

Exploring the Authenticity and Rubric Function of an EAP Presentation Assessment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issue of authentic assessment is one that has come to prominence in recent years in both higher education and language teaching alike. However, there is a relevant small amount of research on the rubrics and criteria used to evaluate authentic assessments. As such, this chapter provides an evaluation of a presentation assessment used on an EAP programme in Japan. Firstly, the degree to which the assessment can be considered authentic is explored. Then the rubric function is assessed using many-facet Rasch measurement. The analysis suggests that the assessment could be considered to be authentic and that the rubric functions well, but both areas have room for improvement. These areas are discussed, as well as other implications for presentations of authentic EAP assessments.

INTRODUCTION

Presentation delivery is a key skill that can enhance the reputation and credentials of effective presenters. Therefore, presentation skills development is the focus of numerous educational programmes. It is a mainstay of tertiary-level assessment with a long and rich history (Brown & Knight, 1994), with its prevalence noted in a number of studies (Doherty, et al., 2011; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Morita, 2000;

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Palmour, 2024; Smith et al., 2022). Beyond higher education, the oral presentation is used in EFL/ESL contexts (Evans & Morrison, 2011) business contexts (Evans, 2013) and academia (Feak, 2013; Morell, 2015). In Japan, where this study takes place, the use of presentations as assessment tools has long been common at the tertiary level and has been slowly increasing in use in junior high and high schools (Akiyama, 2003; Koizumi, 2022; Koizumi & Yano, 2019). Despite their ubiquity, there is a relative lack of research on oral presentations (Feak, 2013; Zareva, 2009), especially on the degree of authenticity the presentation has for a given set of learners. There is even less research on the development of effective rubrics for the presentation as an authentic assessment. As such, this research aims to fill this gap by exploring the authenticity of a presentation assessment task, and also shed light on the rubric validation process used at a higher-education institution in Japan.

Presentations as Authentic Assessments

Although presentations are widely used, it is also important to consider whether a presentation is the right form of assessment for the learners in any given context. Indeed, the expansion of authentic assessments in higher education has led to many examining their assessment practices in search of more direct assessments, moving away from indirect, paper-based means of assessment (Burton, 2011; Colthorpe et al., 2021; Herrington & Herrington, 1998). This has given rise to efforts to define what constitutes an authentic assessment. For example, Burton's (2011) detailed review of the literature identified nine factors that contribute to assessment authenticity, including accurate rating criteria, fidelity to the real world, higher order thinking skills which include metacognition and originality of ideas. Similarly, Gulikers et al. (2004) outlined five key dimensions for authentic assessment: the task, physical and social context, assessment result or form, and criteria. They note the importance of transparent criteria and standards in authentic assessment and point out that the criteria should reflect the expectations of professional life. Crucially, it has been argued that authentic assessments help bridge the gap between academic and professional life by not only enhancing learning and developing thinking skills but also engendering key skills relevant to professional life (Sokhanvar et al., 2021; Tynjala et al., 2003). This is not possible with more traditional forms of assessment, such as paper-based exams or short-answer questions. In Japan, and Confucian cultures more generally, more traditional assessments predominate. Education and assessment, therefore, tends to be mono-directional rather than collaborative, emphasizes exam scores over skills, book knowledge over practical skill, and summative rather than formative assessment (Carless, 2011). However, there have been more recent trends to modernize assessment in Japan. In 2014, as part of a drive to foster citizens with more global competencies and internationalize Japanese higher education, the

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