

Critical Pedagogical Analysis of Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025: The Contradiction of Academic Ability Tests (TKA) in the Context of Revitalising Vocational High Schools (SMK)

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Abstract

Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 introduces the Academic Ability Test (TKA) as a new standardization and selection instrument in Indonesia's education landscape. This policy aims to provide standardized academic achievement data for selection purposes (Ministry of Education and Education, 2025). This paper presents a critical pedagogical analysis that argues that, in the context of Vocational High Schools (SMK), TKA policies show significant pedagogical dissonance. Using the theoretical lens of constructivism, differential pedagogy, and authentic evaluation, this analysis shows that TKA is philosophically contrary to the basic principles of vocational education. Instead of answering chronic competency gaps, especially soft skills deficits which is consistently identified by the industrial world, foreign workers are at risk of exacerbating the phenomenon of academic drift (shift of focus to academics). Furthermore, TKA creates assessment redundancy (overlapping with ANBK) and paradoxically devalues the significance of performance-based assessments of the Expertise Competency Test/UKK which should be the heart of vocational education. This paper recommends radical differentiation or exclusion of foreign workers for vocational schools, as well as the strengthening of UKK as a 'golden standard' for national vocational assessments that are in line with international best practices.

Keywords: Academic Ability Test (TKA), Critical Pedagogy, Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025, Policy Analysis, Vocational Education.

1. Introduction

Vocational secondary education (SMK) in Indonesia has a fundamental mandate to produce skilled middle-level workers who are ready to be absorbed by the business and industrial world (Sudira, 2012). This mandate is a key pillar in the national human resource development strategy.

However, this ideal mandate consistently faces significant challenges in practice, manifested in the form of a chronic and significant skills gap between the profile of vocational school graduates and the real demands of the job market (Suwandono, 2024; Halizah, 2024). Various curriculum reform efforts have been launched to address this issue, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises flexibility and relevance. Nevertheless, recent research shows that these reforms have not yet optimally bridged the existing gap.

A case study evaluating the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools found that the competency gap 'remains significant' (Suwandono, 2024). The findings indicate that



implementation at the school level 'still focuses on fulfilling procedures rather than the substance of in-depth industry partnerships' (Suwandono, 2024).

This critical view is reinforced by the voice of key stakeholders, namely industry. The Indonesian Employers Association (Apindo) has repeatedly highlighted this misalignment. Apindo notes that vocational school curricula are often not designed in line with the pace of industrial growth and change (Aini, 2017), resulting in graduates who are deemed unprepared for work (Apindo, 2024).

It is important to emphasise that the industry's core argument does not focus solely on the deficit in technical skills (hard skills). The most worrying and frequently voiced gap is the deficit in soft skills (Rohmawan et al., 2021). These skills, which include communication, collaboration, problem solving, and work ethic, are seen as the main pillars of career success (Shafik, 2025).

The data supporting the urgency of soft skills is very strong. Goleman (2000) estimates that around 75% of a person's success in their career is determined by soft skills. In line with this, research by Dwiwarman (2025) found that companies in Indonesia prioritise soft skills over hard skills in the recruitment process. Apindo explicitly links low soft skills to the problem of Indonesia's labour productivity lagging behind other ASEAN countries. More granularly, Apindo Lampung highlights specific weaknesses among new graduates (Generation Z), namely in the aspects of emotional intelligence (e.g., difficulty accepting criticism or feedback) and collaboration skills (tendency to work individualistically or 'alone'). This diagnosis clearly establishes that the main issue to be addressed by vocational education policy is the strengthening of non-academic, affective, and contextual competencies.

Amidst this urgent crisis of soft skills relevance, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemendikdasmen) issued Ministerial Regulation (Permendikdasmen) No. 9 of 2025. This regulation introduces a new national assessment instrument, namely the Academic Ability Test (TKA). As its name suggests, Permen 9/2025 defines TKA as 'an activity to measure students' academic achievement in certain subjects'. The main objective of TKA, as stated in the regulation and its socialisation materials, is to 'obtain standardised information on students' academic achievement for academic selection purposes'. This marks a significant shift towards standardised assessment for selection purposes.

This paper proposes the thesis that Regulation 9/2025, particularly in its application to vocational schools, represents a fundamental pedagogical dissonance and policy paradox. This paradox lies in the mismatch between the problems diagnosed and the solutions offered. As described, field diagnoses from industry and researchers (Suwandono, 2024) consistently point to deficits in soft skills, work ethic, and authentic practical competencies. However, the policy intervention presented (TKA) is an assessment that focuses purely on 'academic achievement'. This is a policy non-sequitur: diagnosing disease A (soft skills deficit), but prescribing medicine for disease B (academic deficit).

Furthermore, TKA is not only mistaken in its diagnosis, but also has the potential to cause systemic negative impacts. The main argument of this paper is that TKA, as an instrument that focuses on academic achievement in the subjects of Indonesian Language, Mathematics, English Language, is philosophically contrary to the core principles of vocational pedagogy: constructivism, differentiation, and authenticity (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017).

The most dangerous impact of TKA is not the test itself, but the incentive structure it creates. Because TKA results will be used as 'one of the selection requirements' for the achievement track and 'new student admission selection', the existence of this type of test can create new high-stakes pressure. School principals, teachers, and vocational school students,

whose performance is now measured by TKA scores, will have a strong incentive to ‘teach to the test’. As a result, very limited resources: time, budget, and pedagogical focus, which should be allocated to teaching factories, industrial internships and strengthening performance assessments (UKK) (Sulistiyo et al., 2023), will be diverted to TKA tutoring. This is a phenomenon of policy-driven academic drift (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017), in which TKA risks becoming a hidden curriculum that de facto sabotages the main mandate of vocational education and ultimately widens, rather than narrows, the relevance gap with the industrial world.

To understand the significance of Permendikdasmen 9/2025, it is important to analyse the context of its policy evolution. This regulation did not arise in a vacuum; it explicitly ‘revokes and declares invalid’ the previous Ministerial Regulation, namely Permendikbudristek No. 31 of 2023 concerning Equivalency Tests. An analysis of Permendikbudristek 31/2023 shows that its focus was relatively limited and different. The Equivalency Test (UK) was primarily designed as an instrument of inclusion and equalisation.

Its purpose was to equalise the learning outcomes of non-formal education, such as Programmes A, B, and C, and informal education, such as homeschooling, with formal education standards. The UK was a low-stakes, optional assessment focused on basic literacy and numeracy. Permendikdasmen 9/2025 not only takes over this equalisation function, but also massively expands its targets and objectives. First, the target participants have been dramatically expanded to now include all formal education students in their final year of Grade 6 of primary school, Grade 9 of junior high school, Grade 12 of senior high school, and Grade 12 of vocational high school. Second, and most crucially, the objectives have fundamentally shifted from ‘equalisation’ to ‘academic selection’ and ‘one of the considerations for new student admission selection’. This policy shift and escalation can be summarised in the following comparison table:

Table 1. Comparison of the Evolution and Escalation of Assessment Policy

Aspects	Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 31 of 2023 (Equivalency Test)	Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 9 of 2025 (TKA)	Analysis of Implications (Insights)
Name & Focus	Equivalency Test	Academic Ability Test (TKA)	Shift from ‘Equivalency’ to ‘Academic’.
Main Objectives	Equivalency of Non-formal and Informal Education Outcomes	Obtaining academic achievement information for selection	Transformation from an aid (equivalency) to a selection tool (high-stakes).
Target Participants	Non-formal Education (Packages A/B/C) and Informal Education (Home Schooling)	All Formal Education (Grades 6, 9, 12 SMA/SMK) + Non-formal & Informal	Massive escalation (scope creep) that now covers the entire student population, including vocational schools.
Test Subjects (Vocational High Schools)	Reading Literacy and Numeracy	Indonesian Language, Mathematics, English Language, and Elective Subjects	Expansion of test subjects that increasingly lean towards pure ‘academics’ (English).
Utilisation of Results	Equivalency Test Certificate	One of the requirements for PTN selection and the ‘achievement pathway’	The impact (stakes) of TKA is much higher, creating new pressure on vocational schools.

Table 1 visualises the argument of ‘scope creep’. TKA is not merely a technical update, but a fundamental transformation from an inclusion tool to a selection tool that is now uniformly applied to academic and vocational pathways.

1. Unique Characteristics of Vocational Pedagogy (Vocational High Schools)

2. The uniform application of TKA is highly problematic when applied to vocational high schools, as vocational education differs philosophically and pedagogically from senior high school education. The philosophy of vocational education (Sudira, 2012) emphasises the inseparable unity between the cognitive (knowledge), affective (work attitude), and psychomotor (practical skills) domains to produce holistic work competencies.
3. Vocational learning requires pedagogy that is centred on practical experience, requiring adequate practical facilities that are relevant to the industry. The focus is not on mastering abstract theory, but on developing employability skills (Suhendar et al., 2017). These skills, as identified by research, include 'entrepreneurship, communication skills, teamwork, initiative, and self-management' (Suhendar et al., 2017). Therefore, assessments in vocational schools should ideally be able to measure the process and results of real work, not just the memorisation of theoretical knowledge (Suhendar et al., 2017).

Based on the dissonance between academic TKA policies and authentic vocational pedagogical needs, this paper is designed to answer the following problem formulation:

1. How do the principles of critical pedagogy, constructivism (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017), differential pedagogy (Suhendar et al., 2017), and authentic assessment (Suartha et al., 2015) analyse the validity and relevance of standardised academic assessments (TKA) in the context of vocational education (vocational high schools)?
2. What are the implications of implementing TKA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) on the existing assessment ecosystem in SMK, particularly in terms of potential overlap (redundancy) with the Computer-Based National Assessment (ANBK) (Wildan, 2022) and potential contradiction (devaluation) with the Skills Competency Test (UKK)? (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023).
3. To what extent does TKA risk shifting the pedagogical focus of SMK away from meeting the real needs of industry (authentic competencies and soft skills (Suwandono, 2024) to achieving academic scores (the phenomenon of academic drift), and how do international assessment models (BBIB, 2023; Park & Yu, 2023) offer alternatives?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Pedagogical Analysis Framework

2.1.1. Constructivism (Piaget & Vygotsky) vs. Standardisation

The foundation of modern pedagogy, including in the Merdeka Curriculum, is constructivism theory (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017), pioneered by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017; Bustomi et al., 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory radically changed the view of learning, from students as passive recipients of information (transmissionist) to active builders of knowledge (constructivist) (Hidayatullah, 2024).

For Piaget, knowledge is constructed through an individual's cognitive schemas that interact with real experiences (Bustomi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, for Vygotsky, knowledge is constructed socially (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017). Learning occurs through interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students are assisted by more competent individuals (teachers or peers) through a process of scaffolding (Dewi & Elisa, 2025). In the context of vocational schools, the Project-Based Learning (PBL) or collaborative problem-solving model is a pure implementation of Vygotsky's constructivism.

If we accept constructivism as the basis of pedagogy, then standardised tests such as TKA are inherently anti-constructivist.

1. Decontextualisation of Knowledge: TKA assumes knowledge (e.g., mathematics) to be a fixed, abstract, and universal entity that can be measured uniformly and isolated from context (Shumba et al., 2012). This situation directly contradicts Vygotsky (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017), who views knowledge as something that is constructed within a social and cultural context.
2. Encouraging Transmission Pedagogy: TKA, as a high-stakes test, will encourage 'tension' between the standard curriculum and flexible, exploration-based constructivist approaches (Hidayatullah, 2024). This type of assessment forces teachers to return to a transmissionist model of transferring facts and formulas that are likely to appear in tests, which is the opposite of student-centred learning (Hidayatullah, 2024; Dewi & Elisa, 2025).

TKA is a reductionist instrument. It reduces the rich, complex, social (Vygotskian), and experience-based (Piagetian) vocational learning process (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017; Dewi & Elisa, 2025) to an isolated individual numerical score. True vocational competence, for example, the ability to collaboratively diagnose machine damage in a workshop, is a social constructivist phenomenon that cannot be validly measured by individual multiple-choice tests on mathematical formulas.

2.2. Differential Pedagogy (Differentiation)

The second theoretical framework is differential pedagogy, which is rooted in the understanding that no two individuals learn in the same way (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017). This theory demands that the learning process and, more importantly, assessment, must be adapted ('differentiated') to meet the unique 'characteristics and needs of vocational students' (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017; Suhendar et al., 2017).

Criticism of the TKA from the lens of differential pedagogy is sharp. Regulation 9/2025 applies a uniform set of tests (Indonesian Language, Mathematics, English Language) for the academic-oriented senior high school track and the vocational/work-oriented vocational high school track. This policy is the antithesis of the principle of differentiation (Suhendar et al., 2017). It implicitly ignores the fundamental differences in the objectives, psychological profiles, and learning orientations of SMK students, who are more practical and oriented towards work competencies (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017). Instead of valuing the uniqueness of the vocational stream, the TKA imposes uniform academic standards, as if treating vocational high school students as 'failed academic students' rather than professionals in a different stream.

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2.2.2. The Philosophy of Authentic Assessment

The third theoretical framework, and perhaps the most central to vocational education, is authentic assessment (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017). Authentic assessment is a *conditio sine qua non* (absolute requirement) for VET (Vocational Education and Training) (Suarta et al., 2015). The aim is not to measure what students know, but what students can do. It measures 'workplace competencies' (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017) through 'real-world tasks' (Achzab & Budiyo, 2017) that reflect the complexities that will be encountered in the workplace.

Research in the context of Indonesian vocational education has moved in this direction. One study (Suarta et al., 2015), for example, has successfully developed an 'Authentic Self-Assessment' model in vocational higher education. This model is specifically designed to measure problem-solving skills and self-management skills (Suarta et al., 2015), which are two core soft skills explicitly required by Apindo. From this perspective, TKA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) is a form of non-authentic evaluation.

1. **Measuring Recall, Not Performance:** TKA does not measure performance in a meaningful context. It measures academic recall and computational ability in the artificial context of a test room.
2. **Internal Policy Disconnect:** The emergence of TKA indicates a severe policy disconnect. On the one hand, researchers and education academics, often under the auspices of the Ministry, are actively developing and promoting advanced authentic assessment models for vocational schools (Suarta et al., 2015). On the other hand, policymakers in the same ministry are implementing TKA (Kemendikdasmen, 2025), a non-authentic standardised test that runs counter to this. This shows that the administrative and centralised policy formulation division is not in sync or does not communicate with the contextual and progressive research and pedagogical development division.

3. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with critical pedagogical and policy analysis methods because the research aims to critically examine the alignment and implications of Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 for vocational education. Since the focus is on evaluating theoretical principles, policy content, and pedagogical relevance rather than measuring numerical data, a qualitative, conceptual approach is most suitable. This method allows the study to address the research questions by analyzing the validity, impact, and potential consequences of TKA within the vocational education context.

The primary data in this study are the regulatory documents Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 and Permendikbudristek No. 31 of 2023 as a comparison. Secondary data includes research journals on the implementation of the SMK curriculum (Rahmawati, 2024), soft skills gaps, industry perspectives (Apindo) (Aini, 2017), and international vocational assessment models (BBIB, 2023; Park & Yu, 2023). The analysis was conducted using three pillars of theoretical foundations as an analytical framework to test the assumptions, relevance, and policy implications of foreign workers in vocational schools mentioned.

4. Results and Discussion

Using these three theoretical lenses, this section will analyse the practical and systemic implications of the implementation of Permendikdasmen 9/2025 in vocational schools.

4.1. Deconstruction of the Substance of TKA (Literacy, Numeracy, and Reasoning)

The substance of TKA (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017), as outlined in Permen 9/2025 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) for vocational schools, includes Indonesian Language, Mathematics, and English. These components are often reframed in more modern language as 'literacy' and 'numeracy' (Achzab & Budiyanto, 2017).

No one disputes that literacy and numeracy are vital basic competencies for all students (Gamaliel et al., 2024; Unaenah et al., 2023), including vocational high school students (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Nurmaulidiyah et al., 2024). A mechanic must be able to read technical manuals (literacy) and calculate gear ratios (numeracy). However, the effectiveness and relevance of these skills depend entirely on context.

Research in vocational schools consistently shows this. A study at SMKN 7 Semarang (Musyafak et al., 2024) found that 'contextual learning' is an effective method for improving numeracy literacy skills. Another study (Nadjamuddin & Hulukati, 2022) specifically discusses the development of numeracy instruments 'in the context of agriculture' for students, while another (Nurmaulidiyah et al., 2024) uses Problem-Based Learning to improve the mathematical numeracy of vocational school students.

The key is context. The TKA does not test 'vocational contextual literacy/numeracy'; the TKA tests "Mathematics" and 'Indonesian Language'. By standardising these tests in a general academic format, the ministry effectively eliminates context (Nadjamuddin & Hulukati, 2022), which is precisely the most crucial pedagogical element in vocational education (Musyafak et al., 2024). In practice, the TKA tests whether students have memorised academic mathematical formulas, rather than whether they can use these formulas to solve practical problems in workshops, kitchens, or design studios (vocational competencies).

4.2. Potential Redundancy and Contradictions (Chaotic Assessment Ecosystem)

The implementation of the Academic Ability Test (TKA) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) does not take place in a policy vacuum. Vocational high schools (SMK) are currently part of a complex national assessment ecosystem, particularly through the Computer-Based National Assessment (ANBK) and the Skills Competency Test (UKK). The presence of TKA in the midst of an already crowded assessment system can create chaotic conditions in the assessment ecosystem, where various assessment instruments overlap and cause inconsistencies in objectives and implementation.

ANBK is designed as a national-scale evaluation instrument to map learning quality based on literacy, numeracy, character surveys, and learning environment surveys in all educational units, including vocational schools. ANBK is used as a large-scale diagnostic tool for the education system without determining individual student graduation. ANBK has become the focus of education quality assurance policies that are encouraged to comprehensively map learning quality (Marion et al., 2019).

UKK, on the other hand, serves as an assessment of vocational competence measured based on practical skills in accordance with industry standards. UKK reflects the characteristics of vocational learning that emphasizes the mastery of concrete work competencies relevant to the needs of the business and industrial world (DUDI). The

difference in objectives between ANBK and UKK shows that each assessment has a different orientation: ANBK is more of a system quality evaluation, while UKK is more of an assessment of technical competencies and work readiness.

The introduction of TKA, which focuses on academic cognitive abilities such as critical thinking and conceptual understanding, has the potential to create redundancy with ANBK because both assess literacy and numeracy at a general level. This redundancy can result in repetitive measurements without clear differentiation of objectives, thereby reducing the overall efficiency of the assessment system. According to studies of balanced assessment systems, various assessments within a single system must have clear and coherently connected objectives; otherwise, the assessment ecosystem will lose direction and produce incoherent results.

TKA also has the potential to contradict the vocational paradigm presented by UKK. While UKK emphasizes practical competence and work readiness, TKA emphasizes the assessment of generic academic abilities, which logically are more relevant in the context of general education than vocational education. This discrepancy in objectives can send ambiguous policy signals to teachers and students about which competencies should be the focus of learning. At the practical level, the literature states that when various forms of assessment operate in parallel without clear objectives and validity, it can create challenges in setting curriculum priorities, teacher workload, and interpretation of assessment results.

From the perspective of implementation at the school level, the coexistence of ANBK, UKK, and TKA without an integration framework or adequate explanation reflects the weak alignment between assessment instruments. These instruments operate in parallel, even tending to compete in terms of time availability, resources, and learning priorities in vocational schools. This can increase the administrative burden on schools and force educators to adjust their teaching strategies to meet the demands of various types of assessments that have different logics, formats, and objectives. The literature on assessment quality emphasizes that a system consisting of multiple assessment components must be designed systematically so that each component contributes consistently and meaningfully to learning; the lack of synchronization between instruments can lead to difficulties in interpreting and using assessment data effectively (Karkhaneh, 2024).

In the end, without a strong integration mechanism, TKA has the potential to exacerbate fragmentation in the vocational assessment system by creating redundancy with ANBK and conceptual tension with UKK. As a result, the effectiveness of assessment policies in vocational education may decline due to unclear priorities in the competencies being measured, as well as a lack of coherence between assessment objectives and learning practices oriented towards the needs of the world of work.

4.3. Overlap with ANBK

Vocational schools currently implement ANBK (Wildan, 2022). ANBK, like TKA, also measures the constructs of 'literacy' and 'numeracy' (Wildan, 2022). The critical difference between the two lies in the stakes.

1. ANBK (Wildan, 2022) is designed as a low-stakes assessment. Its purpose is to diagnose the system and improve school quality. The results are not reported individually and are not used for selection (Wildan, 2022).
2. TKA (Kemendikdasmen, 2025) is designed as a high-stakes assessment. Its purpose is individual 'academic selection' and 'new student admission selection'.

This creates assessment redundancy (two national tests test the same thing: literacy/numeracy), which leads to assessment fatigue and a waste of resources. However, the

more damaging effect is the cannibalistic effect of the policy. The high-stakes TKA will inevitably cannibalise the low-stakes ANBK. Schools will ignore the diagnostic spirit and quality improvement of the ANBK, and instead will switch to drilling TKA questions in order to maintain their reputation and graduate acceptance rates in the selection process.

The difference in importance between ANBK and TKA has the potential to significantly affect school responses and behavior. In situations where two national assessments measure the same construct but have different policy consequences, schools tend to prioritize assessments that have a direct impact on student selection, graduation, and institutional reputation. As a result, learning attention and resource allocation shift to TKA preparation, while ANBK risks being treated as a mere administrative obligation. This condition not only reinforces assessment redundancy but also weakens ANBK's diagnostic function as an instrument for improving learning quality, as its results are no longer optimally utilized in pedagogical decision-making at the school level.

4.4. Contradiction with UKK (Skills Competency Test)

The most fatal contradiction is between TKA and UKK. UKK is a summative assessment that should be the crown jewel of vocational education (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023; Annafi et al., 2025). UKK is an authentic evaluation model in which students are tested on their practical abilities, often involving examiners from industry (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023). UKK is designed to measure 'work readiness' (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023) through performance assessment (Annafi et al., 2025). TKA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) creates a crisis of currency for UKK certificates.

1. Historically, the main 'currency' proving the competence of vocational school graduates has been the UKK certificate (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023).
2. Regulation 9/2025 now introduces a new 'currency' that, due to its status as a national selection tool, has the potential to be more powerful: the TKA score.
3. A high-achieving vocational school student who wishes to continue to a polytechnic or be recruited through the 'achievement pathway' now has an incentive to prioritise their TKA (Mathematics, English) scores over their UKK performance.
4. As a result, the value and significance of UKK certificates (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023) will be devalued. Schools will shift their focus from complex and expensive UKK preparation to cheaper and more "efficient" TKA preparation (i.e., tutoring).

This is the most damaging policy contradiction: a new assessment regulation (Permen 9/2025) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) actually weakens and devalues the assessment instrument (UKK) (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023) that should be at the heart of quality assurance in vocational education.

4.5. Gap Analysis: Foreign Workers Fail to Meet Industry Demands

The synthesis of this analysis is that there is a total misalignment between what is measured by TKA and what is actually needed by industry by Apindo.

1. Industry Requirements (Data): Soft skills (communication, initiative, collaboration, work ethic, emotional intelligence) (Rahmawati, 2024) and mastery of the latest industrial technology (Rahmawati, 2024; Aini, 2017).
2. Foreign Worker Substance (Data): Academic abilities in Indonesian, Mathematics, and English (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025).

There is no significant overlap between the two lists. TKA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) is an instrument that does not measure anything identified by key stakeholders

(industry) as the most pressing issues (Rahmawati, 2024). This policy operates in a vacuum, isolated from the reality of the labour market (Aini, 2017) that vocational schools are supposed to serve.

This gap has serious implications for the function of vocational education. When national assessment instruments do not reflect industry competency requirements, vocational schools are forced to adjust their teaching practices towards academic achievements as measured by TKA, rather than strengthening the mastery of work skills and soft skills required by industry. As a result, graduates may "pass the selection process" academically, but remain unprepared to enter the workforce. This situation widens the gap between the supply of vocational school graduates and industry demand, while undermining the legitimacy of the TKA policy as an evaluation tool that should support the main objective of vocational education, namely to prepare a workforce that is relevant, adaptive, and ready to work.

4.6. Comparative Study: Lessons Learned from International Vocational Assessment Models

The inconsistency of TKA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) becomes increasingly apparent when compared to best practices in vocational assessment in countries with established VET systems.

1. **Germany (Dual System):** The well-known German VET model (BIBB, 2023) is based on 3-4 days of training in a company and 1-2 days at school. The final assessment (final exam) is not conducted centrally by the Ministry of Education. Instead, assessments are designed, administered, and certified by Chambers of Commerce and Industry (BIBB, 2023). The focus is on real-world work competencies recognised by industry (BIBB, 2023).
2. **South Korea (Meister High School):** South Korea's highly successful VET system, Meister High School (Park & Yu, 2023), is designed to 'develop a curriculum tailored to industry demand' (Park & Yu, 2023). These schools have thousands of MoUs with companies (Park, 2013). Their assessments are highly authentic, relying on Project-Based Learning (PBL) and a Graduate Certification System specific to each industrial sector (Park & Yu et al., 2022).
3. **Australia (TAFE System):** Australia's Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system focuses on the 'Certificate IV in Training and Assessment' (Chisholm, 2024). The entire system is built on vocational competency units that require the design of assessment tools that are authentic and valid within the industry (Chisholm, 2024).

The lessons learned from these international models are consistent: world-class VET systems are moving towards increasingly decentralised (delegated to industry/Chambers) and increasingly authentic (performance-based, project-based, and specific certification) assessment. Indonesia's TKA policy is moving in the opposite direction: increasingly centralised (created by the Ministry) and increasingly academic (non-authentic). Table 2 below sharply highlights how TKA (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025) is an anomaly in global vocational assessment practices, even when compared to the existing UKK (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023) in Indonesia.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Vocational Assessment Models

Assessment Models	Organising Authority	Main Focus of Assessment	Industry involvement	Pedagogical Implications
TKA (Indonesia) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025)	Ministry (Central) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025)	Academic Achievement (Language, Mathematics, English) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025)	Minimal (Only as users of selection results)	Encourages academic drift and teaching to the test.
UKK (Indonesia) (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023)	Schools (in partnership with Industry/LSP)	Practical Performance / Work Readiness (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023; Annafi et al., 2025)	High (As testers and standard validators) (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023)	Encourages Project-Based Learning and real-world skills.
Dual System (Germany) (BIBB, 2023)	Chambers of Commerce and Industry (BIBB, 2023)	Work Competencies (Theory & Practice in the Workplace) (BIBB, 2023)	Total (Designing, training, and testing) (BIBB, 2023)	Learning is fully integrated with industry practice.
Meister HS (Korea) (Park & Yu, 2022)	Schools (in close partnership with Industry)	Project-Based Learning (PBL) Performance & Specific Certification (Park & Yu, 2022)	Very High (Designing curriculum & recruitment) (Park & Yu, 2022)	The curriculum is highly responsive to industry demands.

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of vocational assessment models in Indonesia, Germany, and Korea, highlighting differences in organizing authority, assessment focus, industry involvement, and pedagogical implications. The analysis shows that TKA in Indonesia is centrally administered, primarily emphasizes academic achievement, involves minimal industry participation, and encourages academic drift by promoting teaching to the test. In contrast, UKK in Indonesia integrates schools with industry partners, focuses on practical performance and work readiness, and fosters project-based learning and real-world skill development. International models, such as Germany's Dual System and Korea's Meister High Schools, demonstrate extensive or full industry involvement, emphasizing workplace competencies and project-based learning, with curricula highly responsive to industry needs.

These findings contribute to answering the research questions by illustrating that the TKA model risks shifting vocational education away from authentic skill development toward academic performance, with limited industry engagement. In comparison, UKK and international models show how high industry involvement and competency-based assessment better align with vocational education objectives, supporting the evaluation of TKA's validity, relevance, and potential pedagogical implications within SMK.

5. Conclusion

A critical pedagogical analysis of Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 shows that, although the policy may be motivated by an effort to standardise assessment, it reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the philosophy, goals, and pedagogical needs of vocational education. Theoretically, TKA conflicts with constructivist learning principles because it promotes decontextualised knowledge, ignores the need for differentiation between academic and vocational pathways, and runs counter to the core concept of authentic evaluation in vocational education. Systemically, the introduction of TKA creates assessment overlap and

unnecessary complexity, while at the same time reducing the value of existing authentic performance assessments by introducing a new academic-oriented benchmark. In terms of relevance, TKA is misaligned with the real demands of industry, which place far greater emphasis on practical competencies and soft skills rather than general academic abilities. When compared to global best practices, Indonesia's shift toward TKA pushes vocational assessment in the opposite direction of countries that prioritise decentralisation, industry relevance, and authenticity. Overall, implementing TKA in vocational schools risks creating administrative burdens, encouraging academic drift, distancing SMKs from their primary mission, and ultimately widening the relevance gap that ongoing reforms aim to reduce.

Based on these conclusions, several policy and pedagogical steps are recommended. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education should urgently revise Permendikdasmen 9/2025 for the vocational pathway. This could involve differentiating the TKA for SMK students by ensuring that elective subjects are fully vocational and contextual, with test items developed in collaboration with industry. However, the more appropriate option is to exclude SMK graduates from TKA for achievement-track and admission selection purposes, and instead base admissions to vocational higher education on digital portfolios, project work, and performance assessments such as UKK scores or certificates. The Ministry should also redirect resources toward strengthening the UKK so that it becomes the recognised national standard for vocational assessment, supported by strong validity, reliability, and industry acknowledgement.

At the pedagogical level, vocational school leaders and teachers must prioritise authentic learning and resist the tendency toward academic drift caused by high-stakes testing. Curriculum focus, learning hours, and resources should continue to emphasise core vocational learning models such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, teaching factory activities, and industry internships, all of which naturally support authentic evaluation. If TKA must still be implemented, it should function only as a supplementary diagnostic tool rather than a central target of instruction. Additionally, vocational schools should explicitly integrate soft skills assessment, covering communication, collaboration, initiative, and problem-solving, into all practical assessments, projects, and internship reports to better reflect the competencies that employers actually seek.

6. References

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