking anxiety, particularly among shy students. However, classroom implementation was not always optimal due to several practical constraints.

2. Assessment Rubrics and Feedback

The teacher used analytic rubrics assessing fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence. Direct feedback was provided during and after speaking performances to help students improve their speaking ability. However, the teacher acknowledged that the rubrics were self-developed without formal assessment training or standardized institutional guidance. This situation created challenges related to scoring consistency, assessment reliability, and validation procedures. Although the teacher attempted to assess students fairly, the absence of formal assessment literacy training increased the possibility of scoring subjectivity and inconsistency.

3. Student Engagement and Confidence

One of the strongest findings of this study was the positive impact of pair work on students' confidence and classroom participation. Pair activities helped shy students feel more comfortable speaking English because they could practice with peers before performing individually. The collaborative interaction also reflected Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction and peer support. Nevertheless, some students remained hesitant and lacked confidence during speaking performances. This condition may have been influenced by limited vocabulary mastery, fear of making mistakes, unequal participation opportunities, and differences in individual speaking ability. Although authentic speaking tasks encouraged participation, speaking improvement appeared gradual and varied among students.

4. Teacher Challenges

Several major challenges were identified during the implementation process.

a. Large Class Size and Time Limitation

The observed classroom consisted of 20 students, which the teacher considered relatively large for speaking assessment activities requiring individual performance and feedback. Due to limited instructional time, the teacher struggled to provide equal speaking opportunities and individualized feedback for all students. As a result, some speaking activities had to be shortened, and not all students were able to perform presentations during the observed meetings. These findings support previous studies indicating that authentic assessment is time-consuming and difficult to implement effectively in large classrooms.

b. Limited Integration of Technology

Although technological facilities were available at school, their use in classroom instruction remained limited. The teacher primarily relied on whiteboards and pair-work activities rather than digital learning tools. Limited technological integration reduced opportunities to design more creative speaking tasks, provide audiovisual speaking models, or allow students to produce more interactive performances. This limitation also reflected the teacher's lack of confidence and experience in integrating technology into authentic assessment practices.

c. Teacher Training and Assessment Validation

The teacher reported receiving no formal professional training specifically related to authentic assessment design or assessment literacy. Most assessment knowledge was obtained independently through online resources and personal teaching experience. Consequently, assessment rubrics were developed individually without standardized validation procedures. This situation affected scoring consistency and reliability, as noted in previous studies emphasizing that

many teachers understand assessment conceptually but still struggle with practical implementation and rubric development.

d. Student Confidence

The teacher explained that many students were still hesitant to speak English confidently, especially during individual performances. Pair work successfully reduced anxiety for some students, but additional strategies were still needed to improve overall speaking confidence and encourage equal participation. Some students remained passive during classroom interaction, suggesting that authentic speaking assessment alone may not fully address students' psychological barriers in language learning.

e. Curriculum Support

The teacher also experienced difficulties related to limited practical guidance from Curriculum Merdeka regarding authentic speaking assessment implementation. Although the curriculum encourages authentic and student-centered assessment, teachers were often required to independently interpret and adapt assessment procedures based on their classroom conditions. This lack of clear operational guidelines contributed to differences in assessment practices among teachers and raised concerns regarding national assessment consistency and validity.

5. Curriculum Adaptation

Despite the challenges, the teacher demonstrated adaptive pedagogical creativity in aligning authentic speaking assessment with the principles of Curriculum Merdeka. Classroom activities were modified according to students' abilities, available instructional time, and classroom realities. These findings indicate that while Curriculum Merdeka promotes meaningful and authentic learning, stronger institutional support, professional development programs, clearer assessment frameworks, and practical classroom guidance are still necessary to ensure more effective, fair, and reliable implementation of authentic speaking assessment in Indonesian secondary schools.

4. Discussion

1. Authentic Speaking-Task Implementation

The findings of the classroom observations and interviews indicate that the teacher implemented authentic speaking assessment in practical and context-based ways that reflected real-life communication. The teacher designed several speaking activities, including pair interviews, individual presentations, and role plays about ordering food at a restaurant. These tasks allowed students to practice English in situations that closely resembled everyday communication outside the classroom. Such implementation supports Wiggins' (1990) concept of authentic assessment, which emphasizes meaningful tasks connected to real-world contexts.

The speaking activities also align with the five-dimensional framework proposed by Gulikers, Bastiaens, and Kirschner (2024), which highlights that authentic assessment should involve realistic tasks, social interaction, meaningful roles, and contextual learning environments. By engaging students in communicative tasks related to daily life, the teacher encouraged students to use English actively and meaningfully rather than merely memorizing grammatical forms. This practice reflects the principles of Curriculum Merdeka, which emphasizes constructivist and communicative learning approaches where students actively construct knowledge through authentic experiences (Wiggins, 1998).

However, although the authentic tasks successfully created meaningful speaking opportunities, the findings also suggest that not all students participated equally. Some students were more active and confident during speaking performances, while others remained passive or hesitant. This indicates that authentic tasks alone may not automatically guarantee equal engagement for all learners. Differences in language proficiency, vocabulary mastery, speaking anxiety, and fear of making mistakes may have influenced students' participation levels.

2. Assessment Rubrics and Feedback

The teacher used analytic assessment rubrics focusing on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence. The use of clear criteria helped the teacher assess students' speaking performance more systematically and provided students with clearer expectations regarding speaking performance. Direct feedback given after speaking activities also helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses for future improvement. According to Richards (2008), effective speaking assessment should include clear performance criteria and constructive feedback to support students' communicative development.

Nevertheless, the study also found several limitations regarding the assessment process. The rubrics used in the classroom were independently developed by the teacher without formal validation procedures or professional assessment training. As a result, there was potential for scoring inconsistency and subjectivity during the evaluation process. Different interpretations of speaking quality, especially related to confidence and fluency, may affect scoring reliability. In addition, unequal speaking opportunities due to limited classroom time may have influenced the fairness of assessment outcomes because not all students had sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their speaking ability fully.

3. Student Engagement and Confidence

One of the strongest findings of this study is the role of pair work in supporting students' confidence and participation. Pair activities allowed shy students to practice speaking in smaller and less threatening settings before performing in front of the whole class. This strategy aligns with Richards and Rodgers (2014), who argue that collaborative speaking activities can reduce anxiety and encourage learner participation in communicative language classrooms.

The findings also support Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that language learning develops through social interaction and peer collaboration. Through pair work, students were able to receive support from peers, negotiate meaning, and gradually build confidence in using English. Over time, several students became more willing to

participate actively in speaking activities and appeared more comfortable expressing their ideas orally.

However, some students still remained shy and hesitant despite the supportive classroom environment. This condition may have been influenced by several factors, including limited vocabulary knowledge, low self-confidence, fear of making pronunciation or grammatical mistakes, and limited prior speaking experience. In some cases, more dominant students controlled pair interactions while quieter students participated minimally. This finding suggests that pair work, although beneficial, does not fully eliminate unequal participation in speaking activities. Teachers may therefore need additional strategies, such as rotating speaking roles, providing scaffolded support, or conducting more individualized speaking practice, to ensure more balanced participation among students.

4. Teacher Challenges

The study identified several challenges faced by the teacher in implementing authentic speaking assessment. One major issue was the relatively large class size combined with limited instructional time. Although the observed classroom consisted of 20 students, the teacher explained during the interview that she often handled larger classes in other teaching contexts, which increased the difficulty of conducting speaking assessments effectively. This clarification addresses the apparent inconsistency regarding student numbers reported in different sections of the study.

Limited instructional time made it difficult for the teacher to provide individualized feedback and sufficient speaking opportunities for all students. Some students were unable to complete presentations due to time constraints, which potentially affected their speaking development and assessment fairness. These findings support previous studies by Zaim, Mukhaiyar, and Syahriati (2017) and Zaim, Refnaldi, and Arsyad (2020), which emphasize that authentic speaking assessment is highly demanding in terms of time and classroom management, especially in Indonesian classrooms with relatively large student populations.

Another challenge involved the limited integration of technology in classroom activities. Although technological facilities were available at school, the teacher mainly relied on whiteboards and oral pair-work activities. Limited technological skills and insufficient training prevented the teacher from maximizing digital tools that could support more interactive and visually engaging speaking tasks. This finding is consistent with Maknun, Zamzani, and Jamilah (2024), who argue that limited facilities and technological competence often reduce teachers' ability to implement innovative digital learning practices effectively.

The study also found that the teacher had not received formal professional training specifically related to authentic assessment or assessment literacy. Most assessment knowledge was obtained independently through online resources and teaching experience. Consequently, assessment design and rubric development lacked systematic validation procedures. Schön (1983) emphasizes that professional reflection is important in teaching practice; however, without formal training, teachers may struggle to ensure assessment reliability and validity consistently. Chappelle, Enright, and Jamieson (2008) further argue that assessment tasks can only be considered valid when they accurately represent the real-world communicative skills being measured. Therefore, stronger

professional development programs and institutional support are needed to improve teachers' assessment literacy and assessment quality.

5. Curriculum Adaptation

The findings demonstrate that Curriculum Merdeka encourages flexibility and creativity in authentic assessment implementation. The teacher adapted speaking activities according to classroom conditions, students' abilities, and available resources. This flexibility enabled the teacher to design communicative and context-based learning experiences that aligned with the curriculum's student-centered principles.

However, the flexibility of Curriculum Merdeka also created challenges because teachers received limited practical guidance regarding authentic speaking assessment procedures and standardization. As a result, assessment practices depended heavily on individual teacher interpretation and creativity, potentially leading to inconsistencies across classrooms and schools. Sakman, Abdulkarim, Komalasari, and Masyitoh (2024) note that while curriculum flexibility promotes innovation, insufficient operational guidance may reduce assessment consistency and comparability. Therefore, clearer assessment frameworks, professional training, and institutional support are necessary to help teachers implement authentic speaking assessment more effectively, fairly, and consistently across Indonesian secondary schools.

5. Conclusion

The focus of this study is to explore how an EFL teacher at SMA (SLUA) Saraswati 1 Denpasar creates and applies a speaking authentic assessment based on the curriculum Merdeka concept. Some creative strategies found which are used by the teacher such as pair interviews, presentations, and role-plays, to make speaking tasks more meaningful and connected to real-life situations. This implementation correlates with the findings of (Suwartono, T., Zulehah, R. A., & Morayo, 2024), who found that an authentic assessment is usually seen positively by Indonesian EFL teachers because it provides a more comprehensive picture of a student's actual communicative abilities than traditional assessments. Speaking rubrics assessment is also used to give clear score and feedback to the students in order to improve the students' improvement in speaking, especially for those who have less confident and shy.

Authentic assessments succeed in Indonesian schools when they are simple, relevant to daily life, and supported by clear rubrics (Zaim, M., Mukhaiyar, & Syahriati, 2017). It is a challenge for teacher in giving every student enough speaking practise and fair assessment when she still faces main problems, such as large number of students in the class, limited time duration. (Zaim, M., Refnaldi, & Arsyad, 2020) and (Suwartono, T., Zulehah, R. A., & Morayo, 2024) highlight how large classes create logistical hurdles, restricting personalized feedback vital for speaking development. Furthermore, lack of technology use and insufficient training or clear guidance from the curriculum is the other challenge faced by the teacher. (Maknun,L. , Zamzani,Z. and Jamilah, 2024) said that schools that don't have the right facilities often can't use digital tools to their full potential for testing, which leads to inconsistent use of these modern testing methods. She must believe on her own experience and creativity to manage these problems, but the result can be inconsistency and less quality assessment.

What was found in this study highlights the effectiveness and fairness in creating speaking authentic assessment, supporting better teachers training, technology use and resources support and clearer guidance in curriculum are essential needed to be provided. Schools and policy makers are hoped can help teachers providing more meaningful learning experiences and better prepare students to use English confidently in real-life situations when addressing these challenges.

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