

Original Article

## **Unravelling the Experiences of Implementing Authentic Assessment in Diverse Classrooms: Elementary School Teachers in Focus**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored how public elementary school teachers experience authentic assessment in diverse classrooms within the Baganga South District of Davao Oriental, Philippines. Through in-depth interviews with experienced educators selected via purposive sampling, the research investigated the practical challenges, coping strategies, and personal meanings attached to these assessment practices. Thematic analysis revealed that teachers face significant challenges related to diverse student needs, demanding curriculum and time constraints, and institutional barriers. To navigate these issues, educators employ individualized student-centered strategies, effective time management, and peer collaboration. Ultimately, these experiences led to enhanced instructional approaches, deeper observations of student learning, and a greater appreciation for authentic assessment. The findings suggest that while authentic assessment is pedagogically valuable, its operational demands require not only teacher adaptability but also manageable curriculum pacing, contextualized support, and sustained institutional investment in professional development.

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## **1. Introduction**

Authentic assessment has gained renewed attention because schools continue to face pressure to evaluate learning in ways that reflect performance, application, and meaning rather than simple recall. Recent scholarship has argued that authentic assessment is not a single technique but a broad family of assessment practices that connect classroom work with real tasks, meaningful products, and visible evidence of understanding (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Hains-Wesson & le Roux, 2024; Quinlan et al., 2024). This orientation is especially relevant in elementary education, where teachers must judge learning across academic, social, and practical domains while also attending to developmental variation among young learners.

The promise of authentic assessment lies in its capacity to align assessment with deeper learning, student agency, and classroom relevance. Studies have associated authentic assessment with stronger student motivation, richer participation, and better opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking in context (Appiah-Odame, 2024; James & Casidy, 2018; Sotiriadou et al., 2020). Yet the same literature also shows that authentic assessment often demands more planning, more flexible classroom management, and more sophisticated professional judgment than conventional paper-and-pencil measures. The challenge is therefore not whether authentic assessment is theoretically desirable, but how it is enacted under real school conditions.

For teachers in diverse classrooms, this question becomes more urgent. Classroom diversity includes variation in readiness, language use, pace, confidence, social interaction, and access to support. Assessment practices that appear equitable in design can become difficult to execute when students require different forms of scaffolding, pacing, or output. Research on authentic assessment has repeatedly shown that teachers must constantly calibrate fairness, rigor, and feasibility as they design tasks and interpret student performance (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Eltahir et al., 2023; Hains-Wesson & le Roux, 2024). In elementary settings, these tensions are often intensified because teachers work with younger learners who need closer guidance and more structured feedback.

The implementation problem is also organizational. Authentic assessment rarely depends on teacher effort alone. It is shaped by curriculum density, available time, school policy, administrative expectations, and the quality of professional support around assessment design and moderation. Recent discussions of authentic assessment have highlighted persistent barriers such as heavy workload, uneven institutional backing, limited training, and tensions between instructional pacing and meaningful assessment tasks (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Hains-Wesson & le Roux, 2024; Quinlan et al., 2024). These issues matter in public elementary schools because teachers often carry overlapping instructional and administrative responsibilities while working within resource-constrained environments.

In the Philippine basic education context, the call for learner-centered teaching has increased the practical relevance of authentic assessment, but its classroom

enactment remains uneven. Teachers are expected to assess understanding in ways that recognize diverse learner needs while still meeting curriculum targets and reporting demands. This makes the teacher experience central to any serious conversation about assessment reform. Without attention to the lived experience of teachers, discussions of authentic assessment risk remaining aspirational and detached from daily classroom realities.

The present study addressed that gap by focusing on public elementary school teachers in Baganga South District, Division of Davao Oriental. Rather than treating authentic assessment only as a policy preference or technical procedure, the study examined it as a lived and negotiated practice. It asked three questions: What challenges do teachers face when they implement authentic assessment in diverse classrooms? How do they cope with those challenges? What insights do they gain from the process? These questions directed attention to practice, adaptation, and meaning, which are central concerns in phenomenological inquiry (Becker & Schad, 2022; Dangal & Joshi, 2020).

This inquiry is significant for both scholarship and practice. Empirically, it adds context-specific evidence from elementary classrooms in the Philippines, where teacher voices remain underrepresented in the literature on authentic assessment. Conceptually, it helps connect broad claims about authenticity, fairness, and meaningful learning with the operational realities of classroom diversity. Practically, it offers evidence that can inform school leadership, teacher development, and assessment planning.

## **2. Methodology**

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers who implemented authentic assessment in diverse classrooms. A phenomenological approach was appropriate because the inquiry sought to describe how teachers encountered, interpreted, and responded to an educational practice that carried both pedagogical promise and daily operational strain. Recent methodological work has emphasized that phenomenological inquiry is particularly useful when a study aims to foreground meaning, situated experience, and participants' own accounts of practice rather than abstract measurement alone (Becker & Schad, 2022; Dangal & Joshi, 2020). The study utilized qualitative and exploratory design, with a constructivist orientation that viewed teachers' realities as shaped through experience, context, and reflection. Consistent with that stance, the study focused on teachers' accounts of challenge, adaptation, and insight rather than on hypothesis testing or variable comparison.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling from public elementary schools in Baganga South District, Division of Davao Oriental. The study selected a pool of 21 eligible teachers and a final sample of 10 participants who met the inclusion criteria, particularly at least three years of experience in implementing authentic

assessment and direct experience in diverse classroom settings. Purposive sampling was suitable because the goal was not statistical representation but information-rich participation from teachers who could speak in detail about the phenomenon under study, a sampling logic well supported in qualitative research (Campbell et al., 2020).

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. This method allowed the researchers to elicit detailed descriptions of classroom realities, assessment decisions, and professional reflections in a way that could capture nuance, tension, and context. The researchers served as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, conducted the interviews, recorded the sessions with consent, transcribed the interviews, and translated relevant responses from the local language into English for reporting.

Interview audio files and transcripts were handled with confidentiality safeguards, and informed consent procedures were completed before participation. The study adhered to standard ethical principles, including voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, confidentiality, respect for participant welfare, and secure handling of research data. The study also situated the work within the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and the broader principles of respect, beneficence, and justice.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis. After transcription and repeated reading, the researchers coded meaning-bearing segments, grouped related codes, reviewed emerging patterns, refined themes, and produced a narrative account organized around the three research questions. This process echoed the recursive logic of contemporary thematic analysis, which values careful familiarization, pattern recognition, theme development, and transparent analytic decisions (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2023; Naeem et al., 2023).

Trustworthiness was strengthened through systematic documentation of the research process, attention to contextual description, coding consistency, reflexive awareness, and alignment between claims and participant excerpts. The study explicitly addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which remain widely accepted criteria for qualitative rigor (Adler, 2022; Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the data and the close use of participant quotations. Transferability was addressed by describing the participants, setting, and phenomenon with enough specificity for readers to judge relevance to similar contexts. Dependability was supported by the stepwise account of data handling and analysis, while confirmability was reinforced through an audit-minded approach that linked themes to participant statements rather than to researchers' preference.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1 Challenges*

##### **Theme 1: Student Differences**

Teachers described student diversity as a persistent source of assessment difficulty because learners differed in ability, pace, support needs, and language use. Across interviews, they stressed that designing tasks that felt fair, clear, and attainable for all learners required constant adjustment. They mentioned:

*“Student differences make it hard to design assessments that are fair for everyone.” (P2)*

*“Some students need more guidance, while others finish quickly, making it challenging to assess accurately.” (P5)*

*“It is difficult to adjust the assessment because students have different abilities.” (P7)*

*“Sometimes it is very hard to account for everything because students differ in ability and learning style.” (P9)*

## **Theme 2: Curriculum and Time Demands**

Teachers reported that authentic assessment required time for task preparation, implementation, observation, and feedback, yet they worked within a tightly paced curriculum. Their responses consistently pointed to a difficult balance between finishing required lessons and carrying out meaningful assessment tasks. They stated:

*“Authentic assessment requires more time, but we have many lessons to finish.” (P3)*

*“The curriculum is packed, leaving little time to create meaningful assessments.” (P4)*

*“There are too many topics, so it is hard to give extra time to assessments.” (P6)*

*“It is very hard to balance teaching the lesson and carrying out the assessment.” (P8)*

## **Theme 3: Institutional or Systemic Barriers**

Teachers also located the difficulty beyond the classroom by pointing to policy constraints, limited administrative support, and insufficient training. These accounts showed that implementation problems were not purely personal or technical, but were also shaped by the school system around them. They verbalized:

*“School policies don’t always allow flexibility for authentic assessments.” (P1)*

*“Administrative support is limited, which makes it hard to implement assessments properly.” (P5)*

*“I do not have clear training on authentic assessment, so I struggle.”*  
(P7)

*“Support from the administration is limited, and this affects how assessments are implemented.”* (P9)

### 3.2 Coping Strategies

#### **Theme 1: Individualized Strategies for Student-Centered Assessment**

Teachers responded to classroom diversity by modifying tasks, adjusting formats, and selecting essential requirements that matched learner needs. Their accounts showed a practical effort to preserve fairness without abandoning the intended learning outcomes. They mentioned:

*“I adjust the tasks according to each student’s learning level to ensure fairness.”* (P1)

*“I provide alternative formats for students who need extra support.”*  
(P4)

*“I use many approaches so I can accommodate different student learning styles.”* (P6)

*“Sometimes I prioritize only the most important tasks so I can make sure all students reach the learning objectives.”* (P10)

#### **Theme 2: Time and Task Management**

Teachers emphasized planning, pacing, and prioritization as necessary responses to workload pressure. They tried to break assessment into manageable parts so that both instruction and assessment could proceed within limited time. They verbalized:

*“I schedule assessments in manageable portions to avoid overwhelming students.”* (P2)

*“I focus on the most essential learning outcomes during each assessment period.”* (P4)

*“Planning and prioritizing tasks help make sure everything is completed on time and that nothing important is left out.”* (P8)

*“Sometimes it is hard to balance teaching time and assessment time, so good time management is really necessary.”* (P9)

#### **Theme 3: Collaboration and Professional Development**

Teachers also relied on colleagues and training opportunities to refine their assessment practices. These responses pointed to the value of shared reflection and professional learning as part of everyday coping. They stated:

*“I regularly share my assessment strategies with my peers to learn new approaches.” (P1)*

*“Training on differentiated assessment has been very helpful in improving my methods.” (P3)*

*“Peer discussions helped me fix my assessment plans and strategies.” (P7)*

*“Talking with my co-workers helped me improve my assessment approach and respond better to students’ needs.” (P10)*

### 3.3 Insights

#### **Theme 1: Changes in Instructional Approaches**

Teachers reported that authentic assessment changed how they planned lessons and delivered instruction. They described a closer integration between teaching and assessment, greater flexibility, and stronger use of applied classroom tasks. They mentioned:

*“My lesson planning now focuses more on real-world tasks and meaningful learning outcomes.” (P1)*

*“I integrate assessment activities directly into daily instruction rather than treating them separately.” (P3)*

*“My teaching strategies are more flexible now because I adjust based on the students’ situation and needs.” (P6)*

*“One major change is that I now emphasize hands-on activities and collaborative projects in my lessons.” (P9)*

#### **Theme 2: Observations on Student Learning**

Teachers observed that students often became more engaged, more expressive, and more reflective when assessment tasks were connected to meaningful work. They also noted clearer evidence of understanding when learners explained, produced, or reflected on their own outputs. They verbalized:

*“Students are more motivated because they see the relevance of tasks to real life.” (P2)*

*“I notice deeper understanding when students explain their learning in their own words.” (P4)*

*“Students are more interactive and more confident in their outputs.” (P7)*  
*“Their learning becomes clearer, and they reflect on their progress after the assessment.” (P10)*

### **Theme 3: Perceived Overall Value of Authentic Assessment**

Teachers ultimately described authentic assessment as beneficial for relationships, classroom culture, and long-term learning development. Their responses framed it as a practice that could support participation, collaboration, and higher-order thinking when conditions allowed it to work well. They stated:

*“Authentic assessment builds stronger connections between me and my students.” (P1)*  
*“It encourages collaboration and a positive learning environment in my classroom.” (P5)*  
*“Classroom culture is better now because students are more involved in their own learning process.” (P8)*  
*“Its long-term benefit is that it helps develop students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills.” (P10)*

## **4. Discussion**

The findings show that authentic assessment in diverse elementary classrooms is pedagogically valued but structurally demanding. Teachers did not reject the logic of authenticity. Instead, they described the strain of translating that logic into workable classroom routines while attending to learner diversity, curriculum pacing, and uneven institutional support. This pattern aligns with broader discussions that treat authentic assessment as educationally desirable yet operationally complex, especially when teachers must balance authenticity, feasibility, and fairness at the same time (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Hains-Wesson & le Roux, 2024; Quinlan et al., 2024).

The first major contribution of the study concerns classroom diversity as an assessment problem. Participants emphasized that student differences made it difficult to design and judge tasks in ways that felt fair for all learners. This extends recent work on authentic assessment by showing that teacher concern is not only about task realism or learner motivation, but also about the practical ethics of responsiveness inside a mixed-ability classroom. As Eltahir et al. (2023) suggested in their phenomenological work on assessment fairness, participants often interpret fairness through the adequacy of support, clarity, and opportunity to demonstrate learning. In the present study, fairness was experienced as a continuous act of adjustment.

The second major issue concerns time. Teachers repeatedly described authentic assessment as labor-intensive because it demanded preparation, observation, adaptation, and feedback, all within a crowded curriculum. This echoes the literature

that identifies time pressure as a central implementation barrier. Ajjawi et al. (2020) argued that authentic assessment becomes difficult when institutional structures expect complex performance tasks but maintain rigid curricular and administrative demands. In a related way, Hains-Wesson and le Roux (2024) noted that teachers often need stronger practice support if authentic assessment is to move beyond isolated enthusiasm and become a sustained feature of teaching.

The third challenge, institutional and systemic barriers, is particularly important because it shifts attention away from individual teacher deficit explanations. Participants pointed to inflexible policies, limited administrative support, and insufficient training. These findings suggest that authentic assessment should be understood as an organizational accomplishment rather than a private classroom technique. When schools do not provide clear policy space, feedback structures, or professional learning, the quality of implementation depends heavily on teacher improvisation. That dependence can produce inconsistency and fatigue even among committed teachers. Recent higher education and school-focused literature has made a similar point, namely that authentic assessment succeeds when institutions support design quality, moderation, and teacher development, not when they merely encourage innovation rhetorically (Quinlan et al., 2024; Sotiriadou et al., 2020).

The coping strategies identified in the study reveal the adaptive professionalism of teachers. Participants did not respond to constraints passively. They modified tasks, varied response formats, prioritized essential outcomes, and staged assessment activities into more manageable sequences. This shows that teachers were actively trying to preserve the spirit of authentic assessment even when perfect implementation was not possible. The prominence of individualized strategies also supports the view that authentic assessment and differentiated pedagogy are closely linked in diverse classrooms. Appiah-Odamé (2024) observed that authentic tasks can support stronger student motivation and teaching effectiveness, yet that potential depends on the teacher's capacity to tailor expectations and evidence of learning to context.

Time and task management emerged as a second coping pattern, which suggests that authentic assessment in real classrooms often depends on disciplined simplification. Teachers were not merely looking for efficiency; they were trying to protect the most essential learning goals from being lost in overload. This resembles McArthur's (2022) critique that authentic assessment should not be reduced to instrumental performance demands detached from learner well-being and educational purpose. In the present study, teachers appeared to be negotiating exactly that tension by deciding what could be retained, what had to be reduced, and how assessment could remain meaningful without becoming unmanageable.

Collaboration and professional development formed the third coping strategy. Participants described peer discussion and training as concrete sources of help for planning, revising, and strengthening assessment practice. This is consistent with literature that places teacher learning communities at the center of sustainable assessment reform. Hains-Wesson and le Roux (2024) argued that knowledge-sharing mechanisms are necessary if authentic assessment is to become more coherent across

settings. Similarly, trustworthiness-oriented qualitative scholarship reminds researchers and practitioners alike that rigor often grows through transparency, dialogue, and documented decision-making rather than through isolated judgment alone (Adler, 2022; Ahmed, 2024). In school practice, peer exchange may serve a similar function by making assessment choices more deliberate and defensible.

The insights teachers gained from implementation are equally significant. Participants reported that authentic assessment changed their instructional approaches, especially by integrating assessment with daily teaching and by increasing the use of hands-on or collaborative activities. This suggests that authentic assessment does more than evaluate learning; it can reorganize instruction itself. Such a finding resonates with James and Casidy (2018), who found that authentic assessment can influence how learners engage with coursework, and with Quinlan et al. (2024), who reframed authentic assessment around meaningful engagement rather than narrow performance replication.

Teachers also observed stronger student motivation, clearer evidence of understanding, and more self-reflection. These observations do not prove causal effects in a statistical sense, but they do show how teachers interpreted the pedagogical value of authentic assessment in practice. Their accounts are congruent with studies that associate authentic tasks with relevance, confidence, and active participation when students can see the purpose of what they are asked to do (Appiah-Odame, 2024; Sotiriadou et al., 2020). In elementary settings, such observations matter because teacher perception strongly shapes whether an assessment approach is sustained, adapted, or abandoned.

Finally, participants framed authentic assessment as valuable for classroom culture and teacher-student relationships. This broadens the significance of the findings. Authentic assessment was not seen only as a tool for grading or documentation, but as part of a more relational and participatory classroom environment. That perspective supports emerging scholarship that asks educators to think beyond compliance and toward educational authenticity, meaning the extent to which assessment invites worthwhile engagement, social connection, and meaningful learning (McArthur, 2022; Quinlan et al., 2024). In this study, teachers' insights suggest that authentic assessment may be most sustainable when it is experienced as both pedagogically meaningful and socially constructive.

Taken together, the study suggests that the success of authentic assessment in diverse elementary classrooms depends on a three-part ecology. Teachers need assessment literacy and adaptive skill. Learners need tasks and support that recognize difference without diluting rigor. Schools need structures that provide time, policy flexibility, and continuing professional support. When any one of these conditions is weak, implementation becomes fragile. When they work together, authentic assessment is more likely to function as a credible, equitable, and instructionally valuable practice.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study shows that public elementary school teachers experienced authentic assessment as both worthwhile and demanding. They valued its relevance to meaningful learning, student engagement, and classroom relationships, yet they also faced persistent obstacles related to learner diversity, curriculum pressure, and institutional limitations. In response, they relied on individualized assessment practices, careful management of time and tasks, and collegial support. Their insights indicate that authentic assessment can reshape teaching and strengthen learning culture, but only when teachers have enough professional space and support to enact it well. The study therefore points to a clear implication: authentic assessment should be treated as a supported school practice rather than as an individual teacher burden. For elementary classrooms that are diverse in readiness, language, and learning pace, the most productive path forward lies in combining contextualized teacher development, realistic workload expectations, and assessment systems that recognize both educational quality and practical feasibility.

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## **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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