



## Original Article

# Challenges in Implementing Authentic Assessment in English Language Courses at Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract:

The application of authentic assessment in English learning in higher education is increasingly considered important because it is able to assess students' communicative skills more clearly and relevant to the context of language use. However, the implementation of this assessment in the classroom still faces challenges that are often not seen in curriculum policies. This research aims to uncover and understand the main challenges faced in the implementation of authentic assessment in English courses in universities, with a focus on lecturers' pedagogical practices, institutional support, and student readiness. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted at a university in Jayapura, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four English lecturers and eight students who were directly involved in performance-based assessments, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study show that the implementation of authentic assessment is constrained by the limited understanding of lecturers in designing clear and consistent assessment instruments, limited time and large class sizes, and low readiness of students in understanding assessment criteria. These findings show that there is a significant gap between competency-oriented learning demands and the real conditions of classroom assessment. The novelty of this research lies in the contextual disclosure of how these challenges interact with each other in the higher education environment in areas that are still rarely studied. This research emphasizes the importance of strengthening the role of institutions, increasing the capacity of lecturer assessments, and assessment transparency for students to improve the quality of authentic assessments in English learning in universities.

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## Introduction

The discourse of assessment in higher education is undergoing a paradigmatic shift as the demands of competency-based learning and authentic context intensify ([Vitchenko et al., 2022](#)). Authentic assessment is positioned as a strategic alternative to traditional assessments that tend to assess linguistic skills in a fragmented manner,

especially in English learning (Pandey, 2024). Shkurti (2021) emphasizes that authentic assessments allow students to display communicative competencies through tasks that represent real-world language use practices. This shift reflects an epistemological shift in language education, from mastery of structures to language performativity in social and academic contexts.

However, the ideals of authentic assessment that are widely promoted in curriculum policies and academic literature are not always in harmony with the reality of implementation in the classroom. Ibrahim et al. (2023) revealed that lecturers often face a gap between the conceptual understanding of authentic assessments and operational capabilities in designing and implementing them consistently. This condition shows that authentic assessment is not only a pedagogical problem, but also a structural problem in the higher education ecosystem.

Most of the research on authentic assessment in English learning still focuses on the context of primary and secondary education. Study Huang & Jiang (2021) It shows that although teachers have pedagogical awareness of authentic assessment scores, the limitation of assessment literacy is the main obstacle to implementation. These findings are reinforced by John Luan & Narayanan (2024) which highlights the complexity of implementing authentic assessment in technology-based learning. On the other hand, studies that review in depth the challenges of authentic assessment in English courses in higher education are still relatively limited and have not provided an adequate contextual picture.

These limitations are even more striking when the institutional and geographical context are also taken into account. Most of the previous studies were conducted in colleges located in academic centers with relatively stable access to resources and policy support. In fact, higher education institutions in the eastern region of Indonesia, including the Papua region, have different academic, social, and structural dynamics. Brondizio et al. (2021) emphasizing that the effectiveness of assessment practices is greatly influenced by the local context, so that an understanding that ignores the geographical dimension has the potential to produce less accurate generalizations.

In addition to lecturer and institutional factors, student readiness is a crucial element that often goes unnoticed in the implementation of authentic assessment. Bodrug (2025) Explained that students who are familiar with the written exam-based evaluation system often experience ambiguity when dealing with performance-based assessments. Unclear criteria, perception of assessment subjectivity, and lack of understanding of rubrics can affect student acceptance of authentic assessments. Therefore, students' cognitive and affective readiness needs to be positioned as an integral part of the study of authentic assessment in higher education.

Based on these empirical and contextual gaps, this study aims to analyze the challenges of implementing authentic assessment in English courses at a public university in Jayapura, Indonesia. The focus of the research is directed at three main dimensions, namely lecturers' pedagogical practices, institutional support, and student readiness in facing performance-based assessments. A qualitative approach with a case study design is used to capture the dynamics of the implementation of authentic assessments in depth and contextually. This strategy allows for the exploration of factors that are often not revealed in large-scale studies.

Theoretically, this study enriches the study of authentic assessment by presenting an empirical perspective from the context of higher education in areas that are still minimally represented in the international literature. Practically, the findings of this study

are expected to be a reference for institutions in designing more realistic and contextual assessment policies, including strengthening lecturer capacity and improving student assessment literacy. Thus, this study not only identifies implementation challenges, but also provides a reflective foundation for improving the quality of English learning assessments. This effort is directed at the realization of a fairer, more transparent, and meaningful assessment system.

## Method

### Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges of implementing authentic assessment in English courses in higher education ([Muzari et al., 2022](#)). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to comprehensively explore the real experiences, perceptions, and practices of learning actors that cannot be represented through quantitative data. The case study design is relevant because this research focuses on a single institution of higher education as a whole system, with certain pedagogical and institutional characteristics. As affirmed by [Tagnin & Ríordáin \(2022\)](#), case studies are particularly appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts when the boundaries between phenomena and context cannot be strictly separated.

### Research Context

This research was carried out at a public university in Jayapura, Indonesia, which organizes English courses as part of the general curriculum and study program. This context was chosen because the institution has begun to implement competency-based learning, including the use of performance-based assessments, but does not yet have an institutionally standardized assessment policy. This condition makes the research context relevant to examine the gap between the demands of learning policies and the practice of implementing authentic assessments in the classroom. In addition, this geographical and institutional context provides an opportunity to present an empirical perspective from a region that is still underrepresented in the international literature on language assessment.

### Participants and Sampling Techniques

The research participants consisted of four English lecturers and eight students who were directly involved in learning with authentic assessment-based assessments. The selection of participants was carried out using non-probability sampling techniques, especially purposive sampling, with the main criterion being direct experience in designing, implementing, or receiving authentic assessments ([Adeoye, 2023](#)). The lecturers selected are course instructors who apply performance-based assignments, while students come from the same class to ensure the harmony of the learning context. The number of participants was considered adequate in qualitative research because the primary goal of the study was to obtain depth of data and richness of perspective, not statistical generalizations ([Maxwell, 2021](#)).

### Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Research data is collected through semi-structured interviews that allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and views, while maintaining a focus on the research objectives. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework of authentic assessment and the findings of previous studies on the challenges

of assessment in higher education ([Lean & Barber, 2022](#); [Schultz et al., 2022](#)). Interview questions include lecturers' understanding of the concept of authentic assessment, strategies for designing instruments and rubrics, implementation constraints in the classroom, and students' perceptions of the clarity, fairness, and transparency of assessments. Semi-structured interviews are chosen because they are effective in exploring complex pedagogical and institutional dynamics and allow for the emergence of new relevant issues.

### **Research Implementation Procedure**

The research procedure begins with the management of research permits and the submission of informed consent to all participants as part of fulfilling research ethics. Interviews are conducted face-to-face within an agreed time frame, recorded with the consent of the participants, and then transcribed verbatim. The data collection process is carried out in stages until data saturation is achieved, which is a condition when additional interviews no longer produce substantive new information. The entire research process is systematically documented to ensure procedural traceability and methodological transparency.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis by following the stages proposed by [Dusi \(2022\)](#), namely data familiarization, initial coding, theme search, theme review, theme definition and naming, and analysis report preparation. The analysis approach is carried out inductively so that the themes produced are truly sourced from empirical data, not imposed by a certain conceptual framework. The process of encoding and organizing data is assisted by NVivo software version 12 to improve the accuracy, consistency, and transparency of the analysis. The results of the analysis were then compiled by linking the main themes on the pedagogical practice of lecturers, institutional support, and student readiness as the purpose of the research.

### **Data Validity and Research Quality**

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies several qualitative research quality strategies. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing data from lecturers and students to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied ([Meydan & Akkaş, 2024](#)). In addition, member checking is carried out by confirming a summary of findings to a number of participants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation ([Motulsky, 2021](#)). The researcher's reflexivity is maintained through the recording of analytical memos during the data collection and analysis process, so that the potential for subjective bias can be minimized. This approach is in line with the quality standards of qualitative research in education studies and assessments.

## **Results**

### **1. Limitations of Lecturer Assessment Literacy in Designing Authentic Assessment**

The first theme shows that the main challenges in implementing authentic assessment are sourced from the limitations of lecturer assessment literacy, especially in developing clear, consistent, and measurable assessment instruments and rubrics. Although lecturers understand conceptually that authentic assessments are important to assess students' communicative competence, the process of operationalizing these concepts into evaluation practice still tends to be intuitive and is not fully based on a

systematic assessment framework. The absence of special training and institutional guidance is a factor that strengthens this condition.

This is reflected in the experience of lecturers who said that the demands of the curriculum are not accompanied by strengthening assessment capacity. *"We understand that assessments have to be authentic, but when asked to put together a really detailed and consistent rubric, it's quite confusing because there's never been any specific training on assessments like this."* (D1, October 10, 2025). Similar views emerged from other lecturers who highlighted the complexity of performance-based assessments. *"Assessing student presentations or projects is much more complex than written exams. I often question whether the criteria I use are consistent for all students."* (D2, October 12, 2025). The limitations of practical references are also acknowledged, as conveyed by other lecturers. *"Examples of authentic assessment rubrics that are appropriate to the university context are very limited, so we often develop ourselves based on experience"* (D3, October 14, 2025). In addition, the absence of institutional standards reinforces the variation in assessment practices between lecturers. *"Without joint guidance from the institution, each lecturer ends up using their own assessment approach"* (D4, 15 October 2025).

From the perspective of students, the limited literacy of lecturer assessments has a direct impact on the perception of unclarity in assessment. A student said that *"We often don't understand what aspects are the main focus of the assessment because the rubrics are still general"* (M2, October 11, 2025). Another student added that *"The explanation of the rubric is usually short, so we have to interpret the lecturer's expectations ourselves"* (M6, October 16, 2025). These findings show that the limitations of lecturer assessment literacy not only affect the quality of assessment instruments, but also have implications for transparency and the perception of fairness in learning evaluation.

## 2. Limited Learning Time and Large Class Sizes

The second theme reveals that limited learning time and large class sizes are structural barriers that significantly limit the effectiveness of implementation authentic assessment. Performance-based assessments require adequate time for process observation, individual feedback, and learning reflection, but crowded classroom conditions and limited time allocation make it difficult to realize these ideals optimally.

Lecturers described that the assessment load increased significantly in large classes. *"With a large number of students, assessing each student in depth is almost impossible, so the quality of the assessment must be affected"* (D4, October 15, 2025). Time pressure also affects the quality of the feedback that can be given. *"Ideally, any authentic task requires detailed feedback, but time constraints mean I can only provide general comments"* (D2, October 13, 2025). A similar condition was expressed by another lecturer who assessed that the time allocation was not proportional to the demands of the assessment. *"Authentic assessment requires additional time, while the lecture hours remain the same"* (D1, October 11, 2025). In addition, the observation of the student learning process is less than optimal. *"In a large class, it is difficult to monitor the work process of each student thoroughly"* (D3, 14 October 2025).

Students also feel the impact of these structural limitations firsthand. A student revealed that *"We rarely receive detailed feedback after a task has been graded, even though it's important to know our shortcomings"* (M5, October 18, 2025). Other students assessed that class size affects the quality of learning interactions. *"Because of the large number of students, presentations and practical assessments often feel rushed"* (M7,

[October 19, 2025](#)). This experience was reinforced by other students who observed the lecturer's workload. *"Lecturers seem to have difficulty dividing attention to all students in one class"* ([M3, October 17, 2025](#)). These findings confirm that time constraints and large class sizes widen the gap between ideals *authentic assessment* and real practice in the classroom.

### 3. Low Student Readiness for Performance-Based Assessment

The third theme shows that the readiness of students in facing authentic assessment still relatively low, mainly because previous learning experiences were dominated by a written exam-based evaluation system. The shift to performance-based assessment creates confusion and uncertainty regarding evaluation standards, especially when the assessment criteria are not fully understood from the beginning of learning.

Students expressed difficulties adapting to the demands of authentic assessments. *"We're more accustomed to multiple-choice exams, so when it's graded through projects or presentations, we're often unsure of what the grading standard is"* ([M1, October 9, 2025](#)). The perception of the subjectivity of assessment also appears in the student experience. *"Sometimes the assessment feels very dependent on the lecturer's assessment because the criteria used have not been fully understood"* ([M4, October 16, 2025](#)). The lack of socialization of assessments also strengthens this condition. *"If it is explained in detail from the beginning how the assessment process and criteria are, we will be better prepared to do the task"* ([M8, October 20, 2025](#)). Other students noticed a difference in the focus of assessment. *"We often focus more on the final result, even though it turns out that the work process is also assessed"* ([M6, 16 October 2025](#)).

The students' views are in line with the lecturer's observation regarding the low literacy of student assessments. *"Many students do not understand that in authentic assessment, the learning process has an important weight of assessment"* ([D1, October 10, 2025](#)). Another lecturer added that *"Students' mindset is still heavily influenced by the traditional exam system"* ([D3, October 14, 2025](#)). These findings confirm that the success of *authentic assessment* is highly dependent on the cognitive and affective readiness of students, as well as on the transparency of assessment communication from the beginning of the learning process.

## Discussion

The application of authentic assessment in English learning in higher education is theoretically seen as an approach that is in line with the competency-oriented learning paradigm, especially in assessing students' communicative abilities in a contextual and meaningful manner. However, the results of this study show that the implementation of authentic assessments still faces fundamental pedagogical, structural, and cognitive challenges. These findings show that there is a significant gap between competency-oriented learning demands and the real conditions of classroom assessment. This condition indicates that the change in the assessment paradigm has not been fully followed by the readiness of human resources and support systems at the institutional level.

The first theme related to the limitations of lecturer assessment literacy emphasizes that the conceptual understanding of authentic assessment has not been automatically converted into technical skills in designing systematic assessment instruments and rubrics. In line with the theory of assessment literacy, lecturers are not only required to understand the purpose of assessment, but also have competence in compiling criteria, indicators, and descriptors of measurable performance ([Chan & Luk, 2022](#); [Pastore, 2023](#)). These findings

are consistent with previous research that showed that the low literacy of lecturer assessments has a direct impact on the unclarity of assessment standards and inconsistency in evaluation practices (Gaikwad et al., 2023). Thus, the results of this study strengthen the argument that the success of authentic assessment is highly dependent on strengthening the capacity of lecturer assessments in a sustainable manner.

In addition to pedagogical factors, the results of this study also reveal structural obstacles in the form of limited learning time and large class sizes. Performance-based assessment demands process observation, individual feedback, and continuous reflection, which ideally requires a proportionate lecturer-to-student ratio (Dodge et al., 2023). However, in the context of large classrooms, lecturers tend to simplify assessment procedures thereby reducing the depth of assessment and the quality of feedback. These findings are in line with international research that states that workload pressures and time constraints often encourage lecturers to adopt more pragmatic than ideal assessment practices (Nkealah, 2023).

From a student's perspective, low readiness in facing authentic assessments shows a significant gap in learning experience. Students who are familiar with the written exam-based evaluation system tend to have difficulties when faced with process- and performance-based assessments. This can be explained through the theory of learning culture, which emphasizes that changes in the form of assessment must be accompanied by changes in students' learning mindsets and expectations (Bingham et al., 2023). Without adequate socialization of assessment criteria and objectives, authentic assessment has the potential to be perceived as subjective and not transparent.

The interaction between the limitations of lecturer assessment literacy, structural barriers, and low student readiness show that the challenge of authentic assessment is not single, but interrelated. These findings show that there is a significant gap between competency-oriented learning demands and the real conditions of classroom assessment. The novelty of this research lies in the contextual disclosure of how these various challenges interact with each other in the higher education environment in areas that are still rarely studied. Thus, this study not only confirms previous findings, but also broadens understanding of the complexity of implementing authentic assessments in different geographical and institutional contexts.

Although the results generally support theoretical assumptions about the importance of authentic assessment, there are also findings that show a discrepancy between theoretical ideals and practical reality. Some lecturers have tried to implement authentic assessments creatively, but limited institutional support makes these efforts individual and unsustainable. This shows that the success of authentic assessment cannot be imposed solely on lecturer competence, but requires systemic institutional policies, including assessment training, standard guidance, and realistic workload management.

This study has limitations in the scope of the case study and the number of participants, so generalization of findings needs to be done carefully. However, the depth of qualitative data makes an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of the implementation of authentic assessment contextually. Further research is recommended to involve more institutions and use a mixed methods approach to examine the relationship between lecturer assessment literacy, institutional policies, and student learning outcomes. Overall, this research contributes to the development of educational assessment studies by emphasizing that authentic assessment is a complex pedagogical practice and requires the support of an integrated educational ecosystem.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the application of authentic assessment in English learning in higher education still faces multidimensional challenges that are intertwined, including the limitations of lecturer assessment literacy, structural constraints in the form of time and class size, and low readiness of students in understanding performance-based assessment criteria. This condition shows that there is a significant gap between the demands of competency-oriented learning as proclaimed in the curriculum policy and the reality of the implementation of assessments in the classroom. Contextually, this study shows that these challenges do not stand alone, but rather influence each other in the higher education ecosystem, especially in areas that still receive little research attention. Therefore, improving the quality of authentic assessment requires a systemic approach through strengthening the role of institutions in providing assessment guidance and training, developing lecturers' pedagogical capacity, and increasing transparency and assessment literacy for students so that communicative learning goals can be achieved more optimally.

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