

Critical Analysis of the Implementation of Academic Ability Tests (TKA) in Vocational Secondary Schools: A Descriptive-Analytical Literature Review of the Impact of Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025

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Abstract

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 9 of 2025 introduces the Academic Ability Test (TKA) as a standard evaluation instrument. Its implementation in Vocational High Schools (SMK), which focus on practical competencies and work readiness, raises the potential for conflict. This study aims to analyse the potential impact and challenges of implementing the TKA in SMKs and its implications for vocational pedagogy. The research method used a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach with a literature review. A policy implementation diagnostic framework and a conflict-ambiguity typology model were used to assess the compatibility between the TKA and the objectives of vocational education. The results of the analysis shed light that there is a dissonance between the academic focus of TKA and the competency-based philosophy of SMK. Implementation challenges are predicted to be systemic, including obstacles related to policy standards, resource availability, and implementer disposition. In addition, at the school level, covert resistance and strategic adaptation to protect the identity of vocational pedagogy are likely to emerge. This policy is categorised as 'Political Implementation,' where formal compliance may occur, but actual practice in the field adapts to the needs and characteristics of vocational schools. It can therefore be concluded that the application of standard academic evaluation in vocational schools risks weakening vocational pedagogy and may compromise the core mission of vocational education.

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

1. Introduction

Vocational education, particularly through Vocational High Schools (SMK), has long been positioned as a strategic pillar in Indonesia's human resource development agenda (Hana et al., 2024). The demands of the global era place SMKs at the forefront of producing skilled workers (Rohaeni et al., 2021).

However, national literature and data consistently highlight the paradox that SMK graduates are among the highest contributors to open unemployment rates (Tanjung et al., 2024). This phenomenon indicates a significant skills gap between educational outcomes and the needs of the business and industrial world.

In response, the government rolled out a policy to revitalise vocational schools, centred on the 'Link and Match' programme (Dese et al., 2024). The basic philosophy of this policy is curriculum customisation. Vocational schools are encouraged to align teaching materials and implement relevant learning models such as Teaching Factory (TeFa) (Saptadi et al., 2025).



Pedagogically, this approach is strongly rooted in the theory of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which states that learning becomes meaningful when students can connect academic material with real-world situations (Mashudi & Azzahro, 2019; Trianto, 2007). The essence of Link and Match is partial de-standardisation, whereby each SMK must be unique and aligned with the needs of its local industry.

This spirit is in line with the national education philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, who dreamed of Indonesians being ‘free in body and soul’, economically independent and spiritually whole (Irawati et al., 2022). In the context of vocational schools, ‘free in body’ is translated as the competence to work.

Within this ecosystem focused on customisation and practical relevance, the government introduced a ‘policy shock’ through the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education (Permendikdasmen) No. 9 of 2025. This regulation established the Academic Ability Test (TKA) as a national standard evaluation instrument. The TKA is defined as ‘an activity to measure students’ academic achievement in certain subjects’.

This is where the paradox of dual policies, which is the core of this study, lies. On the one hand, through Presidential Regulation No. 68/2022, the government requires SMKs to customise their curricula (Dese et al., 2024). On the other hand, through Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025, the government requires vocational schools to standardise assessments that focus on academic achievement. Vocational schools are simultaneously encouraged to move in two opposite directions: to become more vocational (specific and practical) and at the same time more academic (general and theoretical). The fundamental tension between these two policy mandates creates what Matland (1995) refers to as a condition of high policy conflict.

This study has significant novelty compared to previous studies, which often focused on assessment practices in vocational schools without directly linking them to new national policies, such as Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 concerning Academic Ability Tests (TKA). Fatinah et al. (2025) emphasises the importance of assessment aspects that reflect real work skills and professional attitudes (authentic assessment) as an essential part of vocational evaluation, but has not yet linked this to the impact of new academic standard assessment policies such as TKA in Indonesia. Anggraini et al. (2024) shows a trend towards developing assessment instruments in vocational schools that are more technical but do not examine the relationship between academic assessment and vocational learning outcomes holistically, whereas Yusop et al. (2022) on assessment approaches in vocational education highlights that most literature emphasises the link between competency assessment and learning outcomes, but does not specifically evaluate the impact of newly implemented national policies. In addition, the readiness to implement foreign worker policies in general without thoroughly examining their implications for vocational schools and the relevance of vocational curricula specifically Juriyah et al. (2025), as well as Villarroel et al. (2024) regarding the quality and authenticity of vocational assessments, there is a fundamental difference in the objectives of evaluation between academic and vocational needs. Thus, this study fills an important gap by critically analysing the impact of Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 on the implementation of TKA in vocational schools, comparing previous empirical findings and the new regulatory framework to provide a comprehensive understanding of how standardised academic policies influence more competency-oriented vocational assessment practices.

Based on the background of this policy paradox, this literature study formulates several key issues that are the focus of analysis. This study examines how vocational education literature and assessment theory explain the fundamental conflict between the philosophy of academic standardisation represented by the Academic Ability Test (TKA) and the mission of vocational education oriented towards practical competencies. Furthermore, using a

diagnostic framework for policy implementation from Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) this study systematically analyses the potential challenges in implementing TKA in vocational schools. Further, based on Matland's (1995) conflict-ambiguity model, this study examines how the types of TKA implementation in vocational schools can be classified and how the dynamics of school adaptation to this policy can be predicted theoretically.

In line with the problem formulation, the objectives of this study are: 1) To analyse descriptively and analytically the epistemological dissonance between TKA and vocational education philosophy based on existing literature; 2) To diagnose potential systemic factors that hinder the implementation of TKA using the theoretical framework of Van Meter and Van Horn; and 3) To construct a theoretical argument for classifying the dynamics of TKA implementation using the Matland model.

Theoretically, this study contributes to policy implementation studies by presenting a conceptual analysis in a unique context where epistemological conflict (academic vs. vocational) occurs. Practically, this study provides crucial literature-based feedback to policymakers regarding the potential unintended consequences of TKA in vocational schools.

2. Method

2.1. Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive-analytical literature review design. This approach was chosen to analyse and synthesise existing ideas, theories, and research findings in order to build a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2018). The focus is to critically analyse the paradox of foreign worker policies in vocational schools by basing arguments on established literature.

2.2. Data Sources

The data sources in this study are secondary data, which are categorised as follows:

1. **Primary Policy Documents:** These consist of relevant laws and regulations, primarily Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education (Permendikdasmen) No. 9 of 2025 concerning TKA and Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2022 concerning the Revitalisation of Vocational Education.
2. **Theoretical Literature:** Includes reference books and scholarly articles that discuss the conceptual basis of the research. This includes the philosophy of vocational education (Hana, 2024; Saptadi et al., 2025), CTL pedagogy (Mashudi & Azzahro, 2019), educational assessment theories such as Competency-Based Assessment/CBA (Young, 2022) and High-Stakes Testing (Au, 2022; Coniam & Falvey, 2007), as well as public policy implementation theory (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Matland, 1995).
3. **Secondary Empirical Literature:** Previous research journals relevant to the Indonesian context, particularly those examining the implementation of education policy (Raharjo, 2017; Saiman & Kasman, 2025), evaluation of vocational programmes such as Link and Match (Dese et al., 2024), and stakeholder perceptions of policy (Raharjo, 2017).

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis and theoretical synthesis. The analysis process was carried out in three stages:

1. **Policy Description Stage:** Analysing Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025 and Perpres No. 68/2022 documents to identify and objectively describe the objectives, targets, and mechanisms of the two policies, as well as mapping the paradoxes that arise.

2. Conceptual Analysis Stage (Dissonance): Comparing and contrasting the prerequisites for TKA (as a standard academic assessment) with the fundamental principles of vocational education (CTL, CBA, Link and Match) extracted from theoretical literature.
3. Implementation Analysis Stage (Diagnostic & Predictive): Applying the theoretical implementation framework (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Matland, 1995) to the results of the analysis in stage 2 to diagnose potential systemic failures and predict the dynamics of implementation that will occur in the field.

2.4. Theoretical Foundation: Policy, Assessment, And Implementation

To analyse the phenomenon of foreign workers in vocational schools in depth, a solid theoretical foundation is required. This section will outline the three theoretical pillars that form the basis of the analysis.

2.4.1. The Nature of Vocational Education: Philosophy and Authentic Assessment

Vocational education, philosophically speaking, differs fundamentally from academic education (Saptadi et al., 2025). While academic education focuses on the mastery of theoretical knowledge (knowing that), vocational education focuses on the mastery of practical skills and work readiness (knowing how). The main principles are relevance and learning by doing (Hana et al., 2024).

The pedagogy most in line with this philosophy is Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) (Mashudi & Azzahro, 2019). CTL is an approach that links subject matter to real-world contexts (Rifa'i et al., 2022). In vocational schools, CTL is implemented in learning models such as Teaching Factory (TeFa) and Link and Match (Saptadi et al., 2025; Gumay et al., 2024).

The logical consequence of this pedagogy is the assessment model. Vocational education requires Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) (Supriadi, 2020). CBA is the process of collecting evidence to determine whether a person has achieved the specified competency standards (LSP-FPM, 2020). The focus is not on what students know, but on what students can do (ICN, 2008). This assessment must be authentic, that is, 'a meaningful measurement of learning outcomes for the domains of attitude, skills, and knowledge' in a real context (Tawil & Tampa, 2025).

The principle of assessment is based on validity, whether the test measures what it is supposed to measure (Bonner, 2012). However, in the context of CBA and vocational education, the validity sought is external or predictive validity: 'Does this assessment (e.g., competency test) predict successful student performance in the workplace?'

2.4.2. Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025: TKA as Standardisation and High-Stakes Testing

An analysis of the Permendikdasmen No. 9 of 2025 document reveals key articles that are sources of tension. Article 1 defines TKA as 'academic achievement measurement'. Article 8 stipulates that participants include 'final year SMK/MAK students'. Article 9 details the subjects tested for vocational high schools, which consist of Indonesian Language, Mathematics, English Language, and one elective subject.

However, the most transformative article is Article 13. This article states that the results of the vocational high school TKA 'can be one of the considerations in the selection of new students at the higher education level'.

The inclusion of this article instantly changed the TKA from a mere summative assessment (Scriven, 1994) to a High-Stakes Testing instrument (Au et al., 1999). The theory

of high-stakes testing explains that when test results have serious consequences (in this case, student admission to university), the tests will drastically change teaching and learning behaviour (Coniam & Falvey, 2007). Teachers will tend to ‘teach to the test’, the curriculum will narrow, and the focus will shift from deep understanding to question ‘drilling’ strategies.

This is where the ‘betrayal’ of the vocational mission lies. The main mission of vocational schools, which is reaffirmed in the Link and Match programme, is to overcome unemployment and the skills gap through work readiness. However, the TKA policy (Article 13) explicitly creates a perverse incentive. Instead of strengthening Link and Match to increase employment (Dese et al., 2024), schools are now incentivised by the policy to divert resources (time, funds, pedagogical focus) to prepare students to pass the TKA. This phenomenon is known as academic drift in vocational institutions.

2.5. Policy Implementation Analysis Framework

To examine why and how the TKA policy has the potential to cause problems, two classic implementation models are used as an analytical framework.

1. Van Meter and Van Horn Diagnostic Model (1975)

This model is a classic top-down approach that serves as a diagnostic tool for assessing implementation performance (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). According to Subarsono (2012) the success or failure of a policy is determined by six interrelated independent variables. Policy standards and objectives cover the extent to which policy objectives are clear and consistent so that they can serve as appropriate guidelines for implementation. Resources include the availability of sufficient funds, manpower, and time to implement the policy. Inter-organisational communication emphasises the importance of clear and accurate information flow between relevant parties. The characteristics of the implementing agency relate to the capacity and structure of the bureaucracy responsible for policy implementation. The attitude or disposition of the implementers, in the form of acceptance or rejection of the policy, can affect the effectiveness of implementation. Social, economic, and political conditions reflect the external context that can support or hinder the success of a policy. These six variables together form an analytical framework for assessing the effectiveness of a policy.

This model will be used to diagnose potential challenges in the implementation of TKA systematically, with reference to findings from research on the implementation of similar policies in Indonesia (Tasyak, 2022).

2. Matland's Typology Model (Ambiguity-Conflict) (1995)

Richard Matland (1995) offers a synthesis model which argues that the type of implementation depends on two main variables: Ambiguity (unclear objectives or methods) and Conflict (conflicting objectives between policymakers and implementers). This combination produces four different quadrants. The first quadrant is Administrative Implementation, which occurs when both ambiguity and conflict are low, so that policy implementation tends to run smoothly and in a structured manner. The second quadrant is Political Implementation, which arises when ambiguity is low but conflict is high, so that policy implementation is influenced by political interests and negotiations between parties. The third quadrant is Experimental Implementation, which occurs when ambiguity is high but conflict is low, so that policy implementation tends to be experimental, innovative, and flexible. Finally, the fourth quadrant is Symbolic Implementation, which arises when both ambiguity and conflict are high, so that policy implementation is more symbolic and often less effective in achieving real goals.

This model will be used to predict and classify the dynamics of TKA implementation in vocational schools, which are strongly suspected to fall into the ‘Political Implementation’ quadrant.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Epistemological Dissonance: Conflict in Assessment Philosophy

Literature analysis reveals epistemological dissonance, a fundamental conflict at the level of the philosophy of knowledge, between TKA and the mission of SMK. On the one hand, the mission of vocational education (SMK), as emphasised in Presidential Regulation No. 68/2022 and the Link and Match programme, focuses on knowing how (practical competence) (Saptadi et al., 2025). The main pedagogy is CTL (Mashudi, 2019), and the assessment method is CBA (Young, 2022) or authentic assessment (Tawil & Tampa, 2025) which pursues predictive validity (the ability to predict performance in industry) (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014).

On the other hand, Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025 imposes TKA, an instrument that focuses on knowing that (academic achievement). More crucially, Article 13 makes it high-stakes testing by linking it to university selection. The theory of high-stakes testing predicts that this policy will create academic drift, where schools are forced to shift their focus from vocational competencies to drilling academic questions to maximise TKA scores (Coniam & Falvey, 2007).

This dissonance is the core of the problem: TKA implicitly imposes a definition of ‘academic validity’ on the vocational school ecosystem, which has been operating with ‘industrial/performance validity’. This policy directly threatens the relevance of vocational schools to DUDI, which is the main problem that should be addressed by Presidential Regulation No. 68/2022.

3.2. Diagnostic Analysis of Implementation Challenges (Van Meter & Van Horn Model)

By applying the Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) diagnostic model to the TKA policy, and supported by findings from studies on the implementation of similar policies in Indonesia, potential systemic failures in the implementation of TKA in vocational schools can be diagnosed. Based on the Van Meter & Van Horn (1975) Model 6 and Literature Analysis. These potential challenges are described in detail in Table 1, which provides a diagnostic analysis matrix regarding the implementation of TKA in vocational schools.

Table 1. Diagnostic Analysis Matrix of Potential Challenges in Implementing TKA in SMKs

Van Meter & Van Horn Variables	Literature-Based Analysis of Potential Challenges
1. Policy Standards and Objectives	The objectives of TKA (university selection) fundamentally conflict with the core objectives of SMK (work readiness). Academic standards are considered epistemologically invalid by vocational philosophy (CBA).
2. Resources	Implementation studies in Indonesia (Setiawan, 2025; Kusumajati & Kurniawan, 2019) consistently show resource limitations as an obstacle. TKA will trigger resource cannibalisation: practical hours and Teaching Factories, which are crucial for Link/Match, will have to be sacrificed for TKA tutoring.
3. Inter-organisational Communication	Standardised top-down policies (TKA) will be difficult to communicate effectively to implementing agents (vocational schools) accustomed to bottom-up curriculum customisation based on industry needs (Subarsono, 2005).

Van Meter & Van Horn Variables	Literature-Based Analysis of Potential Challenges
4. Characteristics of Implementing Agents	The bureaucratic structure and human resource capacity (vocational schools) have been optimised for industry partnerships and CBA assessments. They are not designed or equipped to be intensive academic 'tutoring'.
5. Implementer Disposition (Attitude)	This is predicted to be the most critical variable for failure. The literature shows that teacher perception is key (Raharjo, 2017). Given that TKA conflicts with the professional identity of vocational teachers and is considered irrelevant by students (who are focused on work), their disposition is predicted to be highly resistant.
6. Social, Economic, Political Context	The local economic context (DUDI) demands SMK graduates who are ready to work (in line with the Link and Match1 mission). The national political context (Ministry of Education and Culture) demands high academic scores. There is a direct conflict between national political demands and local economic realities.

The above matrix analysis as in table 1 shows that foreign workers in vocational schools are predicted to experience systemic failure because this policy has problems in all six diagnostic variables of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), with the most critical root causes being Variable 1 (Standards) and Variable 5 (Disposition). The results of this study show that the most significant conflicts occur in the standards and objectives of the TKA policy, which tend to contradict the vocational education mission of SMKs, as well as in the dispositions of the implementers, where teachers and students consider TKA to be less relevant to the context of vocational learning. In addition, human resources, particularly school principals and teachers, play an important role in the successful implementation; their competence, capacity, and attitudes directly affect the quality of TKA implementation in schools (Arnita & Fadriati, 2022). Another obstacle, in line with the literature, concerns the relationship between vocational schools and industry, which still faces challenges in bridging the skills of graduates with the needs of the job market, thus requiring curriculum adjustments and closer collaboration (Rojaki et al., 2021), as well as ineffective policy communication, which can hinder coordination between policy makers and implementers in schools, thereby affecting the quality of implementation in the field (Wardhany et al., 2024). Based on the combination of findings from this study and evidence from the literature, it can be concluded that without simultaneous handling of issues related to resources, communication, implementer characteristics, and socio-economic context, the implementation of TKA in vocational schools is at high risk of systemic failure, as summarised in Table 1.

3.3. Classification of Implementation: Foreign Workers as Political Implementation (Matland Model)

Using Matland's typology model (1995), the implementation of foreign workers in vocational schools can be classified theoretically.

1. Ambiguity (Clarity of Policy): Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025 has low ambiguity. This policy is very clear: vocational schools must implement TKA with standard academic tests (Articles 8, 9) and the results are used for university selection (Article 13).
2. Conflict over Goals: This policy has a high level of conflict. As analysed in points A and B, the goal of academic standardisation fundamentally conflicts with the vocational mission (work readiness) and professional identity of vocational teachers.

The combination of Low Ambiguity and High Conflict places the implementation of TKA in vocational schools squarely in the Political Implementation quadrant (Matland, 1995). In the 'Political Implementation' model, Matland (1995) predicts that the implementation

process will not be smooth (as in Administrative Implementation). Instead, implementation will be characterised by power struggles, top-down coercion (from the government), and bottom-up resistance (from schools). Schools (bottom-up actors), which do not have the power to openly reject policies, are predicted to engage in political bargaining and strategic adaptation to protect their core interests and missions.

Therefore, if ‘adaptive strategies’ are found in the field (for example, schools integrating TKA material into vocational subjects), Matland's (1995) analysis suggests that this should not be interpreted as sincere compliance. Instead, it should be interpreted as a coping mechanism or covert resistance to ‘tame’ the policy and protect the core vocational mission from policy interventions that are considered irrelevant.

The implementation of TKA in vocational schools is not only related to administrative compliance, but also involves complex adaptation and negotiation processes. Schools are likely to develop pragmatic strategies to adapt TKA to vocational practices, such as integrating TKA material into vocational subjects or adjusting teaching methods to remain relevant to vocational objectives. This indicates that TKA outcomes in the field do not always reflect full compliance, but are also a form of constructive resistance that maintains the integrity of the vocational education mission. Furthermore, these findings emphasise the need for more flexible and contextual policies that enable vocational schools to meet academic standards without sacrificing their focus on work skills. Teachers and school management play a major role as mediators between formal policies and daily learning practices, so support in the form of training, clear policy communication, and effective coordination is key to ensuring that TKA implementation runs optimally and remains in line with vocational objectives.

4. Conclusion

The synthesis of the literature and policy analysis reveals several important findings. First, there is a clear epistemological conflict between the philosophy underpinning Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025, which promotes academic standardisation through high-stakes testing, and the foundational philosophy of vocational education embodied in Perpres No. 68/2022, which prioritises customisation, industry alignment, and competency-based assessment. Second, predictive analysis using the Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) model indicates a high likelihood of systemic failure in implementing the TKA within vocational schools, driven by misalignment between policy objectives and the anticipated resistance of implementers, further aggravated by the diversion of resources essential for the Link and Match programme. Third, based on Matland's (1995) typology, the implementation of TKA falls into the category of Political Implementation characterised by low ambiguity and high conflict, implying that the process will be contested, marked by power struggles and subtle resistance from school actors seeking to safeguard the core mission of vocational education. Overall, the study concludes that enforcing standardised academic assessments in a one-size-fits-all format risks undermining the very essence of vocational education.

The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, the findings reaffirm the analytical strength of classic implementation models specifically those of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Matland (1995) as reliable frameworks for diagnosing and predicting policy outcomes even prior to full implementation. From a policy perspective, the analysis serves as an early warning to the Ministry of Education and Culture that the current design of Permendikdasmen No. 9/2025 may intensify the skills gap among vocational graduates rather than mitigate it. In response, several literature-based policy recommendations are proposed. For the Ministry of Education and Culture, an urgent revision of the national assessment

policy is necessary to halt the imposition of a one-size-fits-all TKA, replacing it with differentiated instruments aligned with Competency-Based Assessment principles. Should national assessments remain mandatory, their design must be fundamentally restructured to incorporate contextualised vocational problem-solving, reflecting approaches such as Contextual Teaching and Learning and authentic assessment. For vocational school administrators, the adoption of a loose coupling strategy is recommended, allowing principals to formally comply with TKA requirements, such as by providing supplementary tutoring, while deliberately safeguarding instructional hours, Teaching Factory activities, and internship programmes from being overshadowed. This strategy helps maintain the integrity of the vocational mission amid bureaucratic pressures.

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