

Student Perspectives on Improving Academic Integrity through Authentic Assessment Design

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Abstract

Authentic assessment has been proposed as a potential solution to deal with increasing concerns around academic integrity in higher education; however, empirical research on its effectiveness remains limited. Moreover, the ability of authentic assessment to improve academic integrity depends on students' perspectives and experiences, yet these remain underexplored in existing literature. To address this gap, a thematic analysis was conducted on the perspectives of final-year undergraduate business students (N = 128) in relation to their experiences with authentic assessment. The authentic assessment was structured using a framework and implementation plan developed by Lehane et al. (2024). The findings of this new study suggest that authentic assessment can play a significant role in enhancing academic integrity. Building on these findings, practical implications and recommendations for educators are discussed to promote the adoption and effective implementation of authentic assessment strategies, strengthening their impact on academic integrity.

Keywords: Academic Integrity; Authentic Assessment; Student Perspectives.

1. Introduction

Authentic assessment actively engages students by creating immersive, real-world experiences that enhance deep learning, self-reflection, and self-evaluation, empowering students to become autonomous learners and active participants in the assessment process (Jopp, 2020). In addition to enhanced learning, authentic assessments lead to the development of key employability skills such as critical thinking, communication, and creativity, addressing the growing 'global skills gap' emphasised by employers (Wake *et al.*, 2023). Despite the clear pedagogical benefits of authentic assessment, research explicitly exploring student experiences remains scarce, with much of the literature centred on lecturers' viewpoints. Understanding student perspectives is

essential for improving learning outcomes, skill development, and the successful implementation of authentic assessment in higher education (Wake *et al.*, 2023). While research does suggest that students prefer innovative teaching methods over traditional approaches, limited studies have specifically explored their perceptions of authentic assessment. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine student perceptions of authentic assessment, offering empirical insights to enhance its implementation and impact on academic integrity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Student Perspectives

Examining authentic assessments from a student perspective provides a critical lens for understanding this type of assessment, as student perceptions significantly influence both what and how they learn. Incorporating student perspectives when designing authentic assessments is imperative as authentic assessment shapes their learning approaches, fosters deeper engagement, and enhances overall motivation. The reflective process also provides valuable insights for lecturers on the enhancement of academic integrity through authentic assessment design, as student reflections highlight areas where students believe they benefited most, and where they thought they were supported or challenged (Sokhanvar *et al.*, 2021). Utilising student perceptions to inform the authentic assessment process ensures that the assessment not only aligns with educational objectives but also resonates with students' expectations, learning needs, and professional ambitions (Asgarova *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, a well-designed authentic assessment experience can enhance students' satisfaction with their degree programme and the university, reinforcing their commitment to ethical academic practices. Although previous studies indicate that students value authentic assessments, there is a lack of in-depth research examining their perceptions, particularly in the context of academic integrity (Asgarova *et al.*, 2022). This study addresses that gap by providing an in-depth analysis of student's perceptions, while also considering broader pedagogical and policy implications for the design and implementation of authentic assessments in higher education business courses.

2.2. Authentic Assessment and Academic Integrity

Authentic assessment is defined as an assessment which evaluates student learning and skill development in ways that are relevant to the workplace and lifelong learning by requiring students to engage with tasks situated within real-world contexts (Jopp, 2020). Authentic assessments must be flexible, dynamic and inclusive, to reflect the diverse student population and the evolving nature of digital and globalised work. There is an urgent need for evidence-based authentic assessment frameworks to clarify lecturer expectations, enhance student understanding, reduce student stress, and facilitate effective implementation of authentic assessment. Furthermore, successful implementation requires faculty training and ongoing

collaboration between educators and industry to ensure that assessments align with current professional standards and industry expectations (Jopp, 2020). Embedding authentic assessment into the curriculum is crucial for its sustainability and long-term effectiveness. However, this integration must be supported by clearly defined institutional policies and guidelines to maintain academic integrity (Sokhanvar *et al.*, 2021). Academic misconduct, particularly the misuse of GenAI, has emerged as a significant global concern. The rapid expansion of the GenAI market presents an ongoing challenge for universities, necessitating strategic responses through assessment design. Authentic assessment design can promote academic integrity by requiring learners to construct original responses and generate personalised, novel ideas that cannot be easily replicated by AI tools (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2020). Providing students with continuous support throughout the assessment is essential to build students' confidence in their ability to complete tasks independently, thus reducing the likelihood of academic misconduct. Moreover, a collaborative teaching approach involving students as partners in the assessment strengthens their commitment to ethical practices (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2020). Further research and empirical evidence are required, however, to evaluate the extent to which authentic assessment effectively deters academic misconduct.

3. Methodology

This novel research aims to examine how the implementation of the Lehane *et al.* (2024) framework led to improvements in academic integrity, offering evidence-based analysis to inform authentic assessment design. A qualitative approach was adopted, and a structured methodological process was followed: [1] Students participated in an authentic assessment with a local industry partner, the Marina Market (MM) in Cork City, Ireland, and the student experience served as the case study for this research; [2] Students provided 600-word reflections on their experience post-assessment; [3] Reflections were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to identify new valuable findings; [4] These empirical findings contribute to the refinement of the Lehane *et al.* (2024) framework by offering recommendations for future iterations. A case study approach was employed to explore students' experiences with the MM authentic assessment. The study involved 128 final-year undergraduate Business students at Munster Technological University (MTU), an Irish university, enrolled in a mandatory Strategy module. Working in groups of four, students conducted a strategic analysis of MM and proposed event ideas based on their findings. Data collection took place in January 2024, following completion of the assessment and the submission of individual student reflections. All 128 students provided informed consent for their reflections to be used in this study, and full ethical approval was granted by the MTU Research Ethics Committee. Data was gathered from reflections addressing: [1] students' positive and negative experiences with the authentic assessment, [2] underlying reasons for their perspectives, [3] skills acquired and key learnings, [4] how and why they developed these skills,

and [5] potential improvements they would make. Students structured their reflections using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1998). A deductive, theoretical, thematic analysis was conducted, with academic integrity as the overarching theme. All student comments related to academic integrity were systematically coded under this theme, and specific sub-themes were identified.

4. Results

Students reflected on various stages of the authentic assessment process as outlined in the Lehane *et al.* (2024) framework and implementation plan including: the Initial Introduction to the authentic assessment, Marina Market Presentation, Rubric Co-Design, Visual Scrapbook Analysis document, Exemplar Workshop, Peer Feedback, Lecturer-Student Feedforward Sessions and Student Presentations. Under the overarching theme of academic integrity, 571 total student comments were received. The major sub-themes that emerged are shown in Table 1, along with the number of comments coded to each sub-theme, the percentage they represent out of the total 571 comments, and the main stages of the authentic assessment process that they relate to. Sub-themes shown in Table 1 represent the nature of 72% of the 571 comments.

Table 1. Number of Student Comments on Academic Integrity Categorised by Sub-Theme

Sub-Theme	Comments		Authentic Assessment Stage & No. of Comments per Stage*
Understanding	176	31%	Exemplar Workshop (55), Rubric Co-Design (51), Marina Market Presentation (45), Lecturer Feed-Forward (15), Initial Intro (6)
Lecturer Support	80	14%	Lecturer Feed-Forward (62), Rubric Co-Design (6)
Student Partnership	72	13%	Rubric Co-Design (69)
Assessment Type	41	7%	Scrapbook (30), Initial Intro (7)
Self-Regulation	39	7%	Rubric Co-Design (15), Lecturer Feed-Forward (5), Student Presentations (5)

*Authentic Assessment Stages which had less than 5 comments are not shown

The main academic integrity findings are discussed below under the sub-theme headings. Strong evidence is provided to support all findings in the form of student quote examples.

5. Discussion

5.1. Understanding

Exemplars provided students with meaningful learning experiences by clearly communicating assessment expectations and offering illustrative examples. Aligning the exemplars with the co-designed rubric further reinforced assessment clarity by ensuring students comprehended assignment guidelines and developed a clear understanding of the marking criteria. This

collaborative approach between the lecturer and students created a supportive, positive learning environment that engaged students and contextualised their learning. By providing clear guidance and meaningful context, the use of exemplars and rubric co-design helped reduce uncertainty around the authentic assessment, thus minimising the likelihood of academic misconduct. Furthermore, the rubric co-design empowered students to engage more deeply with the assessment criteria, enabling them to clearly connect their learning with assessment outcomes and the standards for success. In addition to the rubric co-design process and exemplar workshops, lecturer feedforward sessions built trust between students and the lecturer, and guided student efforts. This approach increased students' confidence in completing the assessment, leading to improved performance. The presentation from Marina Market representatives enhanced student understanding by providing real-world context and practical insights which bridged the gap for students between theoretical knowledge and its application. The presentation also highlighted industry-specific challenges and goals which clarified industry expectations and enabled students to align their work with professional standards:

"Workshops gave me a very good understanding of how to gain as much marks as possible in sections"

"I really found that I was able to further my understanding of what was required for the project"

"Gaining a thorough grasp of the assessment criteria was made possible through the rubric co-design"

"Feedforward sessions deepened my understanding and refined my approach to the project"

"The MM presentation was informative, providing a fantastic insight into what the company expected"

5.2. Lecturer Support and Student Partnership

Students highly valued timely and constructive lecturer support and feedback, recognising its role in reinforcing learning, enhancing self-reflection, and guiding improvement. Feedforward sessions provided students with clear expectations and personalised support, particularly for challenging tasks, which enhanced student confidence and engagement. The individualised nature of these sessions not only strengthened intrinsic motivation but also reduced the perceived need to engage in academic dishonesty. The strong student-lecturer relationships that emerged through the rubric co-design process was also a key aspect of the authentic assessment experience, reinforcing students' roles as active partners and valued contributors in their learning. By collaborating on the development of assessment criteria, students developed a sense of ownership, empowerment, and autonomy over their learning. This process also introduced flexibility and inclusivity, allowing students to align the marking scheme with their individual learning preferences and needs. An open dialogue about academic challenges developed, enabling the lecturer to provide personalised support and address students' concerns directly. As a result, students felt more supported and were less likely to resort to misconduct. Furthermore, despite the large student cohort, the co-design process facilitated a more personalised approach to teaching by ensuring that every student's voice was heard. Close collaboration also allowed lecturers to become familiar with students' skills and learning styles early in the assessment process. This familiarity not only enabled earlier detection of potential

academic integrity breaches but also allowed lecturers to identify and support struggling students at an early stage, potentially preventing future instances of academic misconduct:

"It was a great opportunity to get to show our lecturer our work and get one to one feedback"

"Gave us a clear path to our end goal and made the process a lot easier"

"I had never taken a module with so much student interaction before, and it was really valuable"

"Felt inclusive, each student was able to voice their opinions, with all accommodated by the lecturer"

"Made me feel important because my input was valued, and I had a say in the marking scheme"

5.3. Assessment Type and Self-Regulation

The introduction of a scrapbook, which was a challenging and unfamiliar assessment type, had both positive and negative implications for students. On the positive side, the novelty and complexity of the scrapbook minimised opportunities for academic misconduct by requiring unique, personalised responses that could not be easily outsourced or replicated, particularly in the era of GenAI tools. The creative and reflective nature of the scrapbook format ensured that each submission was highly individualised, reinforcing academic integrity through authentic student engagement. The unfamiliarity of the assessment also heightened student anxiety and uncertainty about expectations and assessment criteria, however, particularly as this student cohort was the first to complete the new format. Despite these initial concerns, incorporating a visual scrapbook instead of a traditional report ultimately enhanced student engagement by offering greater creative freedom and fostering a sense of ownership over their work. By enabling students to experiment with design, layout, and visual elements, the scrapbook aligned with diverse learning styles and encouraged deeper interaction with course content. The integration of authentic assessment tasks, such as rubric co-design, lecturer feedforward sessions, and student presentations, played a crucial role in developing students' self-regulation skills, which in turn reinforced academic integrity. The reflective nature of these tasks enhanced students' ability to self-evaluate, increasing their self-awareness and self-monitoring – students critically analysed their performance, identified their strengths, and recognized gaps in their knowledge or skills. This deeper understanding enabled them to develop targeted strategies for improvement and personal growth. This emphasis on self-regulation not only improved academic performance but also reduced the likelihood of misconduct, as students became more confident in their abilities and more invested in their personal and academic growth:

"Use of a scrapbook rather than a traditional report was a good choice due to the rise of Chat GPT"

"I found the scrapbook quite interesting as we had not done one before, but this also made it difficult"

"I didn't like the idea of the scrapbook in the beginning as I was confused as to what to put inside it"

"Empowered to design our own rubric, gave me responsibility around my project and its direction"

"In the future, I would practice the presentation further in advance to ensure I was prepared"

6. Implications and Recommendations

This study highlights the importance of integrating rubric co-design, lecturer feedforward sessions, exemplar workshops, industry involvement, and personalised assessment types into authentic assessment practices. Students highly value these elements as they create a partnership, enhance support, and clarify expectations leading to greater student engagement and intrinsic motivation, and reducing the likelihood of academic misconduct. To maximize the benefits of authentic assessment, universities should prioritise co-designing assessments with students, incorporating student feedback, and encouraging open communication. Professional development for lecturers should focus on equipping them with the skills needed to facilitate student partnerships effectively. Moreover, implementing feedforward strategies will encourage self-directed learning by enhancing students' self-regulation skills. Allocating time for personalised feedback and support is essential. Universities should explore innovative delivery methods, such as flipped classrooms, online resources, and in-class co-design and exemplar workshops. Providing students with a range of exemplars of varying quality will encourage critical analysis, self-assessment, and a deeper understanding of assessment criteria. Industry collaboration should also be embedded into authentic assessment practices. Universities should support lecturers in developing industry partnerships and integrating industry perspectives into authentic assessment design. Clear instructions and ongoing feedback are particularly important for students encountering unfamiliar assessment formats, to prevent confusion and potential academic integrity breaches. Finally, as the Lehan *et al.* (2024) authentic assessment framework evolves, future cohorts will benefit from additional exemplars and insights from past students. Providing structured scaffolding and reassurance about ongoing support can help mitigate student anxiety. Clarifying from the outset that students will have input in the assessment design and receive personalised feedback will further encourage engagement and ensure the successful implementation of authentic assessment.

7. Conclusion and Future Research

Future research should explore the generalisability of this study's novel and significant findings to different authentic assessment types, disciplines, and universities. Evaluating the impact of student demographics and academic performance on the authentic assessment experience would provide further insights. Further in-depth analysis of student anxiety in relation to unfamiliar assessment types should be carried out. Comparative studies examining student perspectives at various academic stages, as well as evaluations of traditional versus authentic assessments, would also be valuable. Additionally, engaging recent graduates would assess the long-term impact of authentic assessment on employability and workforce transitions. The role of industry partnerships in authentic assessment warrants further exploration, particularly in cases where direct student access to industry premises is limited. Research into industry partners' perspectives, alongside lecturer and graduate experiences, could provide a more in-depth

understanding of how authentic assessment aligns with professional expectations. This study strengthens empirical support for integrating authentic assessment into higher education curriculum design, teaching strategies, and academic integrity policies. By implementing Lehane et al.'s (2024) framework, institutions can enhance academic integrity while improving student engagement and learning outcomes. Given the global relevance of these challenges, sharing best practices in authentic assessment is essential for advancing higher education. This study serves as a foundation for further research, encouraging policymakers and educators to adopt student-centred approaches that align with the evolving needs of 21st-century learners.

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