

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

English is one of the most essential subjects in Indonesia's education system because it prepares students for communication, technology, and professional development in a global context. In vocational high schools (SMK), English plays an even more crucial role since the primary mission of SMK is to prepare students for specific careers. According to Natsir *et al.* (2022), English teaching in SMK should not only develop general language proficiency but also connect learning materials to students' vocational fields such as business, engineering, design, or hospitality. By linking language instruction with professional contexts, English becomes a practical tool that supports students' job readiness and career identity. However, based on a report by the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS), many SMK graduates still show low English proficiency, which indicates a gap between the intended goals of vocational English education and actual classroom practices (Safira & Azzahra, 2022).

In reality, English teaching in many vocational high schools remains generic and textbook-centred. According to Haryudin *et al.* (2020), teachers generally rely on government-published textbooks and supplementary materials from various publishers. As a result, students often encounter topics such as healthy lifestyles, procedure texts, or the passive voice, which are taught without meaningful links to their majors. For example, research by Sari & Wirza (2021)

found that students in the Office Authorization and Governance (OTKP) program were asked to write descriptive texts about a guitar, rather than describing professional tools or tasks relevant to their field. Such practices make English appear irrelevant to students' future professions, lowering their motivation and classroom engagement. This phenomenon highlights the need for innovation in how English is taught at vocational high schools.

One promising solution lies in teachers' creativities integrated with Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). Teacher creativity, as defined by Suwartono (2016), refers to the ability of teachers to design, adapt, and implement innovative strategies that make learning more engaging and effective. According to Mavluda (2024), creative teachers are able to adapt, modify, and design instructional tasks that connect English learning to students' real-life contexts and future professions. In vocational high schools, this means constructing lessons that reflect authentic workplace such as designing role-plays for hospitality students, report writing for business majors, or technical documentation for engineering students. Taula'bi' (2022) adds that creative teachers tend to demonstrate enthusiasm, openness to technology, and effective classroom management, which foster a dynamic and supportive learning environment. These characteristics make creativity a crucial competency for improving instructional effectiveness and sustaining student motivation.

In this regard, several vocational high schools in Batam, including SMK Eben Haezer and SMK Harapan Utama, have implemented English teaching practices that reflect teachers' creativities within the framework of CTL.

Teachers in these schools actively integrate authentic and vocationally relevant materials into their lessons, such as customer service dialogues, business correspondence, or technical descriptions, to make English learning more contextual. These efforts demonstrate that creativity can be effectively embedded in vocational English teaching, aligning language learning with students' future professional fields. Thus, both schools serve as appropriate contexts to explore how teachers apply creativities in contextual teaching.

Preliminary interviews conducted with English teachers at SMK Harapan Utama revealed that although they still rely on general English textbooks, they consistently attempt to integrate vocational-related activities into their lessons. For example, IT students are encouraged to practice technical vocabulary, create simple user guides, and role-play client support scenarios, while accounting students work on drafting emails, preparing invoices, and simulating business meetings. The teacher explained that creativity is essential for linking English materials to vocational contexts, but challenges remain, particularly students' low English readiness, limited time, and the lack of field-specific teaching resources.

A preliminary interview with the English Teacher B SMK Eben Haezer also indicated a similar situation. The teacher stated that English lessons often start with the curriculum's general competencies, but creative modifications are needed to make learning relevant to students' majors. For Software Engineering, for example, the teacher incorporates how to operate something related to computer or software. For business students, activities such as writing product

descriptions or practicing negotiation dialogues are applied. However, the Teacher B also expressed several obstacles, including large class sizes, varied student proficiency levels, and limited vocationally specific materials, which make it difficult to consistently implement contextual strategies. Both interviews confirmed that while creativity is present in teaching practices, teachers still face practical challenges that hinder fully contextualizing English lessons.

The framework of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) strongly supports the integration of teacher creativity into vocational English teaching. CTL emphasizes linking classroom instruction with real-life contexts so students can understand the relevance of what they learn (Widiantara *et al.*, 2022). Within vocational high schools, CTL practices may include role plays in customer service for retail students, writing manuals for technical students, or composing menus and recipes for culinary majors. By combining teachers' creativities with CTL principles, English learning becomes more meaningful, practical, and directly applicable to students' future careers.

Several studies have explored teacher creativities and English teaching in vocational high schools, yet gaps remain. Ningsih *et al.* (2025) identified creative strategies such as varied methods, media, and classroom management, but did not focus on how these support contextual teaching. Similarly, Nasaruddin *et al.* (2020) emphasized innovation and technology in teaching but did not address vocational relevance. Another study by Abdulloh & Nur Alim (2024) highlighted interactive media as a tool for engagement, but focused more

on students' responses than on teachers' creative roles in contextualizing English. These studies demonstrate the importance of creativity but leave unanswered questions about its integration with contextual teaching practices in vocational high school.

In summary, teacher creativity is essential for making English learning engaging, contextual, and effective in vocational high schools. However, while previous studies discussed creativity in general terms, few studies explicitly examined how English teachers employed creativities in contextual teaching to connect English learning with students' vocational fields. Therefore, this study focuses on English teachers' creativities in contextual teaching practices at SMK Eben Haezer and SMK Harapan Utama in Batam and aims to explore how teachers implement creativity, what strategies they use to connect English with vocational fields, and what challenges they face in the process.

1.2 Identification of The Problem

Based on the background of the study, the specific problems identified are:

1. In many vocational high schools, English teaching remains textbook-centered and lacks connection to students' vocational fields.
2. English materials are often generic and not tailored to students' professional contexts, which causes low engagement and limited understanding of English as a career-related skill.
3. Although some schools, such as SMK Eben Haezer and SMK Harapan Utama in Batam, have started integrating creativities into contextual teaching, further exploration is needed to understand how teachers apply

these creative practices, what strategies they use, and what challenges they encounter in sustaining them.

1.3 Limitation of The Problem

This research specifically focuses on examining English teachers' creativities in applying contextual teaching practices at vocational high schools at SMK Eben Haezer and SMK Harapan Utama in Batam City.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the identification and the limitation of the problems above, the research question is defined as follows:

1. How do English teachers implement creativities in contextual teaching at vocational high schools?
2. What strategies do they use to connect English learning to students' vocational fields?
3. What challenges do they face in applying creativities in contextual teaching practices?

1.5 Research Objective

Based on the research question above, this study aims to:

1. Explore the ways English teachers implement creativities in contextual teaching at vocational high schools.
2. Identify teaching strategies that connect English learning to students' vocational fields.

3. Find out the challenges teachers facing in using creativities in contextual teaching practices.

1.6 Significances of the Study

1. Theoretically

This study is expected to enriches the literature on English language teaching at vocational high schools, particularly in relation to teachers' creativities and their role in implementing contextual teaching and learning (CTL).

2. Practically

a. For Teachers

The study provides concrete insights and practical examples of creative strategies that can make English learning more relevant and engaging for students in vocational fields.

b. For Schools and Policymakers

The findings may support the development of programs, training, and resources that encourage the integration of teachers' creativities and contextual approaches in vocational English teaching.

c. For Future Researchers

This study serves as a reference and foundation for further studies related to creativities, CTL, or vocational English teaching practices.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1. Teachers' Creativities

English teachers' creativities refer to teachers' ability to design, adapt, and implement innovative teaching strategies that enhance students' learning experiences.

2. Contextual Teaching Practices

In this study, contextual teaching practices refer to teaching practices that connect English learning with students' vocational majors, workplace communication needs, and real-world situations.

3. Vocational High Schools (SMK)

Vocational high schools are secondary education institutions in Indonesia that focus on preparing students for specific careers, such as business, engineering, hospitality, or design. In this research, the term specifically refers to Indonesian SMKs where English teachers apply creativities in contextual teaching practices.