

# Authentic Assessment as a Catalyst for Student Engagement and Contextual Learning: A Qualitative Study of Classroom Practices in Secondary Education

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Received: 14 Jan 2026 | Revised 27 Feb 2026 | Accepted: 16 Marc 2026

## ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Traditional assessment often emphasizes memorization and standardized testing, offering limited insight into students' ability to apply knowledge in meaningful contexts. Authentic assessment has emerged as an alternative approach that connects evaluation with real-world tasks and more student-centered learning experiences.

**Aims:** This study examined how authentic assessment influences teaching practices, student engagement, and contextual learning in secondary education classrooms.

**Methods:** A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations involving English teachers from two secondary schools in Indonesia. Participants were selected purposively based on their experience in applying authentic assessment. Data were analyzed through reduction, display, and interpretation to identify recurring themes in classroom practice.

**Results:** The findings show that authentic assessment encouraged more contextual, interactive, and reflective learning. Teachers reported that real-world tasks increased students' participation in discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving activities. Classroom observations also indicated higher motivation and stronger engagement when students were asked to apply knowledge rather than reproduce information.


**Conclusion:** Authentic assessment functions not only as an evaluation tool but also as a pedagogical driver that supports meaningful learning, critical thinking, and active classroom participation. Its successful implementation, however, depends on teacher readiness, institutional support, and clear assessment criteria. These findings reinforce the relevance of authentic assessment for educational reform and contemporary classroom practice

**Keywords:** Authentic Assessment, Student Engagement, Contextual Learning, Qualitative Inquiry, Secondary Education.

Cite this article: Anggriana, J., Tjalla, M. (2025). Authentic Assessment as a Catalyst for Student Engagement and Contextual Learning: A Qualitative Study of Classroom Practices in Secondary Education. *Journal of Literacy Education*, 2(1), 50-61.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of geometry teaching aids in enhancing middle school students' mathematical representation skills. It is hypothesized that students who receive instruction using these teaching aids will show greater improvements in visual, symbolic, and contextual representation compared to those taught through conventional methods. By using a quasi-experimental design, this research contributes valuable empirical evidence to guide educators and curriculum developers in designing more effective geometry learning experiences.

Assessment is widely recognized as a central component of the teaching and learning process because it shapes how learning outcomes are interpreted and how instructional decisions are made in classrooms. Emphasize that assessment practices strongly influence students' learning behaviors and teachers' instructional strategies (Z. Xu et al., 2025). Traditional evaluation methods in many educational systems still rely heavily on standardized tests and recall-based examinations that prioritize memorization rather than deeper conceptual understanding. Such approaches often fail to capture complex learning outcomes such as problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking (E. Xu et al., 2023). Contemporary educational reform therefore increasingly promotes assessment approaches that evaluate students' competencies through meaningful and contextual learning activities. Authentic assessment has gained attention as a promising framework that integrates evaluation with real-life tasks and performance-based learning experiences. Explains that authentic assessment requires students to demonstrate knowledge through practical applications rather than isolated theoretical responses (McArthur, 2023). In this perspective, assessment is not only a measurement tool but also a pedagogical process that supports meaningful learning and encourages active participation in classroom activities.

In recent years, the growing emphasis on student-centered learning has intensified discussions about the role of authentic assessment in improving educational quality. Educational researchers argue that authentic assessment can foster deeper engagement by encouraging students to participate in collaborative tasks and contextual problem-solving activities. Demonstrate that authentic assessment environments promote meaningful learning because tasks are designed to reflect real-life situations encountered outside the classroom (Quinlan et al., 2025a). Notes that contextual learning experiences can enhance students' motivation and engagement when learning activities are connected to authentic challenges (Sabudu, 2025). Despite these theoretical advantages, the implementation of authentic assessment often varies widely across educational contexts and institutional settings. Many teachers still experience difficulties in designing authentic tasks, developing clear assessment rubrics, and integrating assessment with daily instructional practices. Consequently, examining how authentic assessment operates within real classroom environments becomes essential for understanding its pedagogical potential. Investigating authentic assessment practices in secondary education therefore provides valuable insight into how assessment can influence teaching strategies, student engagement, and contextual learning experiences (Quinlan et al., 2025b).

The increasing complexity of educational demands in the twenty-first century requires assessment approaches that are capable of capturing diverse learning competencies. Modern education systems emphasize critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving as key competencies for students' future success. Traditional testing formats are often inadequate for evaluating these multidimensional learning outcomes because they measure knowledge

reproduction rather than authentic performance. Authentic assessment offers an alternative evaluation model that integrates learning and assessment into meaningful educational experiences. By requiring students to perform tasks that mirror real-world challenges, authentic assessment can help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This approach also allows teachers to observe students' learning processes rather than focusing solely on final results. As a result, authentic assessment has been increasingly discussed as a mechanism for improving instructional effectiveness and promoting more interactive classroom environments. Understanding how teachers interpret and apply authentic assessment strategies therefore becomes crucial for strengthening contemporary educational practices.

Authentic assessment has been widely discussed in educational research as an approach that evaluates students' abilities through real-world applications of knowledge. Describes authentic assessment as a process that requires learners to demonstrate understanding through meaningful tasks that replicate real-life situations (Lean & Barber, 2022). Further explains that authentic assessment emphasizes performance-based evaluation in which students actively construct knowledge through inquiry and reflection (Lean & Barber, 2022). Educational scholars highlight that authentic assessment aligns closely with constructivist learning theories that view knowledge as actively constructed through experience. Argue that authentic learning environments should incorporate realistic tasks, collaborative interaction, and reflective evaluation processes (Paulsen et al., 2024). Such environments enable students to develop transferable skills that extend beyond the classroom. Studies conducted in various educational contexts demonstrate that authentic assessment can enhance students' conceptual understanding and encourage active learning behaviors. Consequently, authentic assessment has been recognized as an important component of contemporary educational reform.

Research also suggests that authentic assessment contributes significantly to student engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Conceptualize student engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes behavioral participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in learning activities (Wong & Liem, 2022). Authentic tasks that connect classroom learning with real-world situations can stimulate students' curiosity and motivation to participate actively in the learning process. Explains that contextual learning environments encourage students to apply knowledge in complex situations that require critical thinking and problem solving. Empirical studies indicate that students tend to show stronger engagement when learning activities involve authentic problems and collaborative exploration. Authentic assessment also encourages reflective learning because students must evaluate their own understanding while completing meaningful tasks. These characteristics make authentic assessment particularly relevant for educational settings that aim to promote deeper learning and higher-order thinking skills. For this reason, examining authentic assessment within real classroom practices remains an important area of educational research (Ismail et al., 2023).

Although authentic assessment has been widely discussed in educational literature, many studies focus primarily on theoretical frameworks or large-scale quantitative evaluations of learning outcomes. Limited research provides detailed insights into how authentic assessment is actually implemented in everyday classroom practices. In particular, there remains insufficient understanding of how teachers interpret authentic assessment and integrate it into their instructional strategies. Existing research also tends to emphasize student outcomes without sufficiently exploring the

pedagogical processes that occur during authentic assessment activities. As a result, the dynamic relationship between assessment practices, teaching approaches, and student engagement is still not fully understood. Furthermore, contextual evidence from secondary education settings in developing educational environments remains relatively scarce. Without such empirical insights, it becomes difficult to understand how authentic assessment functions in real instructional contexts. Addressing this gap is essential for strengthening the practical relevance of authentic assessment within contemporary education systems (Hains-Wesson & le Roux, 2024).

This study aims to explore how authentic assessment influences classroom teaching practices and student engagement in secondary education. The research seeks to examine how teachers implement authentic assessment tasks and how these tasks shape students' learning experiences. Understanding these classroom dynamics is important for identifying how assessment practices can support contextual and meaningful learning. The study also investigates how authentic assessment contributes to collaborative interaction, reflective learning, and student participation in classroom activities. By examining teachers' perspectives and classroom observations, the research provides insight into how assessment practices influence instructional strategies (Unissa & Alhasan, 2024). The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discussion on assessment reform in contemporary education. In addition, the study provides practical implications for educators who aim to integrate authentic assessment into classroom practice. Ultimately, the research seeks to clarify how authentic assessment can function as a catalyst for student engagement and contextual learning in secondary education.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how authentic assessment shapes classroom practices and student engagement in secondary education. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining educational processes because it allows researchers to capture complex classroom interactions and participants' perspectives in natural settings (Chand, 2025). Explains that qualitative inquiry is effective for investigating educational phenomena that involve social interaction and contextual interpretation (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The design of this research focused on understanding how authentic assessment is interpreted and implemented by teachers during instructional activities. Instead of measuring learning outcomes quantitatively, the study emphasized the exploration of pedagogical practices and classroom dynamics. Argue that qualitative descriptive studies are appropriate when researchers aim to obtain rich explanations of educational practices in real contexts. Within this framework, authentic assessment was examined as a pedagogical strategy that integrates evaluation with meaningful learning experiences. The qualitative approach therefore enabled the study to generate in-depth insights into the relationship between assessment practices, student engagement, and contextual learning processes.

### Participant

The participants of this study consisted of English teachers from two secondary schools who had experience implementing authentic assessment strategies in their classrooms. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the teachers had sufficient pedagogical experience and familiarity with contextual assessment practices (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Notes that purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess relevant knowledge and

experience related to the phenomenon being studied. The selected teachers represented educators who actively integrate authentic tasks such as projects, presentations, and collaborative activities into classroom evaluation (Baig & Yadegaridehkordi, 2023). Their participation provided valuable insight into how authentic assessment is interpreted and practiced in real instructional environments. In addition to teacher perspectives, classroom learning situations were observed to capture how students responded to authentic assessment activities (Papanastasiou et al., 2025). Observing classroom interaction allowed the researcher to understand how assessment tasks influenced participation and collaborative learning. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the research participants.

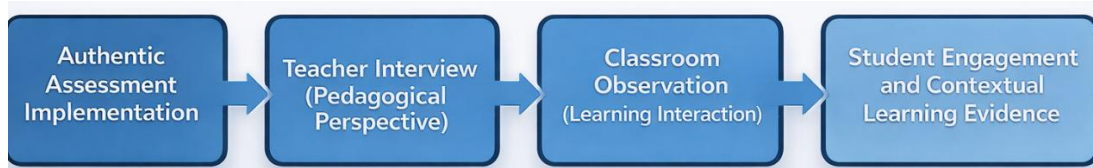
**Table 1. Participant Profile**

Participant	Teaching Experience	School Type	Role in Study
Teacher A	10 years	Public Secondary School	Interview and Classroom Observation
Teacher B	8 years	Public Secondary School	Interview and Classroom Observation

Table 1 illustrates that the participants were experienced teachers who had actively implemented authentic assessment strategies in their teaching practices. Their professional experience allowed the study to capture informed perspectives regarding instructional practices and student engagement.

### Intrument

Data in this study were collected using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as the primary research instruments. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of authentic assessment in classroom practice. Emphasize that semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for exploring participants' perspectives while maintaining a structured research focus (Buys et al., 2022). Through this approach, teachers were able to explain how authentic assessment tasks were designed and how they influenced students' learning engagement. Classroom observations were conducted to capture real instructional interactions during assessment activities. Observation enabled the researcher to examine how authentic tasks stimulated collaboration, discussion, and contextual learning among students. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, combining interviews and observations strengthens qualitative research by providing complementary sources of evidence (Lim, 2025). The integration of these two instruments allowed the study to examine both teachers' perceptions and observable classroom practices. The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading of observation notes, interview transcripts, and instructional documents. Initial coding was conducted to identify meaningful units related to classroom interaction, collaborative dialogue, and comprehension processes



**Figure 1. Data Collection Framework**

Figure 1 illustrates the data collection framework used in the study. The framework shows how interview data and observational evidence were integrated to analyze the relationship between authentic assessment practices and student engagement in classroom settings.

### **Analysis plan**

The data analysis process followed an interactive qualitative analysis model that included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Describe this analytical approach as an iterative process that enables researchers to interpret qualitative data systematically (Nicmanis, 2024). During the first stage, interview transcripts and observation notes were organized and reduced to identify meaningful patterns related to authentic assessment practices. The second stage involved displaying the data in thematic categories that reflected teachers' instructional strategies and student engagement patterns. Through this process, the researcher examined recurring themes related to contextual learning, collaborative participation, and reflective learning practices. The final stage focused on interpreting the data to understand how authentic assessment influenced classroom interaction and instructional design. This analytical process allowed the researcher to develop conceptual insights regarding the pedagogical role of authentic assessment. By systematically integrating interview and observational data, the study generated a comprehensive interpretation of classroom practices and student engagement in secondary education.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of authentic assessment significantly influenced classroom interaction and student engagement in secondary education. Data obtained from teacher interviews revealed that authentic assessment encouraged teachers to design learning activities that were closely connected with real-life contexts. Teachers reported that tasks such as presentations, collaborative projects, and reflective discussions increased students' willingness to participate in classroom activities. Classroom observations further confirmed that students became more active when assessment activities required them to demonstrate understanding through contextual applications rather than simple memorization. In several observed sessions, students were engaged in collaborative problem-solving tasks that required them to interpret learning materials and relate them to authentic situations. This finding suggests that authentic assessment promotes a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. The integration of contextual tasks also encouraged students to express their ideas and respond to peers' perspectives during classroom discussions. Overall, the results demonstrate that authentic assessment can serve as a catalyst for improving both teaching practices and student engagement.

To illustrate the patterns observed during classroom activities, the study summarized key findings related to teaching practices and student engagement. The analysis revealed that authentic assessment influenced several dimensions of classroom interaction, including collaborative learning, contextual task completion, and reflective dialogue. Teachers noted that students appeared more motivated when evaluation tasks involved real-world scenarios. Classroom observations also indicated that authentic assessment encouraged students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. In many cases, students demonstrated increased curiosity and willingness to ask questions during learning activities. This behavior reflects the emergence of a more participatory learning environment. The integration of contextual tasks allowed students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical situations. Table 2 summarizes the key findings derived from interviews and classroom observations

**Table 2.** Key Findings of Authentic Assessment Implementation.

Aspect Observed	Evidence from Interview	Evidence from Observation
Student Participation	Teachers reported higher discussion involvement	Students actively contributed to group discussions
Contextual Learning	Teachers designed real-life tasks	Students connected learning with real-world contexts
Collaborative Interaction	Teachers encouraged group tasks	Students engaged in peer collaboration
Reflective Learning	Teachers used feedback sessions	Students evaluated their own understanding

Table 2 demonstrates that authentic assessment contributes to multiple dimensions of learning interaction. Interview data highlight teachers' perceptions of improved participation, while observation data provide direct evidence of collaborative engagement in classroom activities.

In addition to the findings presented in Table 2, classroom observations also revealed a sequential process through which authentic assessment influenced student engagement. The implementation of contextual tasks encouraged teachers to facilitate more interactive learning environments. Students responded positively to learning activities that required them to apply knowledge in meaningful situations. As students participated in collaborative tasks, classroom interaction gradually shifted from teacher-centered instruction toward student-centered discussion. This shift allowed students to express ideas more confidently and engage in reflective learning processes. Authentic assessment therefore created opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding through dialogue and collaboration. Figure 2 illustrates the process through which authentic assessment contributed to the development of contextual learning and student engagement. The diagram summarizes the pedagogical pathway identified during classroom observations.



Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Authentic Assessment for Enhancing Student Engagement and Reflective Learning

Figure 2 illustrates how authentic assessment functions as a pedagogical catalyst within the classroom. The framework shows that contextual tasks initiate collaborative interaction, which ultimately leads to stronger student engagement and reflective learning practices.

### Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of authentic assessment in fostering student engagement within classroom learning environments. Authentic assessment encourages students to apply knowledge in meaningful contexts rather than relying solely on memorization-based learning. According to Wiggins, authentic assessment enables students to demonstrate understanding through real-world tasks that reflect genuine learning situations (Vlachopoulos, 2025a). This approach aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active knowledge

construction through experience and interaction. Argue that authentic learning environments support deeper understanding by integrating realistic tasks into instructional practice (Radović et al., 2023). The results of this study confirm that contextual tasks stimulate students' motivation and participation during classroom activities. When students are required to solve problems collaboratively, they become more engaged in negotiating meaning and exchanging ideas. This dynamic interaction ultimately contributes to the development of meaningful learning experiences.

Another important finding of the study concerns the relationship between authentic assessment and collaborative learning processes. The classroom observations indicated that authentic tasks often require students to work together in order to interpret information and develop solutions to contextual problems. Such collaborative interaction supports the development of social learning environments where knowledge is constructed collectively. Emphasize that student engagement involves behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation in learning activities. Authentic assessment provides opportunities for students to experience these forms of engagement simultaneously (X. Xu et al., 2023). In particular, collaborative tasks encourage students to communicate ideas and respond to alternative perspectives. This interaction strengthens both conceptual understanding and communication skills. Consequently, authentic assessment can function as a pedagogical tool that facilitates cooperative learning and interactive classroom dialogue.

The findings also demonstrate that authentic assessment contributes to the development of contextual learning experiences. Explains that contextual learning environments encourage students to connect academic knowledge with real-life situations. When students encounter realistic tasks, they become more motivated to explore learning materials in depth. The results of this study support this theoretical perspective by showing that contextual assessment activities increased students' motivation to participate in discussions. Students appeared more interested in tasks that required them to interpret real-world problems. This engagement reflects the relevance of contextual learning for improving educational outcomes. Further notes that authentic assessment promotes reflective learning because students must evaluate their understanding during task completion. In this sense, authentic assessment serves as a bridge between theoretical instruction and practical application (Vlachopoulos, 2025b).

Another important implication concerns the transformation of classroom pedagogical practices. Authentic assessment encourages teachers to adopt more interactive teaching strategies that promote dialogue and collaboration. Suggests that assessment practices can shape instructional approaches and classroom culture (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). The findings of this study indicate that teachers became more attentive to designing tasks that stimulate student participation. Authentic assessment therefore contributes to the shift from teacher-centered instruction toward student-centered learning environments. Such transformation aligns with contemporary educational reforms that emphasize learner autonomy and active participation. In addition, authentic assessment allows teachers to observe students' learning processes rather than focusing exclusively on final results. This process-oriented perspective strengthens the connection between assessment and instruction.

Finally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on assessment reform in modern education systems. Educational scholars increasingly recognize the limitations of traditional testing methods that emphasize standardized measurement of learning outcomes. Authentic assessment offers an alternative approach that integrates evaluation with meaningful learning experiences. According to (Murphy et al., 2023), assessment practices should function as tools that support

learning rather than merely measure performance. The findings of this research support this perspective by demonstrating that authentic assessment encourages reflective dialogue and collaborative learning. Such practices help create more inclusive and participatory learning environments. These insights reinforce the importance of authentic assessment as a strategy for improving teaching quality and student engagement in contemporary classrooms.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study provide several important implications for educational practice and assessment reform. Authentic assessment can function as a pedagogical strategy that strengthens the relationship between instruction and evaluation. By integrating contextual tasks into classroom activities, teachers can encourage students to participate more actively in learning processes. Authentic assessment also supports the development of critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving skills. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for students' success in the twenty-first century. Educational institutions should therefore provide professional development programs that help teachers design authentic assessment tasks. Institutional support is also necessary for developing clear assessment guidelines and evaluation rubrics. Such initiatives can facilitate the sustainable integration of authentic assessment within classroom instruction.

### **Research Contribution**

This study contributes to the field of language education by providing a detailed analysis of the linguistic and psychological barriers that hinder speaking proficiency among junior high school students. It also offers practical recommendations for teachers and educators to enhance students' speaking abilities through communicative teaching strategies and supportive feedback. By identifying both the challenges and potential solutions, the study fills a gap in the existing literature on language learning difficulties at the junior high school level, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts.

### **Limitations**

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The research involved a relatively small number of participants from two secondary schools. Consequently, the results cannot be generalized to all educational contexts. The study relied primarily on qualitative data obtained from interviews and classroom observations. While this approach provided rich insights into classroom practices, it did not measure learning outcomes quantitatively. Future studies may combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of authentic assessment. In addition, the research focused specifically on English language classrooms. Different subject areas may present distinct challenges and opportunities for implementing authentic assessment. These limitations suggest that further research is necessary to explore authentic assessment across broader educational contexts.

### **Suggestions**

Future research should examine authentic assessment practices across multiple educational disciplines and institutional settings. Comparative studies involving different subject areas may reveal how authentic assessment influences learning processes in diverse contexts. Researchers may also explore the long-term impact of authentic assessment on students' academic achievement and critical thinking skills. Another promising direction involves integrating authentic assessment with digital learning technologies. Digital platforms may provide innovative opportunities for

implementing contextual learning tasks and collaborative projects. Further investigation into teacher professional development programs may also help identify strategies for strengthening authentic assessment implementation. By expanding the scope of research, scholars can deepen understanding of how assessment practices contribute to meaningful learning experiences. Such efforts will support ongoing educational reform initiatives aimed at promoting student-centered learning environments.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that authentic assessment plays a significant role in strengthening student engagement and contextual learning within secondary education classrooms. The findings reveal that when assessment activities are designed around meaningful and real-world tasks, students become more actively involved in the learning process. Authentic assessment encourages learners to move beyond memorization-based learning and engage in collaborative problem-solving and reflective dialogue. Through contextual learning tasks, students are able to connect theoretical knowledge with practical situations, which enhances their motivation and participation in classroom interaction. The study also shows that authentic assessment supports a shift toward more student-centered pedagogical practices in which teachers act as facilitators of learning rather than sole knowledge transmitters. This transformation contributes to a more interactive and reflective learning environment where students are encouraged to share ideas, question assumptions, and construct knowledge collaboratively. Furthermore, the integration of authentic assessment practices enables teachers to observe students' learning processes more holistically, allowing evaluation to function not only as a measurement tool but also as a driver of meaningful learning experiences. Overall, the study highlights the importance of authentic assessment as a pedagogical strategy capable of promoting deeper engagement, contextual understanding, and reflective learning, thereby supporting contemporary educational reforms that emphasize meaningful and participatory learning environments.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the completion of this study. Special gratitude is extended to the participating teachers and school administrators who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights during the interview and classroom observation processes. Their openness and willingness to reflect on their pedagogical practices provided valuable perspectives that enriched the findings of this research. The authors also acknowledge the support of the educational institutions that permitted access to classroom settings and facilitated the data collection process. In addition, the authors appreciate the constructive feedback and encouragement provided by colleagues and academic peers during the development of this study. Their scholarly input helped refine the conceptual direction and analytical rigor of the research. Appreciation is also extended to all reviewers and editors whose critical comments contribute to improving the quality and clarity of the manuscript. Finally, the authors are grateful for the broader academic community whose research and theoretical contributions have informed the development of this study and continue to inspire efforts toward improving educational practices through meaningful and authentic assessment approaches.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Jelli Anggriana conceptualized the research idea, designed the study framework, conducted data collection through interviews and classroom observations, and performed the initial data analysis. Maghdahalena Tjalla contributed to the development of the research methodology, supervised the analytical process, and provided critical interpretation of the findings. Jelli Anggriana prepared the original draft of the manuscript, including the introduction, method, results, and discussion sections. Maghdahalena Tjalla reviewed and revised the manuscript to strengthen its theoretical foundation, methodological clarity, and academic rigor. Both authors contributed to the interpretation of the research findings and the formulation of the conclusion. Both authors also participated in revising the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. Finally, both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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