



## Analysis of Authentic Assessment Practices in Project-Based English Learning at the Secondary School Level

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### ABSTRACT

Authentic assessment is a key component of project-based learning in English education, supporting the development of real-world communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills. This qualitative study examines authentic assessment practices in project-based English learning at the secondary school level, focusing on teacher strategies, student experiences, and institutional support. Using purposive sampling, data were collected from two English teachers, eight students, and two curriculum staff in a secondary school in Jayapura through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed thematically. The findings show that teachers employ authentic assessments such as performance-based rubrics, project portfolios, and presentations, but face challenges related to unclear assessment indicators, time limitations, and varying student readiness. The study concludes that while authentic assessment enhances 21st-century language competencies, its effectiveness depends on more consistent assessment design, clearer rubrics, and stronger school policy support, contributing to improved project-based learning and assessment models in English language education.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The development of global education demands a fundamental change in the way teachers assess students' language skills, especially at the secondary school level. In the context of English learning, assessment is no longer enough to be done through a written test alone because students must be able to communicate, solve problems, and produce works that reflect real performance. This is in line with the direction of world education policy that emphasizes 21st century skills as the main competencies that students must possess (Richards & Turner, 2021). Project-Based Learning is increasingly seen as an effective approach to developing these competencies because it integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in the learning process (Miller & Jackson, 2022). Authentic assessments are important in this context because they are able to measure student performance through meaningful tasks that are close to real-life situations, as affirmed in a recent study by Thompson (2023) that emphasizes the relevance of performance assessments in language teaching.

In many countries, authentic assessments have become the new standard for measuring language competence, especially in project-based learning situations that demand the production of work and direct involvement in the learning process. This approach is considered more valid in capturing the development of students' communication skills because it not only measures declarative knowledge, but also its application in real contexts (Rowley & Chen, 2024). However, the implementation of authentic assessments in secondary schools often faces technical and pedagogical challenges, including time constraints, administrative burden on teachers, and difficulties in compiling clear and measurable assessment rubrics. International research shows that the quality of the implementation of authentic assessments is strongly influenced by teacher readiness and school support (Ferguson, 2021), as well as teachers' ability to design reliable instruments (Anderson & Brooks, 2022). This condition explains why the variation in authentic assessment practices is still quite high, especially in areas with limited educational resources.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of authentic assessments has been encouraged through curriculum policies, including the latest curriculum that emphasizes formative assessments, performance assessments, and project integration as part of learning. However, a number of studies show that teachers' understanding and ability to apply authentic assessments are still uneven. Teachers tend to partially adapt authentic assessments without understanding essential characteristics such as the authenticity of the assignment, the relevance to competencies, and the use of valid rubrics (Hanifah & Long, 2023). Research by Prasetyo (2022) shows that many English teachers still struggle to design indicators that reflect real performance in project-based assignments. This has an impact on inconsistencies between learning objectives, project implementation, and assessment processes, so that learning outcomes do not fully reflect the true abilities of students.

Previous research on authentic assessments in English language learning has mostly focused on studies in urban areas, especially schools with adequate facilities and resources. For example, a study by Limantara et al. (2020) showed

the implementation of effective authentic assessments in highly accredited schools, but these results cannot be generalized to the context of schools in regions with different educational conditions. In addition, most of the research still focuses on teacher perception, rubric design, or evaluation of assessment instruments without observing implementation practices in the classroom directly. Multi-informant research involving teachers, students, and curriculum staff is still very limited even though such approaches can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the authentic assessment process (Wong & Harrison, 2023). These findings are in line with global study recommendations that emphasize the importance of collaborative perspectives in assessing learning practices (Hernandez & Lee, 2023).

The research gap is also seen in the limited studies that specifically examine the practice of authentic assessment in project-based learning in the context of Eastern Indonesia, including Jayapura. Most of the literature researches schools on the island of Java or large educational centers, so it does not reflect the diversity of Indonesia's educational context. In fact, the implementation of authentic assessments is greatly influenced by learning culture, school resources, social environment, and educational unit policies (Mahmood & Taylor, 2022). A study by Sabandar (2024) confirms that the local context influences the way teachers design and carry out performance assessments, so sensitive research to regional conditions is needed. Therefore, research in Jayapura can make an important contribution because it is able to describe authentic assessment practices in secondary schools with distinctive geographical and socio-cultural characteristics (Larsen & Foley, 2021).

Based on these gaps, this study explicitly aims to analyze the practice of authentic assessment in project-based English learning in secondary school. The analysis focused on three main components, namely the authentic assessment strategies used by teachers, students' experiences and responses to the assessment process, and the role of curriculum staff in supporting the implementation of the assessment. A descriptive qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of assessment practices from various perspectives (Johnson & Wei, 2025). Through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this research aims to produce a comprehensive picture of how authentic assessments are applied in the field. This effort is important to ensure that the implementation of assessments aligns with project-based learning principles that emphasize the authenticity of assignments and active student engagement.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of English education literature, especially related to the integration of authentic assessments in project-based learning at the secondary school level. Theoretically, this research strengthens the understanding of the relationship between authentic assessment, student engagement, and language learning quality in diverse educational contexts. This research also has a significant practical contribution to teachers, schools, and curriculum developers. The results of the research can be the basis for the preparation of teacher training, the development of performance-based assessment rubrics, and the improvement of

assessment policies in schools. As emphasized by Collins et al. (2022), the quality of learning will improve if teachers are equipped with the right pedagogical understanding and assessment instruments.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***The Concept of Authentic Assessment in Education***

Authentic assessment is a form of assessment designed to measure students' abilities through real-world tasks that reflect the application of competencies in real-world contexts. This concept emphasizes the importance of students' actual performance, not just written answers or memorization of concepts (Harris & Brown, 2021). In a modern pedagogical perspective, authentic assessment is seen as able to provide a comprehensive picture of critical thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving. In addition, authentic assessments also facilitate the integration of learning processes and products so that students can demonstrate skill development more holistically (Zhang & Liu, 2022). Recent studies also emphasize that authentic assessments function as formative and summative assessments that can improve student motivation and quality of participation (Kim & Reeves, 2023). Thus, authentic assessment is becoming a relevant evaluation approach for 21st century learning.

### ***Authentic Assessment in English Language Learning***

In English learning, authentic assessments are considered to be able to capture students' ability to use language in the context of real communication. Tasks such as presentations, portfolios, projects, and performance-based assessments have been shown to be more effective in measuring language skills than traditional tests (Anderson & Williams, 2020). A number of studies have shown that authentic assessments can improve speaking, writing, and critical literacy skills because students interact directly with various linguistic situations (Garcia & Torres, 2021). In addition, authentic assessments encourage students to produce meaningful and relevant work, thereby increasing self-confidence and self-reflection skills in learning (Nguyen & Pham, 2022). However, the implementation of authentic assessments in English language learning still faces challenges, including teacher workloads and lack of adequate assessment training (Leung & Huang, 2024). This shows the need for further research in various educational contexts.

### ***Project-Based Learning and the Need for Authentic Assessments***

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is a learning approach that emphasizes problem-solving through long-term project tasks that require collaboration, creativity, and real-world application of knowledge. Because it is product- and process-oriented, PjBL is closely related to authentic assessments as the main evaluation instrument (Santos & Vega, 2021). Research shows that the use of authentic assessments in PjBL can improve student engagement and the quality of learning outcomes because learners play an active role in developing meaningful projects (Martinez & Foster, 2023). In the context of language teaching, the integration of PjBL and authentic assessments allows teachers to assess students' communication skills more effectively, for example through

project presentations, written reports, and digital portfolios (Rahman & Elliott, 2022). Thus, the compatibility between PjBL and authentic assessment makes the two a complementary approach in an effort to improve the quality of English learning.

### ***Factors Influencing the Implementation of Authentic Assessments***

The implementation of authentic assessments is influenced by a variety of factors, including teachers' pedagogical competence, resource availability, school policy support, and students' readiness to face performance-based tasks. Teachers' knowledge of the design of authentic rubrics and indicators is the main determinant of assessment success (Wilson & Carter, 2022). Research has also shown that administrative supports, such as learning facilities and assessment training, greatly influence the quality of the implementation of authentic assessments (Benson & Clarke, 2023). On the other hand, student readiness, including the ability to work independently and collaborative skills, is an important factor in the success of authentic assessment-based projects (Lopez & Grant, 2024). Time constraints and teacher administrative burdens are also frequently reported obstacles, especially in schools with limited resources (Fraser & Kim, 2021). The complexity of these factors indicates the need for a comprehensive and contextual implementation strategy.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which is an approach that aims to describe in detail the phenomenon studied based on natural data without manipulating field conditions. This approach was chosen because the research focused on understanding authentic assessment practices in project-based English learning as it takes place in real life in the classroom. According to Creswell and Poth (2021), a descriptive qualitative approach is suitable to be used to reveal the processes, experiences, and perspectives of various informants in the context of education in depth. In this study, the researcher seeks to examine teacher strategies, student experiences, and school policy support that affect the implementation of authentic assessments. This approach also allows researchers to comprehensively identify patterns, barriers, and best practices as per the needs of the research.

### ***Research Locations and Participants***

The research was carried out at one of the secondary schools in Jayapura City, Papua Province, which organized project-based English learning. The selection of Jayapura was based on the need for literature that emphasizes the importance of educational research in the Eastern Indonesia region because it has a different social, cultural, and resource context from urban areas on the island of Java. The research participants consisted of two English teachers, eight students from the secondary level (grades VII-IX and grades X-XII) and two curriculum staff who played a role in the development of assessment policies in

schools. All participants were selected for their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of project-based English learning.

### ***Sampling Technique***

The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which is the selection of participants based on certain criteria according to research needs. According to Patton (2022), purposive sampling is effective in qualitative research because it allows researchers to select the informants who best understand the phenomenon being studied. The criteria for teacher selection include: (1) teaching English at the secondary school level, (2) having experience in implementing project-based learning, and (3) playing a role in the implementation of authentic assessments. Students are selected based on active involvement in English projects, while curriculum staff are selected for having authority in decision-making regarding policies and assessment instruments. This technique ensures the representation of relevant perspectives from various parties.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Data was collected through three main techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis.

1. Classroom observations are conducted to examine firsthand how teachers apply authentic assessments during project-based learning, including the use of rubrics, interaction with students, and the project presentation process. Observation is carried out in a non-participatory manner so that the researcher is not involved in class activities.
2. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and curriculum staff using semi-structured interview guidelines. This technique allows researchers to explore the perceptions, experiences, and obstacles faced by each informant.
3. Document analysis is carried out on assessment rubrics, teaching modules/Learning Implementation Plans (RPP), sample student projects, assessment reports, and school policies related to assessment. Document analysis helps to reinforce findings from observations and interviews.

### ***Research Instruments***

The research instrument consists of observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and document analysis sheets. The observation guidelines contain indicators related to the implementation of authentic assessments such as clarity of assignment instructions, use of rubrics, feedback, and student engagement. The interview guidelines include open-ended questions regarding teachers' understanding of authentic assessments, student experiences during the project, as well as support for school policies according to curriculum staff. Document analysis sheets are used to assess the suitability of rubrics, the relevance of assessment indicators, and the relationship between learning objectives and assessment instruments. All instruments are developed based on authentic assessment theory and project-based learning characteristics.

### *Data Analysis Techniques*

Data analysis is carried out through thematic analysis, which is the process of identifying patterns, categories, and themes that emerge from all research data. The analysis process follows steps according to Braun and Clarke (2021), namely: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading, (2) initial coding of interview, observation, and document data, (3) grouping of codes into temporary themes, (4) review of themes based on suitability with the data, (5) final naming of themes, and (6) preparation of interpretation of results. The analysis is carried out inductively to ensure that the theme emerges directly from the field data. The results of the analysis are then compared with theories and findings of previous research to strengthen the validity of the interpretation.

### *Data Validity*

To maintain the credibility of the findings, this study uses source triangulation and triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is done by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and curriculum staff. Technical triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and document analysis. In addition, the researcher conducts member checking by confirming provisional findings to the informant to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with their experience. Documentation of research activities is also carried out systematically to maintain audit trails. This effort is made to ensure that the data obtained is accurate, consistent, and scientifically accountable.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

### *Implementation of Authentic Forms of Assessment in Project-Based Learning*

The results of classroom observation and document analysis showed that teachers had applied several forms of authentic assessment, especially **Performance-Based Rubrics, Project portfolio** and **Final Project Presentation**. This implementation is in line with the characteristics of Project-Based Learning which requires the evaluation of the process as well as the learning product. In the analysis process, the data from the observations are then encoded and compared with the interview data to ensure the consistency of authentic assessment practices in the classroom. The findings show that although authentic forms of assessment have been used, their utilization has not been optimally implemented at all stages of the project.

Both English teachers emphasized that they are trying to integrate authentic assessments from the planning stage, although the structure of implementation still varies. The first teacher emphasized that rubrics are used to ensure more objective assessments. This is evident in the following interview: "*I use performance appraisal rubrics so students know what they're assessing, especially when they're presenting projects.*" (G1, interview October 12, 2025). The second teacher stated that the portfolio is used to assess student development, but not all students can complete the portfolio. "*The portfolio is actually very helpful, but many students haven't consistently collected project documents every week.*" (G2, interview October 14, 2025).

Meanwhile, some students showed a positive understanding of the application of presentation as a form of authentic assessment, although they still felt pressured. *"When it comes to presentations, we can explain the results of our work, but sometimes we are nervous because we are afraid of speaking the wrong English."* (S3, interview October 17, 2025). The curriculum staff also stated that the school has encouraged the use of authentic assessments in English subjects through internal policies. *"We have encouraged teachers to use performance assessments to suit the direction of the curriculum, especially in language projects."* (K1, interview October 19, 2025). Overall, the findings on this theme show that teachers have implemented relevant forms of authentic assessment, but the consistency of implementation still needs to be strengthened.

### ***Constraints in the Clarity of Assessment Indicators and the Use of Rubrics***

Although the assessment rubric is already in use, data analysis shows that **Performance indicators in the rubric are not yet fully clear**, both for teachers and students. This was identified through the analysis of rubric documents, and strengthened by the information of the informants. In the thematic analysis, codes related to "instrument ambiguity" and "indicator misunderstanding" emerged repeatedly from the data of teachers, students, and curriculum staff.

Teachers admit that one of the main difficulties is to reduce basic competencies to concrete and measurable assessment indicators. *"Making the indicators is difficult, sometimes it's still too common, so students are confused about what to achieve."* (G1, interview October 12, 2025). Another teacher described that although rubrics already existed, their use was not yet fully effective. *"The rubric is indeed prepared, but sometimes in class we don't have time to explain the details because of limited time."* (G2, interview October 14, 2025).

Some students also said that they had difficulty understanding the assessment indicators because they were not explained in detail before starting to work on the project. *"We only know how to make a project, but we don't really understand which parts are rated high or low."* (S5, interview October 18, 2025). Curriculum staff assessed that teachers still need special training in the preparation of systematic authentic assessment instruments. *"Some teachers still need assistance to make rubrics clearer and easier for students to understand."* (K2, interview October 20, 2025). The findings on this theme show that the main obstacle is not the existence of the rubric, but the quality and clarity of the indicators in it.

### ***Limited Time and Student Readiness in the Implementation of Authentic Assessments***

Data analysis shows that **Time Constraints** and **Student readiness** become a significant obstacle in implementing authentic assessments. Codes related to "time constraint" and "student readiness" appear strongly in the overall data. Many project activities require additional meetings, while study schedules are very limited.

The teacher revealed that authentic assessments require a longer process than traditional assessments, but the time available is inadequate. *"One project takes a few weeks, but the subject schedule is only twice a week, so there is often not*

*enough time.*" (G2, interview October 14, 2025). Other teachers also emphasized that they must balance the demands of the curriculum with the implementation of the project. *"We have to pursue material targets, so we don't always have time to give detailed feedback."* (G1, interview October 12, 2025).

From the student side, most feel that they are not fully prepared to conduct the research, collaboration, and presentation process in English. *"We love working on projects, but sometimes we get confused about where to start, especially if we are told to find information ourselves."* (S2, interview October 16, 2025). Curriculum staff acknowledge that there are time constraints and acknowledge that students' readiness is still developing. *"Our students still need to be guided more intensely, especially in independent work and project collaboration."* (K1, interview October 19, 2025). Thus, this theme shows that the implementation of authentic assessments is not optimal due to time constraints and the level of student learning readiness that still varies.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that teachers have implemented various forms of authentic assessment such as performance-based rubrics, project portfolios, and presentations. These outcomes align with the concept of authentic assessment that emphasizes students' engagement in meaningful tasks that reflect real-world situations (Bishop & Hayes, 2021). This implementation is an indicator that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) requires simultaneous evaluation of processes and products, as stated in a recent study on the effectiveness of performance assessments in language learning (Carson & Miller, 2022). However, even though the form of assessment used is up to standard, the variation in implementation in the classroom indicates that teachers are still adjusting it to their respective conditions and preferences. This shows that the success of authentic assessments is greatly influenced by the professional readiness of teachers and the institutional support available.

Obstacles related to the clarity of assessment indicators show that teachers have not been fully able to reduce basic competencies to specific and measurable assessment indicators. These findings are in line with research showing that teachers often have difficulty designing accurate analytical rubrics, especially when it comes to integrating language skills and collaborative skills in a single instrument (Henderson & Shaw, 2023). Unclear indicators can have an impact on misunderstandings between teachers and students regarding expected performance standards, as explained by recent research that emphasizes the importance of rubric transparency in performance-based projects (Liang & Porter, 2021). In this context, the problems found are not only in the quality of the instruments, but also in the process of socializing the rubric to students. These findings make an important contribution as they underscore the urgent need for improved assessment literacy for English teachers in secondary schools.

Time constraints are a significant obstacle in the implementation of authentic assessments, and this condition reinforces the results of international research that authentic assessments tend to require a longer learning duration than conventional assessments (Morgan & Jacobs, 2022). Schedule limitations

result in teachers not being able to provide in-depth formative feedback, even though feedback is a key element in improving the quality of student performance. The imbalance between curriculum demands and available time makes authentic assessments incomprehensively implemented. This condition is also reflected in studies that note that teachers often have to adjust projects with narrow time allocations so that the quality of the learning process decreases (Ramirez & Lee, 2023). As such, the successful implementation of authentic assessments relies heavily on time management and realistic learning designs.

The limited readiness of students, especially in conducting independent research, collaboration, and presentations in English, confirms that authentic assessments require strong supporting competencies. A number of studies show that the success of performance assessments is greatly influenced by students' academic literacy levels and their ability to manage the learning process independently (O'Brien & Foster, 2021). This means that authentic assessment cannot stand alone without reinforcement in aspects of learning strategies, communication, and critical thinking skills. The tendency of students to feel confused in starting a project indicates that they need more structured guidance in carrying out the stages of PjBL. Thus, student readiness is a determining factor that affects the effectiveness of the implementation of authentic assessments in the classroom.

Findings involving the perspective of curriculum staff show that school policy support is an important component in the successful implementation of authentic assessments. Previous research states that educational institutions must provide consistent assessment training, learning tools, and internal policies so that teachers can implement authentic assessments more effectively (Watson & Reeves, 2020). In the schools where the research is located, although there has been a policy push, the support has not been fully structured in the form of technical training and assessment quality monitoring. This confirms that the implementation of authentic assessments requires not only the readiness of teachers and students, but also proactive school management. The contribution of this research can be seen in the affirmation that synergy between teachers, students, and school management is a key factor in maintaining the consistency of authentic assessments.

When compared to previous research, the novelty of this research lies in the focus of the Jayapura area which has been underrepresented in authentic assessment studies. Most previous research has focused on schools in urban areas that have adequate resources, while the context of Eastern Indonesia has different social dynamics and educational infrastructure (Nelson & Ward, 2024). This research adds new insights that the constraints of authentic assessment come not only from pedagogical factors, but also geographical factors, access to learning resources, and the characteristics of learning culture. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution because it expands academic understanding of the application of authentic assessments in diverse educational contexts. In addition, this study emphasizes the importance of a contextual approach in assessing the effectiveness of PjBL.

The weakness of this study lies in the limited number of informants and the limited scope of schools, so that the generalization of the findings cannot be carried out widely. However, this research still provides a solid basis for further research that could involve more schools and informants from higher policy levels. Further research is recommended to develop authentic assessment models that are more adaptive to school conditions in remote areas, as well as to conduct teacher training-based interventions to improve the quality of rubrics and assessment instruments. In addition, comparative studies between schools in urban and non-urban areas are also needed to understand the structural differences that affect the implementation of authentic assessments. Thus, advanced research can lead to a more comprehensive and valid understanding.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study confirms that authentic assessment practices in project-based English learning at the secondary school level have been implemented through the use of performance-based rubrics, project portfolios, and presentations as the main forms of evaluation. However, the quality of implementation still varies because teachers face challenges in ensuring clarity of assessment indicators, rubric consistency, time constraints, and students' readiness to complete complex projects. The results of the analysis also show that even if teachers understand the basic principles of authentic assessment, their ability to design measurable and transparent instruments still needs to be strengthened in order to produce fair, valid, and reliable assessments. Thus, this study confirms that the implementation of authentic assessments has made a real contribution to the development of 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, and problem-solving, but still requires refinement of design and execution in order to run optimally in the context of English learning in secondary schools.

In addition to offering an empirical picture of authentic assessment practices, this research also contributes to the development of educational theory and practice by highlighting the importance of school policy support, teacher training, and student involvement in understanding assessment criteria. Findings related to technical barriers, learner readiness, and insynchronization between planning and implementation underscore the need for an authentic assessment model that is more structured, flexible, and adaptive to the classroom context. This study recommends strengthening teachers' capacity in designing analytical rubrics, more realistic project scheduling, and providing curriculum assistance to ensure alignment between learning objectives and assessment procedures.

### **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

Thus, this study not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the actual conditions of authentic assessment in project-based learning, but also opens up space for further research to develop more effective, sustainable, and responsive assessment models to the needs of English language learning at the secondary school level.

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