

# The Study of Postgraduate English Teaching Based on Authentic Assessment System

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of science and technology, high-qualified postgraduates are badly needed. However, a multitude of problems exist in the current situation of postgraduate English teaching, which greatly affects learners' learning effect. It is found authentic assessment can help improve this situation. Not only can it inspire and promote learners, but also ultimately exert great influence on learners' enthusiasm as well as their confidence. Authentic assessment can be seen as an all-round yardstick to fairly evaluate learners' learning outcome. Authentic assessment serves as a good feedback to both the students and the teachers, in which case they can check their learning and teaching timely and make amendments accordingly so that the improvement of the teaching quality can be guaranteed. It is urged that authentic assessment should be applied more in the future.

## 1. Introduction

In China, education reform has never ceased to explore in the past thirty years: first on syllabus and then on curriculum, at one stage on pedagogy, and at another stage on teaching methodology. Nowadays, with globalization, education should be evaluated from a global perspective, and therefore there is a growing concern about the authentic assessment with respect to the education reform, on the grounds that after years of teaching practice, scholars and researchers have become keenly aware of the significance of authentic assessment: it can not only guide, inspire and promote learners, but also can ultimately exert great influence on learners' enthusiasm and innovation and their confidence in learning.

For postgraduates, in order to meet the requirements for the rapid scientific and technological development, the overwhelming majority of the universities have embarked on a wide range of reforms including English teaching pedagogy, means and curriculum. And meanwhile, there has been an increasing shift to how to assess the results of the learning in that scholars are becoming keenly aware that a better assessment system like authentic assessment, possesses more advantages, which makes the students get more involved into the process of learning, resulting in a more dynamic evaluation process and a more authentic feedback. Consequently, assessment has become a feasible means to motivate postgraduates' creativity and enthusiasm for learning, and besides that, it contributes to building up their confidence. As a result, authentic assessment can offer a comprehensive feedback to both the teachers and the students, in which case they can check their learning and teaching and make amendments timely so that they can continually improve their learning effect and teaching quality.

But nevertheless, quite a few universities still adopt the traditional summative assessment to evaluate learners. In this case, learners, more often than not, lay too much emphasis on scores or even only care about scores, which results in learners' motivation loss or the lack of creativity and interest in learning. Compared with summative assessment, authentic assessment, serving as a scientific and rational evaluation means, highlights the process of the assessment, which takes the elements such as knowledge, skills, emotions and attitude into account. Authentic assessment is universally regarded as the very one deserving popularizing.

## **2. About Authentic Assessment**

An assessment is originally classified into two groups: one is summative assessment, which sees an exam as its evaluation tool, with its emphasis on the learning outcome, and the other is formative assessment, which is a dynamic evaluation, with its focus on learners' learning process. Authentic assessment is a variety of formative assessment.

The notion authentic assessment was proposed by Grant Wiggins (1989), an American expert from Assessment Training Institute, or ATT. With its ultimate goal as a means of promoting learners' development, authentic assessment is a pluralistic evaluation. Not only can it evaluate how much knowledge and how many skills learners have acquired, but also their capability of applying what they have learned to practice. Authentic assessment includes three basic elements: assessment criteria, assessment task and assessment rubric.

### **2.1 Assessment Criteria.**

It is what the teacher expects of the learners. It elaborates what knowledge that learners should acquire and what task that the learners can accomplish by using what they have learned.

### **2.2 Assessment Task.**

It refers to a series of assignments to the students given by the teachers. In order to achieve assessment criteria, learners will employ their knowledge to give full play to their problem-solving ability.

### **2.3 Assessment Rubric.**

It is a grading system to evaluate how the students perform in the task.

## **3. The Characteristics Of Authentic Assessment**

Authentic assessment highlights that the learners should use the knowledge or skills to accomplish a real meaningful task. Compared with the traditional evaluation system, it lays emphasis on whether the students have a mastery of what they have learned rather than the examination results, resulting in a big change in the role of the learners. Authentic assessment is looked upon as an effective supplement to the learning and teaching. Through authentic assessment, students learn how to work out problems so that they can promote their problem-solving ability. Authentic assessment possesses the following characteristics:

### **3.1 Putting Students First.**

Based on constructivism, authentic evaluation treats students as the leading role in teaching, in which learners can actively get involved, including designing the evaluation standard with their teachers. Through performing the standard, they feel responsible and confident.

### **3.2 Promoting Learners' Advanced Thinking Mode.**

Traditional assessment usually adopts quantitative analysis, like testing, to evaluate the learning outcome. Compared with it, authentic assessment employs the process of fulfilling a task effectively. Quite different from the pure memorizing or identifying the prior knowledge, authentic assessment requires the learners to construct and transfer the new knowledge with their old knowledge in the process of learning, through which learners can cultivate their comprehensive abilities, like advanced learning ability, independent thinking and analyzing ability, problem-solving ability.

### **3.3 A Good Combination of Teaching Process, Content and Evaluation Method.**

In the classroom teaching, evaluation is indispensable to assess the learners. Authentic evaluation can integrate teaching goal, content into teaching process quite well. Teaching process is closely related to the learning effect and authentic assessment can serve this purpose. It involves teaching process into the ultimate learning assessment. If the students want to get a good evaluation at the end of the term, s/he has to participate in every step of the teaching activity, otherwise, s/he will fail.

### 3.4 Improving Interaction between Learners and Teachers.

Authentic evaluation gets students as well as teachers involved into the whole process of learning. Based on the learners' performance and the feedback, teachers can make some amendments and learners can reflect themselves and make some improvement in their learning. What's more, learners can choose different ways to participate in the learning, such as , independent learning or learning in pairs or in groups. The evaluation standard is open and fair to everybody. Evaluation can be performed only in two students, or among a group or, or solely by their teacher.

## 4. The Application of Authentic Assessment in Postgraduate English Teaching

On the basis of the above-mentioned theories, the author conducted a case study among the postgraduates in Wuhan Polytechnic University.

### 4.1 Objective.

In order to find out whether authentic evaluation can facilitate learners' learning, the author conducted an experiment.

### 4.2 Subject.

The subjects were from different majors, such as, bioengineering, civil engineering, food science and etc. The author asked them to write a 150-word abstract after reading an 4000-word essay. They could choose to work in pairs or in a group of five or by themselves. After finishing writing the abstract, their writing was evaluated by the other student within the group or the pair or their teacher. The rubric is stated in table 1.

### 4.3 Instrument Questionnaire.

The subjects were required to fill in an questionnaire, which includes three questions :1) How do you feel about the authentic evaluation system? 2) What can you get from it ? 3) What are your suggestions about it?

Table 1 Abstract Assessment Rubric

| Assessment item / grade | Grade 1 (8-10 points)  | Grade 2(4-7 points)  | Grade 3(0-3 points)  |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| main idea               | Summarize the main idea clearly and accurately   | Identify the important idea but not the main idea of the essay   | Find out the detail but not the main idea  |
| grammar                 | few mistakes   | a few mistakes   | many mistakes  |
| Spelling                | few mistakes   | a few mistakes   | many mistakes  |
| Writing skill           | A variety of syntactical structure and many advanced words   | Less syntactical structures and not many advanced words  | Many simple sentences with many low level words  |
| Organization            | A consistent point of view , focus , and organizational structure, including effective use of transition | A mostly consistent point of view , focus , and organizational structure, including use of transition but not all are used appropriately | inconsistent point of view , focus , and organizational structure, including ineffective use of transition |

### 4.4 Results of the Questionnaire.

According to table 1, in terms of the questions in the questionnaire, the students' answers are as

follows: The majority of the students think authentic evaluation is an effective and a fair way to assess their learning, which is much better than the traditional evaluation method. Some hold that they can accomplish the assignment individually while others believe through cooperative learning, they become more active in participating in the work, in which case they benefit a lot from learning and have a sense of achievement. In addition to that ,students get to know the whole process of learning is operated like this :discussing together---writing individually ---assessing or being assessed . By doing so, they are more willing to get involved in the learning process and they feel less stressed out. What's more, it's so convenient for both teachers and students to learn about their evaluation outcome that they can easily find out the existing problems timely and work them out immediately.

Even if authentic evaluation has a lot of advantages, it is inevitable that there are some existing problems beyond us. For students, diversity of the language proficiency among the students may directly influence the understanding of the rubric and the assessment outcome. For teachers, employing authentic evaluation system may take up too much time and energy to design the task , set the goal, perform the rubric before the activities and various tasks like evaluation and collecting data for improvement after the activities, which makes it hard for the teachers to keep going on.

## **5. Conclusions**

Authentic evaluation system is of great significance in that it can integrate evaluation into teaching and learning. It can get postgraduates involved into the learning process, which can motivate their enthusiasm and independent thinking ability as well as problem-solving ability. From evaluation, postgraduates can also know what area they need to improve, which is very conducive to their learning. It is urged that more teachers should employ such a system. However, we still have a long way to go.

## **References**

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