

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The 21st century is characterized by unprecedented technological advancements and rapid societal transformations, which demand that education systems worldwide equip students with essential skills to thrive in this dynamic environment. Among these skills, critical thinking and problem-solving are paramount, as they enable individuals to analyze complex situations, generate innovative solutions, and make informed decisions in a globalized and interconnected world (rajeevelt, 2023). In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has introduced significant educational reforms, including the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum; both curricula aim to improve student competencies and align the education system with the demands of the global era (Puspitasari, 2025). However, while their overarching goals are similar, their design, implementation, and, particularly, their assessment frameworks reveal distinct differences that influence the way critical thinking and problem-solving skills are nurtured in students.

The 2013 Curriculum employs a structured, standardized approach to assessment, focusing on formal examinations and predefined performance indicators. This framework prioritizes consistency and reliability, offering educators clear guidelines to evaluate student competencies systematically (Ashton, 2022). However, this rigidity has been a subject of criticism, as it often limits teachers' ability to design assessments that promote higher-order thinking skills. Standardized tests, which are central to this framework, primarily assess rote learning and factual recall, leaving little room for creative or open-ended problem-solving tasks. Consequently, while the 2013 Curriculum ensures uniformity in evaluation, it may inadvertently constrain students' opportunities to develop critical thinking and apply knowledge to real-world challenges (Chusni, 2021).

In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum represents a shift toward flexibility and learner-centered education. This curriculum empowers teachers to customize assessments to suit the unique needs of their students and the specific contexts of their schools. By moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages innovative assessment practices, such as project-based learning, collaborative problem-solving activities, and real-world case studies. These methods aim to foster deeper engagement and allow students to connect their learning with practical applications. Moreover, the Merdeka curriculum emphasizes holistic education, integrating cognitive, emotional, and social development to prepare students as well-rounded individuals capable of addressing complex societal issues (Kemendikbud, 2022).

Moreover, without adequate comparative studies, it is difficult to determine which curriculum is better at preparing students for real-world challenges. Previous research has shown that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are essential for success in academic and professional settings (Facione, 2013). However, the extent to which each curriculum develops these skills remains unclear. Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, and Chinn (2007) suggest that problem-based and inquiry learning approaches can enhance students' ability to analyze and solve complex problems. Nevertheless, more empirical evidence is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of different educational programs. Future research should focus on assessing students' critical thinking abilities through standardized tests and real-world applications to provide a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each curriculum.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of an assessment system depends on its ability to evaluate students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills rather than just their ability to recall information. Research by Black and Wiliam (1998) highlights that formative assessments, which provide continuous feedback, can enhance student learning and engagement. In the context of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, it is essential to examine whether their assessment methods encourage deeper understanding and analytical skills. While the 2013

Curriculum emphasizes standardized testing, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes more flexible, student-centered assessments. However, without comprehensive studies comparing their impact, it remains unclear which approach better supports the development of higher-order thinking skills. Future research should explore how different assessment strategies influence student learning outcomes to ensure that assessments align with educational goals and effectively prepare students for real-world challenges.

This study aims to bridge the research gap by conducting a detailed comparison of the assessment frameworks within the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. By evaluating their effectiveness in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, this research seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how these curricula shape student learning outcomes. Previous studies emphasize the importance of assessments that go beyond rote memorization and instead encourage higher-order thinking (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Brookhart, 2010). Therefore, this study will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each framework, considering their implications for students' ability to navigate complex real-world challenges. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers, supporting evidence-based improvements in curriculum design. Ultimately, by examining how these assessment strategies contribute to the development of essential 21st-century skills, this research aims to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Indonesia's education system in preparing students for future demands.

1.2 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

This research specifically aims to address the demands of recent developments in Indonesia's national education system, which are reflected in the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and Merdeka Curriculum. By exploring the application of the Assessment Framework in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, this research seeks to contribute to understanding how assessment in both curricula is harmoniously integrated to hone critical thinking skills. This is

in line with the commitment to understanding and adapting to significant changes in the national education paradigm, making this research relevant and meaningful in the current Indonesian education context.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the background study above, the research question:

How do the Assessment Frameworks in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum differ in assessing students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study examines the differences between the assessment frameworks in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in evaluating students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By comparing their approaches, this research aims to determine how effectively each framework supports the development of these essential skills in student learning outcomes.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study has theoretical, practical, social, and educational significance in contributing to the understanding and improvement of assessment frameworks in the Indonesian education system.

1.5.1. Theoretical significance

This study contributes to the growing body of research on curriculum and assessment in Indonesia by examining how different assessment frameworks influence student learning. By comparing the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, it highlights the role of assessments in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for 21st-century education (Brookhart, 2010). Furthermore, this study provides a theoretical foundation for future research on educational policy and curriculum development, particularly in understanding the impact of structured and flexible assessment approaches on student learning outcomes (OECD, 2019).

1.5.2. Practical Significance

This research offers evidence-based insights that can help policymakers refine assessment strategies within the 2013 Curriculum or enhance the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Aditomo, 2022). It also provides educators with a clearer understanding of the advantages and limitations of each assessment framework, equipping them with effective strategies to design assessments that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Firman, 2022). By improving assessment practices, this study indirectly benefits students by creating learning environments that nurture essential skills for academic achievement, personal growth, and future career readiness (Kemendikbud, Education Ministry Issues National Assessment Policy, 2021).

1.5.3. Social and Educational Significance

Beyond its impact on curriculum development, this study supports Indonesia's broader educational goals, such as producing globally competitive graduates and enhancing the quality of education nationwide. It aligns with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2017). Additionally, this research serves as a model for other countries undergoing curriculum reform, demonstrating how assessment frameworks can be analyzed and improved to align with specific educational objectives.

1.6 Definition of Terminologies

The following terms are explained in detail according to the research setting in order to give clarity and precision in comprehending the important terminology used in this study:

1.6.1. Comparative analysis

A research method that systematically examines and contrasts two or more subjects to identify their differences and similarities. In this study,

comparative analysis is used to evaluate the assessment frameworks of the 2013 Curriculum and Merdeka Curriculum, focusing on their structures, implementation, and impact on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students (Bryman, 2012).

1.6.2. Assessment Framework

A methodical collection of instruments, techniques, and rules intended to gauge and assess students' knowledge and abilities. Formal, standardized tests that concentrate on the cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor domains are used in the 2013 curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes students' holistic development by emphasizing adaptable, teacher-driven assessments that are customized for local situations (Kemendikbud, 2022).

1.6.3. 2013 Curriculum

Indonesia implemented a competency-based curriculum that emphasized measurable learning objectives. The assessment framework is rigidly structured, requiring teachers to follow specific guidelines to evaluate student performance in three domains: cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes), and psychomotor (skills) (Kemendikbud, 2013).

1.6.4. Merdeka curriculum

A student-centered curriculum was introduced in Indonesia as an alternative to the 2013 Curriculum. It allows teachers greater autonomy in designing critical thinking and adaptability through contextual and flexible learning approaches (Kemendikbud, 2022).

1.6.5. Critical Thinking Skills

Higher-order thinking skills enable individuals to independently analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make reasoned decisions or solve problems. In this study, critical thinking is assessed based on students' ability to question assumptions, identify valid evidence, and construct logical arguments (Pau, 2019).

1.6.6. Problem-Solving skills

The ability to apply knowledge and skills in a structured way to identify, analyze, and resolve real-world or theoretical problems. This study evaluates problem-solving as the student's capacity to understand complex issues, generate solutions, and implement them effectively (OECD, 2019).

1.6.7. Student Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are the observable and measurable results of a student's educational process. In this research, learning outcomes specifically refer to students' demonstrated abilities in critical thinking and problem-solving, as influenced by the assessment frameworks in the 2013 Curriculum and Merdeka Curriculum (Biggs, 2011).