CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Background of the Research

Merdeka Curriculum is regarded as a transmission in Indonesian education system in which it is also perceived as a new paradigm in all educational levels (Wahyuni et al., 2023). As an educational foundation, the Indonesian government progressively supervises and revises the curriculum used by educational instances in which the instruction of implementing Merdeka Curriculum is viewed as a way to renew Indonesian education system after pandemic (Sherly & Sihombing, 2020). The educators are offered with more flexible learning condition compared to the previous curriculum (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022).

Hence, the teachers of all learning subjects should change their learning and assessing ways for the students. In *Merdeka Curriculum* in terms of assessment, the *Merdeka Curriculum* strengthens the relationship between learning and evaluation by promoting authentic assessment practices. This approach emphasizes continuous assessment from the beginning to the end of the learning process, allowing teachers to evaluate not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of skills, creativity, and critical thinking (Sugiri & Priatmoko, 2020).

Meanwhile, the previous curriculum (Curriculum 2013) also recognized the relationship between learning and assessment, it leaned more towards standardized summative evaluations, such as national exams and structured written tests. Formative and authentic assessments were less emphasized and often considered secondary. On the other hand, the *Merdeka Curriculum* places authentic assessment at the core of the educational process, encouraging a more holistic understanding of student progress through observation, reflection, and real-world problem-solving activities. Briefly, the assessment in *Merdeka Curriculum* should be directed to the implementation of authentic assessment (Ripalga & Fitrawati, 2023; Sadora et al., 2021; Sugiri & Priatmoko, 2020).

As a different way of assessing in education, authentic assessment is defined differently by experts. Butakor and Ceasar (2021) defines authentic assessment as a process that applies actual proof of students' learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes related to instructional classroom activities. It aims to provide input on students' learning to encourage further improvement of their knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking that could be used to imitate a real-world situation. Zeim et al., (2020) describe authentic assessment as a process that aims to report students' progress and obtain various regular information on students' learning progress and outcomes. Based on the definition, authentic assessment is actually a process of collecting the students' performance in real context.

Authentic assessment prepares the students to be ready to show their competency. Huang and Jiang (2021) stated that authentic assessment has the potential to bridge the gap between what students learn in school, the skills needed in professional settings, and the challenges they face in everyday life. Traditional

assessments often focus on memorization and theoretical knowledge, which may not fully prepare students to apply their learning in practical or professional contexts. This creates a gap where students may excel in academic exams but struggle to adapt their knowledge to real-world situations. Authentic assessment, on the other hand, addresses this gap by requiring students to engage in tasks that reflect real-life challenges, such as problem-solving scenarios, collaborative projects, and tasks that simulate professional environments. By bridging these contexts, authentic assessments help students develop transferable skills, enhance critical thinking, and gain a deeper understanding of how to apply their knowledge practically, thus better preparing them for future careers and everyday life interactions. The use of authentic assessment is expected to stimulate students to improve their language skills and communication in an authentic context. Forsyth and Evans (2019) state that authentic assessment connects the school with real world life. Sundari and Sabarun (2023) discovers that authentic assessment facilities the development of students deep understanding on how to perform knowledge in real life. Briefly, It highlights more on improving students' knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking by providing them with a real world task which is able to show significant application of their knowledge and skills.

If the authentic assessment is connected to English as a foreign language learning (EFL), it can contribute on learning process and product. As being stated in curriculum, teaching English is divided into four language skills, namely: speaking, writing, listening and reading. According to Harmer (2006), speaking and

writing are categorized into productive skill, while listening and reading are categorized into receptive skill. It means that in speaking and writing the students should produce various learning product or performance (Galata, 2021). For example, in speaking the students can make conversation, story telling, speech, etc; meanwhile in writing the students can write down various texts or genres. Hence, the teachers need to check their performance in speaking or product in writing in a detailed way.

In the previous curriculum (Curriculum 2013), assessment practices for productive skills, especially speaking, focused more on linguistic aspects such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary mastery. Common assessment methods used include structured oral exams, such as short dialogues or answering questions. This method places less emphasis on real-world communication contexts and is less flexible in adapting to individual student needs, especially in writing skill assessments that focus on technical aspects such as sentence structure, grammar, and paragraph organization. The tasks given are usually in the form of short essays or written answers with standardized criteria. Assessments tend to be rigid and less accommodating of student creativity. These conventional methods often fail to provide authentic contexts where students can demonstrate their skills in real-world scenarios, as highlighted by Butakor and Ceaser (2021). As a result, these methods do not fully support the development or accurate evaluation of ongoing skills such as speaking and writing. However, in the Kurikulum Merdeka, these limitations are overcome by emphasizing authentic assessment as the main approach. Authentic assessment is more in line with the dynamic nature of productive skills because it

involves continuous evaluation and requires students to engage in real-world tasks. The assessment of speaking skills is based on differentiation that is tailored to students' skills, learning styles, and interests. Introducing activities such as role- playing, interactive discussions, and real-world context simulations to measure practical communication skills. Learning reflection is also used as part of the assessment to increase students' metacognitive awareness. For example, the use of creative media such as Voucher Cards can increase students' participation and confidence in speaking. In addition, in assessing writing skills, authentic assessment is emphasized through projects such as writing factual report texts and real-world context-based tasks. A holistic rubric is used that includes aspects of creativity, contextual relevance, and argumentation skills. Formative assessment should be integrated to provide continuous feedback, for example, through gradual revision and peer review. For example, the development of task-based learning-based teaching modules that assess writing skills through products such as articles, reports, or visual presentations.

Butakor and Ceaser (2021) argue that the traditional type of assessment frequently fails to observe further types of learning and it could not optimally view students' changes in their knowledge it is because students are not given opportunities to apply their knowledge or understanding. Here, authentic assessment is as the alternative assessment. In addition, Merdeka Curriculum carries out the assessment which is directed at an ongoing assessment such as authentic assessment (Pantiwati et al., 2023). Hence, this authentic assessment is matched to the nature of productive skill (speaking and writing) which is also as an on-going skill.

Mastering authentic assessment in EFL is one of criteria in conducting quality learning. Researches done by Mardjuki (2018) and Inayah, Komariah and Nasir (2019) discover that EFL learning without implementation of authentic assessment is not successful. Therefore, the teachers should be directed to master authentic assessment well which can be done during in university or through workshop or seminars. In line with this, Zaim and Refnaldi (2016) and Koh (2015) state that achieving competency should be done by implementing authentic assessment. It is hard for students' competency can be measured without it.

By knowing the importance and roles of authentic assessment in productive language skills, English teachers should have a good perception of it and try to practice the use of authentic assessment. The teacher's perception of authentic assessment influences how the teachers act or practice it. Yanti (2020) argues that teachers' perceptions and classroom practices are closely interconnected due to its perception is the reflection of their classroom practices. Furthermore, Setiawati (2018) states that teachers' perceptions will reflect the teachers' knowledge, belief, and thinking in the classroom practice. It will impact on the role and contribution of the teachers about authentic assessment. Theoretically, when the teachers have good perception on authentic assessment, they implement it well.

In a change of something like curriculum, Perception refers to the process by which individuals interpret and understand sensory information and external stimuli, forming a subjective understanding of their environment. Perception plays a vital role in shaping attitudes, decisions, and actions. In the context of educational change such as curriculum reform, teachers' perceptions are critical because they influence how they interpret and respond to new teaching practices,

including the implementation of authentic assessment. Positive perceptions can motivate teachers to adopt and engage with innovative methods, while negative perceptions can hinder the effectiveness of these changes. According to Saks and Johns (2011), when teachers view curriculum change positively, they are more likely to respond to it with enthusiasm and adaptability. Conversely, as Ayubi, Erlina, and Desvitasari (2021) found, challenges such as difficulties in managing classroom activities, maintaining consistent assessments, and monitoring the originality of student work can lead to negative perceptions. Therefore, providing adequate training and support is essential to fostering positive perceptions and ensuring the successful implementation of authentic assessment practices. Saks and Johns (2011) explain that perception has roles to interpret the message so that when teacher perceive positively, it can leads the teacher to positive thing. Hence, when authentic assessment is implemented, the teachers should have positive perception about it. Ayubi, Erlina and Desvitasari (2021) discover that problems or lack knowledge of authentic assessment makes the teachers have negative perception on it. The problems that are usually found covers managing class activity, maintaining consistence scoring, and monitoring student's work originality.

Struggle of authentic assessment leads the teachers decrease the teachers' confidence hence influencing teachers' positive perception. Achmad and Prastowo (2022) discovers that providing quality assessment is the most difficult problem in education. It is suggested that teachers' ability in assessment should be improved significantly. Actually, teachers have good belief of authentic assessment (Huang & Jiang, 2021). However, Putra and Marhaban (2021)

discover that teachers still struggle with creating reliable assessment methods and rubrics. It made there is a gap between teachers' positive perception and implementation.

To find out the real situation of the implementation of authentic assessment in the Independent Curriculum, the researcher traced several schools that implemented the Independent Curriculum and determined one school that met the research criteria, namely implementing the Independent Curriculum and developing authentic assessments, especially in English language learning. The school that was determined according to these criteria was SMAN 2 Kuta which is located close to the tourism world where in addition to paying close attention to the development of learning and also its learning assessment, this school also pays close attention to the development of English, for that reason this school was chosen as the research site. Although SMAN 2 Kuta implements the independent curriculum, there are several gaps in the context of authentic assessment in learning, especially in English subjects, where the authentic assessment system in the independent curriculum is still relatively new and requires understanding and adjustment to changes in the previous curriculum, both in terms of the competencies possessed by English teachers and their implementation in learning. Investigating how to bridge this gap and developing teacher competencies in authentic assessment is essential for the success of curriculum implementation and improving educational outcomes.

Based on the explanation of the theory and facts of authentic assessment in reality, it was urgent to do research about the teachers' perception and implementation of authentic assessment in productive skill for three reasons. First,

the urgency of conducting research on teachers' perceptions and implementation of authentic assessment in productive skills under the Merdeka Curriculum is evident for several important reasons. First, the rapid introduction of the new curriculum without adequate preparation has created a significant gap between policy expectations and implementation in learning. Understanding the challenges faced by teachers and their perceptions of authentic assessment is critical to identifying immediate solutions and developing practical strategies to align teaching practices with curriculum objectives. Addressing these issues promptly is critical to avoid a prolonged mismatch between policy objectives and educational outcomes, which may affect students' skill development. Second, teachers' perceptions play a critical role in the successful adoption of educational innovations. Positive perceptions can foster motivation and engagement, encouraging teachers to explore creative and effective ways to implement authentic assessment. Conversely, negative perceptions can create resistance, leading to ineffective practices or continued reliance on outdated assessment methods. Therefore, exploring and understanding teachers' perceptions not only highlights the challenges but also offers insights on how to foster a positive mindset that supports curriculum reform. Finally, observing the implementation of authentic assessment in learning and providing valuable input in developing teacher competency in authentic assessment especially speaking and writing in English language learning. This research can inform the design of targeted professional development initiatives, resource allocation, and policy adjustments to better support teachers in adopting best practices. Furthermore, understanding the current state of assessment implementation can serve as a benchmark to

evaluate the effectiveness of government interventions and track progress over time. Thus, this research not only addresses immediate educational challenges but also contributes to shaping long-term policies and professional development strategies.

In line with research on the field of authentic assessment in education that has been carried out previously by several experts (Rahayu, Paramarta & Dewi, 2021; Dharma & Oktaviani, 2019; Arjuna, Hikmat & Candraningrum, 2024; Prawisanthi, et al 2021), it is emphasized that authentic assessment in education has produced valuable insights that recommend further research related to authentic assessment. Rahayu, Paramarta, and Dewi (2021) also emphasized further that the use of authentic assessment significantly improves critical thinking skills and student engagement in learning when implemented correctly. Likewise, Dharma and Oktaviani (2019) highlighted the positive impact of authentic assessment on students' problem-solving skills and their ability to connect academic content to real-world situations. In addition, they also highlighted challenges such as limited teacher knowledge and lack of resources to implement authentic assessment effectively. Arjuna, Hikmat, and Candraningrum (2024) examined teachers' perceptions of authentic assessment and found that although teachers recognized its value, many struggled to abandon traditional assessment methods due to lack of training and institutional support. Prawisanthi et al. (2021) further emphasized the need for clear guidelines and ongoing professional development to improve teachers' competence in designing and implementing authentic assessments across subjects. The results of these studies play an important role as a reference in this study, namely to explore and explore more

deeply the general challenges and potential for the use and implementation of authentic assessments. However, there is still a gap in understanding the application of authentic assessment, especially productive skills such as speaking and writing in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Furthermore, the current study discusses the urgent need to explore teachers' perceptions and practical experiences in the context of the new curriculum reform, which has different requirements compared to previous educational frameworks. By investigating these areas, this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the current status of authentic assessment and inform strategies to overcome challenges, especially in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

This study differs from previous studies in three key ways. First, this study focuses on productive language skills. Unlike previous studies that may have explored a range of language skills, such as receptive or interactive skills, this study specifically examines EFL teachers' perceptions of productive language skills. This distinction is important because authentic assessments within the Merdeka Curriculum framework are designed to assess productive skills (speaking and writing) rather than receptive skills (listening and reading). Second, this study is contextually relevant to the Kurikulum Merdeka. While many studies have explored general EFL teaching practices, this study aligns with the requirements and objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes the assessment of productive skills. This contextual focus ensures that this study addresses needs and challenges that are relevant to the current curriculum reform in Indonesia. Finally, this study places teachers' perceptions at the center of its inquiry. Previous studies may have examined the effectiveness of authentic

assessments or the challenges faced by students, but this study uniquely focuses on EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the use of authentic assessments for productive skills. By centering on teachers' perspectives, this study provides valuable insights into the implementation and challenges of authentic assessment from an educator's perspective.

1.2.   Problem Identification

The implementation of authentic assessment has various problems in reality. It is proven by several research done by experts. Dharma and Adiwijaya (2019) discover that teachers' readiness was average in planning and not ready in executing and reporting authentic assessments due to 3 main reasons faced by the teachers namely insufficient of authentic assessment understanding, lack of experience in designing authentic assessment, and lack of discussion about authentic assessment among other teachers who already joined authentic assessments' workshop. Meanwhile, Imansyah et al., (2018) teachers had a good enough perception of authentic assessment meanwhile their understanding and practices seemed to be limited because there were some problems in implementing the authentic assessment.

Furthermore, Pre-observations were conducted at SMAN 2 Kuta in the 2024/2025 school year. Pre-observations were conducted by interviewing two English teachers who teach at the school. From several questions asked in the initial observation, there were several findings from the responses given by the English teachers who were interviewed. From the results of the interview, the teachers only knew a little about authentic assessment. They only knew about it from sharing with

friends at MGMP. For them, authentic assessment is good and appropriate for assessing English language skills, especially for speaking and writing. However, designing and implementing authentic assessment is still an obstacle. In fact, they have tried to find an authentic assessment model, but it is difficult to find a model that is in accordance with the competencies in the Kurikulum Merdeka. In short, they have a positive view of authentic assessment and the progress of authentic assessment learning. so that from the results of the interview the problems that occurred can be identified as follows: First, English teachers feel that curriculum changes are rapid so that it takes a long time to understand authentic assessment in learning in the independent curriculum, for that, it is necessary to explore more deeply the teacher's perception of the implementation of authentic assessment to measure students' productive skills. Second, English teachers are still exploring the right method in implementing authentic assessment, especially productive skills, therefore it is very necessary to investigate how teachers apply authentic assessment in assessing students' productive skills. Third, there is a difference between teacher perceptions of authentic assessment, especially productive skills assessment, namely speaking and writing in English learning with the implementation of the

assessment in English learning, so it is necessary to explore more deeply the difference between EFL teachers' perceptions of actual authentic assessment with its implementation in assessing students' productive skills.

1.3. Problem Limitation

Based on the analysis of the pre-observation conducted, the problems were limited according to the problems found related to EFL teachers' perceptions of authentic assessment and the application of the assessment in measuring students' productive skills, especially in speaking and writing skills. The problems are limited as follows.

a. EFL teachers' perception on authentic assessment in productive skills.

b. EFL teachers' practice on authentic assessment in productive skills.

c. The discrepancies between EFL teachers' perception and their actual implementation of authentic assessment in assessing students' productive skills.

1.4. Research Problems

Based on the problem limitation, the research question can be formulated as follows.

a. What perceptions do EFL teachers have on the implementation of authentic assessment in assessing students' productive skills?

b. What aspects are considered by the EFL teachers in implementing authentic assessment for evaluating students' productive skills?

c. What discrepancies are found between EFL teachers' perceptions and their actual implementation of authentic assessment in assessing students' productive skills?

1.5. Research Objectives

Based on the research question, the research objectives are as follows.

a. To describe the EFL teachers' perception about the implementation of authentic assessment for assessing students' productive skills.

b. To describe how the EFL teachers apply authentic assessment in evaluating students' productive skills.

c. To describe the discrepancies between EFL teachers' perceptions and their actual implementation of authentic assessment in assessing students' productive skills.

1.6. Research Significance

The significance of the study is viewed from two perspectives such as theoretical significance and practical significance.

1.6.1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to theoretical understanding of authentic assessment particularly in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum and teachers' understanding about authentic assessment particularly about teachers' perception, planning, and implementation of authentic assessment in senior high school. The result of this study provided some insights about the planning and implementation of authentic assessment for assessing students'

writing and speaking skills. The result can be utilized   as a source, reference or reflection by the teachers or the stakeholders to conduct an effective authentic assessment. Thus, it can explore the theoretical frameworks and pedagogical knowledge needed for teachers to design and implement authentic assessment practices effectively and promote their professional development.

1.6.2. Practical Significance

1) For Teachers

The result of this study is expected to be meaningful and useful to senior high school teachers as they plan and implement authentic assessments in English language teaching. This is also expected to improve the quality of the teaching and assessment process in language learning.

2) For Stakeholders

The result is expected to serve as a resource for curriculum specialists and education researchers in informing curriculum development and guiding the design of instructional materials, teaching modules, and assessments that promote the development of students' productive, writing, and speaking skills.

3) For other Researchers

This study is expected to contribute for further studies with different or modified interests or areas. The other researchers can investigate teachers' perceptions and practices in authentic assessment which provide insights into teachers' professional development needs, challenges, and effective strategies of authentic assessment in diverse educational settings.