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Authentic Assessment in Examining EFL Students' Writing

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Abstract: This writing intended to explore authentic assessment in teaching EFL writing, focusing on how the authentic assessment is presented in writing, the problem of the implementation, as well as the effectiveness. This is a literature review writing that examines previous articles. According to previous studies, some teachers have used authentic assessment to evaluate their students' writing skills, but they have faced some challenges such as lack of time and resources to implement all kinds of authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is a powerful way to measure student writing because it allows students to write about realistic situations that suit their needs, and it can also enhance their writing abilities, motivation, enthusiasm, and desire to write.

Keywords: Authentic Assessment, EFL Students, Writing

Introduction

Evaluating students' writing is crucial in the EFL teaching and learning process. Writing serves as a vital skill, allowing students to show how well they can communicate in written form and serving as a way to gauge their language abilities (Bean, 2011). However, many students find writing challenging due to difficulties with content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar. Challenges in writing for EFL learners stem from various aspects, including psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and evaluation factors (Peloghitis, 2017, as cited in Johanes, R & Alsaqaf, A, 2022). Addressing these aspects requires effort from both students and teachers.

Since writing is an important skill in language learning, effective writing assessments should be adjusted with the objectives of the learning course and provide meaningful learning that helps students improve their writing skills. Teachers should provide appropriate support and guidance to help students develop their writing skills and overcome any language barriers they may face. Students may feel anxious or stressed about writing assessments, which can negatively affect their writing performance (Graham & Harris, 2016). As mentioned by Xu, J.

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(2017), unclear assessment criteria and excessive assessment workload, were significant predictors of any kind of writing anxiety in some writing types.

Furthermore, authentic assessment, in this case, provides a more comprehensive and accurate evaluation of students' writing skills. The authentic assessment approach has been widely used in EFL classrooms in examining learners' language proficiency through writing. This approach emphasizes real-life tasks that simulate the target language use. It can evaluate students' writing skills in a way that reflects real-world writing tasks and situations, (Brown, 2010). Authentic assessment involves different ways to measure how well students perform, their motivation, and their attitudes toward learning activities following instruction (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). Thus, this literature review aims to explore how educators incorporate authentic assessment methods and evaluate their efficacy within the context of appraising the writing proficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.

Authentic Assessment Criteria

Several forms of authentic assessment methodologies that can be employed for the evaluation of language proficiency suggested by Brown (2004) are performance-based assessment, portfolios, project assessment, self, and self-peer-assessment.

Performance-Based Assessment

Performance assessment is an evaluation that asks learners to show and use their learning in different situations based on some criteria. Two main features of performance assessment are engaging in the proficiency of generating a product through a specific process or undertaking a designated activity, and subsequently, yielding a tangible product as a culmination of the stipulated performance task. In other words, the performance assessment is an evaluation that is done by watching students' specific activities.

The Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment represents a form of evaluation wherein a compilation of a student's written projects is assembled. This compilation serves as a tangible demonstration of the student's proficiency in writing, showcases their comprehension of the subject matter, and facilitates the opportunity for the student to engage in self-reflection and self-assessment through the process of revising their work.

Project Assessment

Garza et al (2011) distinguish between three kinds of projects based on their level of structure. a) In a structured project, the teacher organizes the tasks and questions in a clear and orderly way to guide students' activity in the classroom. b) In an unstructured project, students are granted greater flexibility by the teacher to explore their ideas within the study's objectives. c) A semi-structured project entails students adhering to some instructions provided by the teacher while also having a degree of autonomy in executing the project.

Self and Peer assessment

Self and peer assessment serves as an evaluation that involves students in their learning process. Engaging in self-assessment entails students critically reviewing their own work and contemplating their personal academic development. On the other hand, peer assessment involves students evaluating the work of their peers and offering constructive feedback. Both methods can enhance metacognition and help students take ownership of their learning. They can also promote collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills (Brown 2004 & Brown, & Abeywickrama, P. 2010)

Authentic Assessment Characteristic

Frey (2014) defines authentic assessment as evaluating tasks and requirements that reflect real-life situations. He believes assessment is truly authentic when the assignments, content, requirements, and evaluation methods align with real-world needs. The study suggests that an assessment becomes more authentic when it closely resembles real-life situations, as shown in the chart illustrating the characteristics of authentic assessment by Frey (2014).

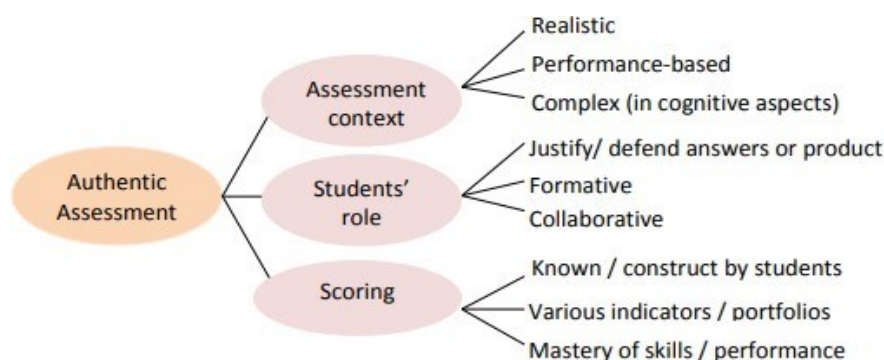


Figure 1. Authentic Assessment Characteristics

Authentic Assessment Steps in Writing

Assessments serve various purposes, yet their primary aim invariably centers on enhancing instructional methods and evaluating each student appropriately. Consequently, when evaluating students' writing, educators should take into account the strategies outlined by O'Malley and Pierce (1996) as well as Sarwanti (2015) to optimize the effectiveness of the assessment process.

Ensure students possess a clear understanding of the criteria for proficient writing

The teacher wants learners to develop their writing skills and have a clear understanding of the features of proficient writing. For instance, a student who writes about their own life should know that they can use their own words and stories, and they do not have to be very formal. When the teacher evaluates their writing, the students should know the criteria that the teacher uses. It is also important for students to be aware of the criteria of good writing so that they can

monitor and enhance their writing before submitting it to the teacher. The teacher should communicate their expectations to the students.

Facilitate student involvement in the formulation of assessment criteria

If practicable, allow students to participate in the decision-making process regarding the grading criteria for a written piece within the classroom. This approach fosters a greater sense of involvement among students and enhances their comprehension of the criteria that define the quality of writing. Additionally, it empowers students to select topics of personal interest for their writing assignments.

Provide students with an elucidation of the scoring process for their written work

Learners need to be apprised of the criteria employed in the assessment of their work and possess the capability to decipher the assigned scores. For instance, in the scenario where a student achieves a score of 80 on a composition, it is imperative for them to comprehend the precise criteria utilized in the grading procedure and the implications inherent in that score. Clear communication regarding how their work will be evaluated and the meaning behind the scores is essential for students' comprehension and engagement in the assessment process.

Evaluate the Writing Process

Writing involves several steps, starting from generating ideas to completing the final manuscript. As students get better at each step, their overall writing skills will improve. By assessing and discussing each step of student writing, they can understand the effectiveness of their writing and the reasons behind it.

Provide Opportunities for Feedback

Provide students with guidance on how to improve their writing. This will enable them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to monitor their progress, their goals, and their strategies for writing. Teachers can give them written or oral feedback on their writing and encourage them to exchange feedback with each other.

Encouraging Self and Peer Assessment

By incorporating peer-self assessment, learners can gain a clear understanding of their writing capability through the evaluation of their written work. This approach has demonstrated its efficacy throughout the entire writing process. Collaborative discussions with partners enable students to articulate their ideas, with partners assuming the role of an audience at every phase of the writing. Additionally, students have the option to form groups of three or four to conduct writing conferences.

Discussion

Authentic Assessment Implementation

As indicated by Hamp-Lyons (1990) and referenced in O'Malley (1996), the process of writing encompasses the transformation of ideas into self-generated topics. Through writing activities, students convey their creativity and thoughts. To assess writing proficiency, educators ought to design tasks that mirror authentic, real-world writing situations. Authentic assessment proves to be well-suited for evaluating students' writing capabilities, underscoring the significance for teachers to adeptly employ it as a benchmark for assessing language skills (O'Malley, 1996 & Brown, 2004).

Natalia and her colleagues (2018) conducted a study on writing and authentic assessment, emphasizing that educators employ authentic assessments to evaluate writing proficiency. Typical methods encompass assessing attitudes through observation and journals, assessing knowledge through written tests and assignments, and gauging skills through projects and tangible products.

Furthermore, in a survey study by Pamela and her team (2019), they explored educators' requirements for authentic assessment to evaluate writing skills in senior high schools. The research identified seven types of authentic assessments that teachers found helpful, including purposeful writing, writing prompts, summarizing, writing samples, integrated language assessment, storytelling with pictures, and portfolios. The topics for writing assessment were in line with the curriculum of 2013 and were relevant and relatable to students.

A study finding by Atibrata (2023) on students in class X at MA Assalafiyah Mlangi Sleman Yogyakarta, revealed that the teacher applied authentic assessment to evaluate learners' writing. The assessment focused on three aspects: feelings, understanding, and abilities. For feelings, the teacher utilized methods like observation, self-assessment, peer assessment, and journals, with a preference for journals. For understanding, students had written tests and assignments. Assessing abilities involved using product, project assessment, and portfolio assessment.

Whereas, Moria, E., Refnaldi, and Zaim, M (2017) surveyed to identify the authentic assessment modalities sought by educators in the evaluation of writing proficiency. The results revealed that teachers articulated a demand for diverse assessment formats, encompassing writing samples, process writing, portfolios, performance assessments, journals, and projects/exhibitions. Additionally, the survey underscored that pertinent assessment topics encompassed family, prominent individuals, and elements within the students' lives.

Moreover, the experts agreed that authentic assessments should be defined following the formulated scoring components. This portrays that in implementing authentic assessment to assess English skill, the teachers need simple analytical scoring rubrics as the critical aspects to evaluate student performance. In the writing context, rubrics can be effective in assessing student learning progress if they are designed carefully and used appropriately (Black & Wiliam 1998). Gere and Abbott (2010) emphasized that rubrics should be clear, specific, and consistent in evaluating students' writing performance. They suggested that rubrics should be used as a teaching tool to help students understand what is expected of them. Moria and Zaim (2017) also stated in their study that in conducting an authentic

assessment, the teacher needs to use two types of rubrics as a guide to examine writing skills, namely holistic and analytic rubrics which should always be defined before developing the assessment procedures, and exercises.

Authentic Assessment and Its Impact on Students' Writing Skills

The literature review revealed that some researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of applying authentic assessment in writing.

Writing Performance

Authentic assessment promotes the use of real-world writing tasks, which enhances students' development in the writing process. By connecting classroom writing tasks to authentic contexts, students perceive the relevance of their writing skills and become more invested in improving their writing abilities.

Hanifah, N. (2019), studied what teachers think about using real-life assessments to grade students' writing. The research showed that authentic assessment helps students perform well in English writing. Hanifah suggested that using authentic assessment is like practicing important skills for real life, making it valuable for professional development. A recent study by Arianda et al, (2021) looked at how well authentic assessment works for evaluating students' writing skills, and found that the utilization of authentic assessment proves to be efficient in the assessment of writing due to its contextual, objective, and student-focused, and helps develop real-life skills. The research also highlighted the use of portfolios as a practical method for teachers to assess writing skills, addressing challenges they might face. This approach is in line with language teaching frameworks (Geneshee & Upshur, 1996).

Besides, Ambarwatia, A., & Damayantib V.S (2021), analysed authentic assessment of literary writing skills "poetry" in students at Ihsaniyah High School. The outcomes revealed that educators employed authentic assessment in the context of literature education, specifically focusing on "poetry," utilizing three assessment techniques: attitude assessment, skill assessment, and knowledge assessment. The conclusive findings notably demonstrated the relatively effective application of authentic assessment in the study of poetry among students at SMA Ihsaniyah Tegal, aligning with the assessment guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Indonesia.

Motivation and Engagement

Engaging in authentic assessment enhances the enthusiasm and motivation of EFL students toward writing. Cahyono, B. Y., & Rahayu, T. (2020) conducted a study exploring the connection between the motivation of EFL students in writing, their writing proficiency, and gender. The research revealed a robust correlation between the motivation of EFL students in writing and their proficiency in writing. The results suggested that those EFL students who exhibited higher motivation also demonstrated elevated writing proficiency. These students displayed notable enthusiasm in completing various assignments.

Nguyen and colleagues (2020) explored how real-life assessments can help students become better writers. They support using these assessments because they believe it helps both students and teachers improve. The research shows that observing students' writing using authentic assessment is a good way to develop

their skills in college. The results suggest that utilizing authentic assessment is a helpful way to make learners more interested and motivated in writing. This means that authentic assessment can effectively encourage students' interest in writing (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Yashima et al, 2009).

Measure Critical Thinking Skills

Authentic assessment promotes the cultivation of transferable skills, including the enhancement of critical thinking abilities. Through real-world writing tasks, students engage in higher-order thinking processes, applying their language skills in meaningful ways. A further study by Cahyono & Widiati, (2016), shows that through real-world writing tasks, students engage in higher-order thinking processes, applying their language skills in meaningful ways and preparing them for future professional or academic contexts.

Authentic assessment entails a thorough evaluation of diverse tasks deemed suitable for measuring multiple constructs. Research conducted by Mohamed, R., & Lebar, O. (2017) affirmed that authentic assessment possesses the capability to gauge higher-order thinking skills in students. Tasks within authentic assessment, which demand higher-order thinking skills, serve to foster the enhancement of students' critical thinking abilities. Authentic assessment leads students to think, analyze, and evaluate each side based on evidence and logical reasoning (Birenbaum & Nasser, 2008).

Authentic Feedback

Authentic assessment facilitates valuable feedback, aiding students in enhancing their writing skills. In this approach, teachers provide constructive feedback pertinent to real-world writing challenges, emphasizing both strengths and areas for improvement, thereby assisting students in attaining heightened writing proficiency. Ashford-Rowe, Herrington & Brown (2014) further propose the inclusion of metacognition, encompassing critical reflection and self-evaluation, constituting an integral element of authentic assessment, affording students avenues to reassess their thought processes, fostering an appreciation for the evaluation outcomes rather than inducing anxiety over high or low scores.

A study conducted by McCarthy (2013) found that authentic assessment not only fostered the development of analytical and evaluative skills in students but also cultivated self-assessment and self-reflection abilities, preparing them for roles as reflective practitioners and ongoing professional development. Essentially, the process of self-reflection facilitated by authentic assessment enabled students to objectively assess themselves and enhance their writing capabilities. Similarly, Siahaan, J. et al. (2021) investigated the impact of reflective journal authentic assessment on students' writing proficiency and motivation. The research demonstrated a significant simultaneous effect of reflective journal assessment on both students' writing competence and motivation. The partial correlation for students' writing was 0.527, which was larger than

0.05, indicating a noteworthy effect on writing ability. Regarding motivation, the significance value was 7.488, affirming that reflective journal writing had a partial effect, as supported by qualitative analysis indicating its significance in enhancing students' writing competence and motivation.

Furthermore, those who need direct feedback from others about their writing product, it is likely to get satisfactory results. Nguyen, et al (2020) argued that authentic assessment can help students develop social relationships through positive communication. Additionally, students have the opportunity to receive feedback from both their teacher and peers, allowing them to adapt their focus and efforts accordingly. Meletiadou, E. (2021) researched the impact of peer assessment on EFL students' writing performance, revealing that peer assessment yielded a moderately positive effect on students' writing proficiency. The students demonstrated improvement in various aspects of writing, including mechanics, organization, content, focus, and vocabulary and language use.

Authentic Assessment Challenges

Implementing Authentic assessment in EFL writing may require more time to implement compared to traditional assessment methods. Here are some reasons why authentic assessment may be more time-consuming: 1) Designing authentic writing tasks that closely resemble real-world situations requires careful thought and preparation. Teachers need to create meaningful and engaging prompts that reflect authentic writing contexts, which can involve conducting research, selecting appropriate topics, and crafting task instructions. 2) Authentic assessment involves evaluating multiple dimensions of writing, such as content, organization, language use, and critical thinking skills. Assessing these various aspects of writing in a comprehensive and meaningful manner takes time and effort. 3) promoting reflection and student involvement in the feedback process may require additional time for individual conferences, or peer feedback sessions.

In response to the above statements, Muthohharoh, et al (2020) in their study about the use of authentic assessment in evaluating students' HOTS in writing at Man 2 Tulungagung, clearly revealed that the teachers sometimes faced common problems in assessing writing such as not sharing the scoring rubrics and not implementing self-assessment for the learners. The main reason for these problems was the limited time. However, the study also suggested some solutions for the teachers to overcome these difficulties, such as managing time more effectively and efficiently. Moreover, the study reported that the teachers preferred to walk around the class and guide the students' process to help them write better.

Similarly, Natalia, D. E., Asib, A., & Kristina, D. (2018) researched the use of authentic assessment in writing instruction showing that the teacher encountered several challenges such as the limited time for teaching and the complicated procedures of assessment. However, the teacher also made some efforts to solve these challenges. Additionally, a study result by Hanifah, N. (2019), revealed some problems that teachers encountered when they tried to implement this type of assessment in their classrooms. Some of the problems were related to the students'

low ability in writing, which made it hard for them to produce quality texts. Another problem was the students' limited self-awareness in the assessment process, which affected their competence to reflect on their own learning and progress. Moreover, the teachers faced difficulties in maintaining their objectivity when they assessed the students' work, as well as in providing adequate facilities for conducting the authentic assessment. Furthermore, the teachers also struggled with making lesson plans that aligned with the authentic assessment criteria and managing their time effectively during the assessment process. These problems indicated the need for more training and support for the teachers who wanted to apply authentic assessment in their teaching. It showed that the solutions to solve the problem are first teachers' independent action and school government policies.

Conclusion

The ability to write is a fundamental skill in language acquisition as it enables students to articulate their imagination and ideas. Consequently, educators should design assessment tasks that enable learners to showcase practical writing skills applicable in real-world scenarios beyond the classroom. All the related research shows that some teachers have applied authentic assessment in assessing students' writing, but they have not applied all types of authentic assessment due to several problems such as time and media limitations. Authentic assessment is very effective in assessing student writing because it allows students to get writing assignments based on real cases according to their needs, and can also increase students' writing competence, interest, and motivation to write.

Future Direction

Studies that have been explored by the writer, have some limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, further studies need to be carried out in a larger sample and more detailed constructed tests to provide valid answers to the proposed problems. Second, future research could examine more deeply the correlation between the implementation of authentic assessment and students' proficiency in particular cases in writing such as argumentative or descriptive, etc. Third, it is also necessary to conduct a more descriptive study regarding the strategy of applying authentic assessment so that detailed information and deeper analysis can be collected about how teachers apply the assessment. Lastly, future research needs to investigate authentic assessment in assessing certain writings such as argumentative.

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