



Developing Assessing Rubrics for Authentic Assessment Tasks in EFL Courses

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Abstract. This paper introduces the concept, history, and implementation background of authentic assessment, reviews the underpinning theories, related literature, and research, and proposes the considerations for EFL teachers when they are implementing authentic assessment and designing authentic assessment rubrics for assessment tasks. With these considerations as the basis, this paper discusses the authentic assessment rubrics design and presents an example for EFL teachers' further discussion and reference who plan to reform their language teaching and assessment.

Keywords: Authentic Assessment · Task · Rubrics · EFL

1 Introduction and Background

Authentic assessment is a real-life context-based assessment that promotes student development by assessing learning in real-life contexts. Authentic assessment is typically used to assess students' understanding of a topic to test their mastery of the subject matter. It is also used to determine how well students are progressing in learning and the skills needed to achieve that progress [1]. To determine the extent to which students understand a particular topic, authentic assessment instrument is used, such as task analysis to assess students' understanding of specific topics, and portfolios to assess students' understanding of specific topics.

The theory and practice of authentic assessment have been around for a century in the field of teaching and learning worldwide. The concept first appeared in the context of American education with the primary goal of educational reform to improve student achievement, and it views teaching and assessment as a unified process to ensure student success during their studies [2]. With authentic assessment, teachers are able to determine student progress and assign course tasks based on student progress. A large amount of journal articles have been published to stress the importance of using authentic assessment in the field of teaching and learning. Deakin University published *Authentic Assessment Methods: A Practical Handbook for Teaching Staff* in 2016 [3]. This handbook explores the principles and practices of authentic assessment, including

its concept, its role in teaching and learning, and how to use it to help students achieve their learning goals.

In China, the starting point of authentic assessment seems less clear. Some scholars argue that authentic assessment was first introduced into English language teaching in the 1970s, but was not widely implemented. By the 1980s, Chinese English teachers began to use authentic assessment tasks in their classrooms. This was because the English curriculum standards at the time were written with reference to some English language teaching guidelines, such as the American English Curriculum Standards and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [4].

As interest in authentic assessment grew, some universities also began to implement it experimentally. For example, both Beijing Normal University and Shanghai Normal University have developed a set of English courses based on authentic assessment. Beijing Normal University developed the “Process-Based Learning Assessment” in 1997, which is student-centered and uses authentic tasks and contexts to assess student learning. Shanghai Normal University’s curriculum is designed to provide students with a series of authentic tasks that they are required to complete in real-life contexts. These tasks are related to knowledge acquisition and students are assessed to determine whether they have mastered what they have learned.

Authentic assessment is considered an effective way to assess instruction because it not only assesses student learning but also helps teachers understand student learning. Unlike standardized tests, authentic assessment does not assess student learning with specific criteria, but with real-life tasks. Thus, authentic assessment is more easily understood and accepted by teachers. In this way, teachers can provide individualized, high-quality, learner-centered lessons and learning experiences for each student.

2 Underpinning Theories

The theoretical basis for authentic assessment can be traced back to the 1980s Outcome-Based Education (OBE) theory, which asserts that students should be widely recognized for their performance in real-life contexts rather than being tested with standardized tests. OBE theory asserts that instruction is a complete process that includes planning, instruction, and implementation. In this process, instruction takes into account factors such as students’ age characteristics, ability levels, and cognitive styles to ensure that student learning does not result in students failing to meet instructional goals [5].

The emergence of authentic assessment in the field of teaching and learning is due to its use as a method for assessing student learning processes and learning outcomes, which is consistent with Bloom’s Taxonomy. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a classification system based on learning outcomes that classify student learning into three levels: basic, applied, and complex. Basic means that students have mastered the subject matter knowledge; applied means that students apply the subject matter knowledge and solve problems in specific contexts; and complex means that students not only apply the subject matter knowledge in specific contexts but also can combine the subject matter knowledge with other knowledge to solve real-life problems [6]. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an example that applies language learning to specific contexts and solves relatively complex disciplinary problems.

Constructivist learning theory can also provide theoretical support for authentic assessment. Constructivist learning theory assumes that learning is a process by which students construct knowledge based on their own experiences. The development of student's cognitive abilities and levels, as well as the experience they gain from participating in social activities, motivates students to use their knowledge to solve problems in real-life contexts [7]. The mastery of knowledge in practice is a manifestation of authentic situations, not rote memorization.

3 Literature Review

A framework of authentic assessment was proposed which contained five dimensions (Gulikers et al.). Researchers suggested that authentic assessment should be a continuum that includes five important assessment components: assessment tasks, physical context, social context, assessment outcomes, and assessment rubrics. These five components, or five dimensions, are a logical whole that relates to each other. The assessment task, as the most basic component, is very similar to the learning task. The difference is that while the goal of the learning task is to acquire knowledge, the goal of the assessment task is to evaluate the implementation of the learning task to suggest improvements. The researchers developed the framework to demonstrate the congruence between authentic teaching and authentic assessment at the conceptual level. The researcher defined the authentic task as a task based on a real-life context, similar to the general learning task in terms of the integration level of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The physical and social contexts were defined as influential elements of authenticity in authentic assessment. Assessment outcomes was defined as summaries and feedback on the effectiveness of assessment task completion based on the real-life and assessment contexts. Some of the characteristics that are valued in the assessment outcome, or the assessor's expected performance of the person being assessed, are the assessment rubrics for authentic assessment. The assessment rubrics have a guiding and normative role in the learning process [8]. Of the five factors, assessment tasks and assessment rubrics need to be developed by teachers through their own creative and critical thinking based on the teaching content and teaching objectives.

In his article on the authenticity of assessment tasks, Tay mentions that an important aspect of authentic assessment is a clear definition of the task objective [9]. This notion is worth noting since it poses a suggestion for teachers when they are designing the assessment tasks to be summative, formative, or both, and designing the corresponding rubrics. The writer focuses on the process instead of the learning outcome. While it is also questionable. Authentic assessment should be an integration of Assessment of Learning, Assessment for Learning, and Assessment as Learning. It is reasonable to involve both the learning outcome and learning process in one assessment task and the rubrics should be comprehensive. Tay presents an example task in his paper, an English expression task. Students are asked to collaboratively answer cybersecurity-related questions, construct a visual poster, and make an English presentation of the poster's content. Tay sets the rubrics for assessment as English phonetics, proficiency, and clarity. Following the assessment, the teacher provides feedback to help students improve. The assessment rubrics for this task in the article is biased toward summative,

but the feedback of the task complements the formative features of the task. As can be seen, the design of the assessment rubrics should be about the teacher's or designer's view of the summative and formative features.

In the book *Language Assessment in Practice: Developing Language Assessments and Justifying Their Use in the Real World*, authors Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer focus on how to develop language assessment rubrics. They state that assessment rubrics should be feasible, detailed, comprehensive, transparent, and consistent with the objectives of the assessment. Assessment rubrics must be feasible, meaning that they must be practically operational, and teachers and assessors must be able to understand and use them to conduct effective assessments. Second, the assessment rubrics must be detailed, meaning that they should cover aspects such as language skills, types of tasks, and assessment methods to ensure a comprehensive assessment of students. Assessment rubrics should also be comprehensive, taking into account both different aspects of language (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, communication, etc.) and different tasks and forms of assessment. Transparency of the assessment rubrics is also important, i.e., the assessment rubrics should be open to all those involved in the assessment and ensure consistency among evaluators in the assessment process by providing examples. Finally, assessment rubrics must be aligned with the objectives of the assessment; they should reflect the content and objectives of the assessment while requiring evaluators to conduct the assessment according to clear rubrics [10].

Authentic assessment has been widely studied. Designing authentic assessment tasks was also discussed and researched by many teachers and researchers. Comparatively, research on the assessment rubrics seems quite less. The aforementioned literature presents a reference worth learning from and talking about.

4 Designing Assessment Rubrics

A review of the underpinning theories and the extensive literature throws light on the necessary considerations in designing authentic assessment rubrics. The basic consideration is presented in the following table which illustrates the assessment type (summative and formative), the assessing object (learning outcome and learner skills), and the assessment content (concerning EFL courses) (Table 1.).

An outline example is presented to illustrate more details in designing the rubrics which aligns with the authentic assessment task, as is shown in Table 2.

The student's cognitive development, social communication requirements, real-life contexts, classification of knowledge, learning content, and learning objectives are taken

Table 1. Consideration for designing authentic assessment rubrics

Assessment Type	Assessing Object	Assessment Content
Summative	Learning outcome	Language proficiency
Formative	Learner skills	Communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, etc.

Table 2. Authentic Assessment Design

Learning objective statement	AA task	Involved and assessed skills	AA method[Ⓐ] and type of assessment[Ⓑ]	AA rubrics (corresponding to skills)
Students can demonstrate their ideas on a specific topic through speaking and writing.	Case Study	①Critical thinking; ②Communication; ③Creativity; ④Collaboration; ⑤Independent working skills	Ⓐcritical thinking skills and communicative skill assessment ⒷAFL/AaL/AoL	①collective outcome, etc.; ②representing clarity, etc.; ③self-explanatory nature, etc.; ④identification of any bias, generalizability, etc.; ⑤tool choice of presentation, etc.

into consideration when the teachers design authentic assessment rubrics. The example is preliminary and obliged for further discussion and amendment.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

For EFL courses, authentic assessment in the classroom is a method of assessment based on real-life contexts created during the English teaching and learning process. Specifically, authentic assessment is not a result-oriented assessment, but a process-oriented assessment. It does not assess students' learning by whether they have mastered the subject matter, but by assessing students' learning in authentic contexts to understand their learning and by assessing their ability to apply knowledge and skills in authentic contexts. Text analysis, portfolios, and other measures are used to help teachers better understand what students are doing in authentic contexts to determine whether the knowledge and skills they have learned are being fully applied.

When developing assessment rubrics, teachers need to first clearly understand that authentic assessment is a method of assessment that entails assessing student learning. Therefore, authentic assessment rubrics should be developed based on the following key points. First, authentic assessment assesses the ability to solve real-life problems, but not the ability to manage standardized tests. Second, authentic assessment needs to be conducted in real-life contexts. Third, authentic assessment needs to assess students' learning processes and learning outcomes. Fourth, authentic assessment needs to be conducted in multiple formats. Fifth, authentic assessment needs to be learner-centered. Sixth, authentic assessment needs to be task-oriented, with tasks that guide students to apply what they have learned.

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