

Authenticity in Language Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract. Authentic assessment enhances learners' capacity to communicate proficiently in real-world contexts. It enhances relevance and student motivation by offering tasks that reflect real-world contexts and promoting students' higher-order thinking skills, creativity, strategic collaboration, as well as effective communication skills, as they are required to comprehend real-world problems faced contextually. As such, it is widely recognized as a more effective approach to assessing students' competence. However, despite its opportunities, authentic assessment has some constraints, such as time constraints, limited resources, and issues of objectivity. This article is a conceptual paper that derives its data from previous studies and is predominantly based on theories concerning language assessment. In this respect, the aim is to help teachers design and implement more effective and contextualized assessments within the learning process. Despite existing practical constraints, the practice of authentic assessment has the potential to improve the effectiveness of learning and more adequately equip students for real-world communication.

Keywords: authentic, assessment, context, learning

1 Introduction

Teaching is not only about imparting knowledge but also about enabling students to cope with the challenges faced in this complex world. A teacher does not only serve to facilitate the learning process but also guides students to become resilient individuals capable of going beyond obstacles. In this respect, a teacher is responsible for developing cognitive aspects alongside efforts to cultivate good character. These aspects, in question, are closely related to teachers' competencies [1], [2].

Theoretically, a teacher must be able to manage the preparation, implementation, and assessment processes. Prior to these processes, the teacher should be able to identify what to teach, known as the competencies to be achieved in the learning process. During the preparation stage, the teacher must be capable of handling the syllabus, lesson plans, learning media, assessment instruments, and the selected teaching methodology. Subsequently, what has been prepared should be implemented in the actual teaching process. Finally, the assessment activities should be designed in such a way that they contribute to further improvement in the learning process [3], [4], [5], [6].

In this stage, assessment should be carried out by referring to what to teach or the competence to be achieved. Putting it differently, assessment cannot be conducted in isolation and must be aligned with the expected competence.

Regardless of the preparation and implementation processes, assessment is essential in the teaching-learning process. It has the potential to gather information that is beneficial not only for the current situation but also for future instructional planning. Assessment is a systematic procedure through which data are thoroughly obtained, analyzed, and interpreted, subsequently serving as the foundation for accurate decision-making. Furthermore, aside from measuring knowledge, assessment focuses on constructive feedback. In this respect, by conducting assessments, teachers can obtain comprehensive information and design well-planned future teaching-learning activities [7], [8], [9].

Assessment can be categorized into three types: assessment of learning (summative), assessment as learning, and assessment for learning (formative). The first type focuses on measuring students' knowledge and is conducted at the end of a teaching period. In this context, assessment takes place after certain topics have been taught over a specific period. The purpose is to evaluate the extent of students' understanding of the given topics. Meanwhile, the second type, known as assessment as learning, encourages students to engage in significant reflection on their learning progress. This type is implemented through self-assessments and peer assessments. Finally, the third type aims to gather feedback from students, which is subsequently used by teachers to design more effective learning instructions [5], [6], [9], [10]. This type is conducted during the teaching-learning process. To date, the primary focus of assessment of learning (AoL) and assessment as learning (AaL) is on students. Meanwhile, assessment for learning (AfL) primarily focuses on teachers. Although they have different focuses, these types of assessment share common principles. They should follow a systematic process and be implemented in alignment with what is taught or the competencies to be achieved, as previously highlighted.

Many studies have been conducted regarding assessment in language teaching. For example, assessment can be carried out through questioning techniques [7], [9], [11]. In this respect, the use of questions should be constructed in such a way that they function to provide feedback for better future learning instruction. As such, teachers should be able to raise questions strategically and efficiently. Additionally, by focusing on critical thinking skills, questioning techniques can enhance students' higher-order thinking. In this regard, types of questions have the potential to guide students' understanding, leading them to critically analyze and respond effectively [12], [13], [14].

Other studies are concerned with types of assessment [15], [16], [17]. Formative assessment is beneficial for teachers in managing the learning instruction. Despite its effectiveness for learning instruction, this type of assessment is also capable of achieving learning objectives. The use of this type is effective because it is based on the real situation of the teaching-learning process. Unlike summative assessment, which focuses on students' knowledge, formative assessment focuses on teachers' efforts to gain constructive feedback from students, which is subsequently beneficial for self-reflection on the teaching methods implemented. As such, summative assessment is always carried out at the end of the learning process and solely measures students' understanding.

In relation to teaching, there should be a correspondence between assessment activities and learning goals. As such, teaching activities should be carried out in a way that enables teachers to conduct assessments effectively. In this regard, the assessment in question should be justified and aligned with the learning goals from which its instruments are designed. In other words, assessment instruments and teaching activities are like two sides of the same coin. They are both employed to achieve the expected learning goals. Teaching activities are processes aimed at guiding learners' understanding, while assessment is a systematic way to reflect the extent of progress in the process [18]. Despite the fact that teaching preparation is a necessary element, both are essential to reach the target learning goals.

However, it is crucial to note that assessment and teaching should trigger students to have a significant engagement [19], [20]. The engagement in question appears to result from experiential learning and effective assessment for learning. The former focuses on how teachers involve students in critical thinking, collaboration, and provide meaningful learning activities. To actualize these efforts, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) are alternative approaches to scaffold students' engagement [21], [22]. Meanwhile, the latter focuses on teachers' strategies for assessing students' understanding of the topic being discussed, whether at the end or during the ongoing learning process. This subsequently helps teachers design improved future learning instructions that scaffold learning engagement. The learning goals reflected in the learning process should align with the assessment activities. If learning instructions or goals change, the assessment process should be re-evaluated.

Although previous research studies have examined assessment activities, the use of authentic assessment needs to be discussed in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. In this regard, it is essential to highlight the opportunities and challenges in a manner suitable for learning English as a foreign language. Authentic assessment, which focuses on real-world contexts, should adapt to the learning environments it is intended to support. Moreover, the learning contexts for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) differ significantly. Therefore, emphasizing the application of authentic assessment in EFL teaching is crucial. In this article, the authors specifically focus on the opportunities and challenges encountered in the EFL context.

2 Method

Since this writing is a conceptual paper, the data are primarily taken from literature. In this regard, the literature mainly consists of journal articles related to authentic assessment. The writer searched for the topic in relevant journals from Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Subsequently, the articles were filtered based on the scope and limitations of the discussion. In addition to relevant articles, the writer also relied on books written by scholars and their own knowledge of assessment. The findings from previous studies in relevant journal articles, perspectives from scholars in their books, and the writer's own knowledge were adapted in a way that contributes to completing this paper.

3 Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment differs from traditional assessment in both focus and objectives. Authentic assessment emphasizes evaluating students' real-life competencies by providing tasks that reflect real-world scenarios. In completing these tasks, students are expected to interpret, analyze, make decisions, and apply their knowledge in practical, real-life contexts [23]. In contrast, traditional assessment focuses on measuring students' knowledge and understanding through a scoring system. As a result, written tests, such as multiple-choice and essay tests, are predominantly used. As such, authentic assessment relies on approaches such as projects, portfolios, and presentations, through which students demonstrate their competence, creativity, and collaboration in a comprehensive manner.

Traditional assessment, on the other hand, is more on standardized and quantified system reflecting in the test score [24]. In addition to the focus, another difference lies in the objective. Authentic assessment aims to improve students' skills that are relevant to real-life contexts. These skills are honed by engaging students with real-life problems, requiring them to think critically and analyze systematically in response to the challenges they encounter. In contrast, traditional assessment focuses on students' comprehension as outlined in the curriculum, measuring the extent to which they understand the topics covered within standardized competencies.

There have been many ways to assess students learning. Scholars have been in a long debate on what and how it should be. However, it is deniable that the assessment is functioned to know the impact of learning instruction [25], [26]. Teachers use assessment to understand the extent of students' knowledge in relation to the competencies to be achieved. Whether conducted prior to, during, or at the final stage of learning, assessment is an essential component of instructional design. As previously highlighted, it should align with the intended learning goals.

In its implementation, authentic assessment is concerned with a real-life context [1], [23], [27]. Assigning projects, conducting experiments, delivering presentations, and performing simulations are suggested methods to employ. The tasks in question should reflect real-world contexts, which are beneficial for encouraging students to think critically, collaborate, and solve problems related to the given subject matter. Therefore, the implementation should be designed to provide students with experiential learning, practical skills, conceptual understanding, and the ability to apply knowledge to real-life situations.

Regardless of the context, the focus of authentic assessment is the competence [28], [29]. In this respect, students are guided to have particular competence utilized in a more practical context. Therefore, the assigned project or problems should be able to integrate a range of knowledge and skills following the learning indicators. Integral to this, teaching learning process should be constructed in such a way that it should scaffold students' understanding toward the topic being discussed. As such, teaching methodologies, learning media are essential to reach the learning goal of the topic in question. Furthermore, the product should be assessed holistically, steps by steps taken by students, and evaluated comprehensively to know their strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, the assessment reflects their actual abilities and thinking skills, analyzing and synthesizing process.

Moving deeper to teaching- learning process, authentic assessment corresponds to Project-based learning (PjBL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) [22], [30]. These active methods support students to complete complex, real-life and relevant tasks and are used to evaluate the learning process and outcomes. The former is concerned with the assigned projects that are helpful to actively and independently engage students in learning [31]. In addition to project, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) corresponds to the implementation of authentic assessment. In this context, students are required to solve the problems of the assigned tasks through which they are trained to face real-world challenges of the globe. In these learning activities, students are able to critically think, collaboratively work, effectively communicate, and creatively innovate, as highlighted in the 21st-century skills.

4 Opportunities and Challenges

Authentic assessment is beneficial for improving the quality of teaching. It provides opportunities for both teacher and students [15], [32]. Authentic assessment is essential for teachers to design better learning instructions resulting from feedback gained from students. As such, its implementation should be constructed in such a way that it provides detailed information of students needs. Besides, the implementation should encourage teachers to reflect what have been taught that subsequently benefit them to plan a better teaching. The reflection in question includes the achieved competence, teaching planning, teaching method and the assessment itself. In the meantime, the second is concerned with students' skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and creativity. These 21 skills, as highlighted previously, corresponds to project-based and problem-based learning that help them to engage with the skills in question.

Furthermore, the implementation of authentic assessment might be of benefit for practicing the real-life skills [33]. In this context, students are motivated to learn due to the relevant context they have. In this respect, they are acquainted with real-life situation and more secure to have scaffolding. Saying it differently, the sociocultural aspect of learning is essential to scaffold learning process. Besides, students have great chances to engage with meaningful learning process that subsequently lead them to a deep reflection of their own learning progress [34]. Deep reflection in question is an action of what they have and will be. Therefore, teachers are suggested to provide projects, simulations, or portfolios to students following their needs and learning objectives contextually.

Aligned with the above argument, authentic assessment encourages the use of interactive and collaborative learning methods. For example, in group discussion-based learning or simulation, students are given the opportunity to explore the material through teamwork. In this context, authentic assessment enables teachers to assess not only the final outcome but also the student's collaborative process, critical thinking ability, and communication skills [35]. This provides a more comprehensive view of the extent to which these learning methods have successfully supported the development of student competencies.

Authentic assessment also plays a crucial role in encouraging inquiry-based learning methods, where students are expected to be more independent in seeking information, analyzing data, and making decisions [36]. This method is well-suited for tasks in authentic assessment, such

as research, experiments, or case study analysis. Authentic assessments help teachers evaluate how students identify problems, formulate hypotheses, and devise relevant solutions [37]. In other words, inquiry-based learning methods and authentic assessment together encourage students to master higher-order thinking skills, as previously mentioned. Finally, the implementation of authentic assessment is significant for continuous learning. As such, feedback obtained from assessment activity lead teachers to design future better learning instructions, more in line with students learning needs. Consequently, learning might occur continuously and trigger to the quality of learning deeply, meaningfully, and contextually.

Overall, the application of authentic assessment affects teachers to design learning instructions. By integrating authentic assessments, teachers are encouraged to adopt a more student-centered, active, and real-world relevant learning approach. This creates a learning environment that not only fosters academic understanding but also equips students with practical skills they can use in their daily lives. [23], [24]. Thus, authentic assessment and learning methods have a mutually reinforcing relationship in improving the quality of learning [38].

Despite the fruitful opportunities, authentic assessment meets some challenges [39], [40]. The challenges include time constraint, resources and objectivity. Since the given tasks should be relevant to real-life world, such as project and case studies, both teachers and students spend more time completing them. Teachers definitely need time to prepare instrument such as scoring rubrics completely. Meanwhile students corrupt their time to complete the assignment. It might take longer time as they find more challenges in the field. The flexibility and complexity of gathering and processing and interpreting data in the field consumes much more time than an expectation. This leads to an unpredictable time.

In addition to time, resources present another challenge in the implementation of authentic assessment. The challenge is particularly related to technological facilities and support barriers faced by those living in remote areas, especially issues such as internet accessibility and learning media [30]. The challenges in question lead to imbalance between city and remotes and results in the effective and efficient implementation of authentic assessment. These limited resources might impact on readiness. Therefore, teachers should be able to provide and scaffold students with additional guidance for students who are used to traditional assessment methods. This appears due to the difficulty in adjusting themselves with the required facilities, influencing level of creativity, initiative, or collaboration.

More importantly, teacher's objectivity is essential in the implementation of authentic assessment. Despite the fact that it always takes place in other types of assessment, it remains a significant challenge for teachers. The challenges are concerned with reliability and validity which are definitely required for developing instrument. In this respect, teachers still find some difficulties in dealing with the requirements in question, providing space for subjectivity. Therefore, the implementation of authentic assessment should be well-prepared both for teacher and students. Owing to the fact that it has great opportunities for meaningful and relevant learning, they have to be still adaptative. Teachers must be trained to understand how to structure and execute. In the meantime, students should be ready for the required sources supporting for its implementation

effectively. By overcoming these challenges, authentic assessment can be optimally applied to improve the quality of learning and prepare students for real life.

5 Conclusion

Authentic assessment, which aligns with Project-Based Learning and Problem-Based Learning, is promising. Its implementation benefits both teachers and students. Students are given opportunities to develop critical thinking, a sense of belonging, creativity, and collaboration, all of which are essential for 21st-century skills. Furthermore, they become more adaptable, independent, and capable of learning beyond their limits. Meanwhile, teachers have a great opportunity to improve future learning instruction based on feedback from their teaching methods. However, challenges such as time, resources, readiness, and objectivity still arise. These challenges should not be seen as burdens but as opportunities for constructive, meaningful, and experiential learning experiences.

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