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Implementing Authentic Assessment in Entrepreneurship Education: A Case Study of an Undergraduate Module



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Abstract

Authentic assessment encourages the student to get involved with real-world tasks and increase their engagement, thereby reducing the scope for academic malpractice. Using the five-dimensional model (Gulikers et al., 2004), this article illustrates key elements of authenticity and reflection using an undergraduate module's assessment.

Keywords

Authentic assessment, academic malpractice, entrepreneurship education

Introduction

As 92% of undergraduates in the UK currently report using generative AI tools and 88% report its use in assessments (Freeman, 2025), the landscape of assessment in higher education is dramatically changing. This widespread adoption of AI has raised concerns about academic integrity and prompted renewed interest in authentic assessment strategies. Authentic assessment, a term first coined by Wiggins (1993), seeks to foster a learning environment to engage students in meaningful academic works focusing on real-world tasks. In the Michaelmas term 2023, a 15-credit Entrepreneurial Finance module was introduced by the Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy. The module's single assessment was designed to engage the students in real-world situations. Drawing on the need to integrate theory and practice in entrepreneurship education pedagogy (Neck et al., 2014) and inspired by a past learning initiative focused on designing plagiarism out of assessment (Carroll, 2002), we designed an applied learning task for students. In 2023, students worked individually, and in 2024, in pairs, to conduct a discursive online interview with a nominated Entrepreneur in Residence (EiR)—experienced business professionals collaborating with Lancaster University to support enterprise education and provide real-world insights. This is a scaffolding task (Koh, 2017), with students left to decide on specific interview questions, drawing on their interests and prior research, including the business operations of their allocated EiR, leading to authenticity within the assignment

structure. This distributed data source approach is analogous to established practice in quantitative subjects, such as Finance or Mathematics, where tutors allocate common problems but with each student receiving an individualised input data set, reducing the scope for collusion and requiring each student to develop an individual answer. Assessment design plays an impactful role in reducing the magnitude of academic misconduct (De Maio & Dixon, 2022); authentically designed assessment can address the emerging problems of academic malpractice in the higher education sectors. This article details the design of authentic assessment in an undergraduate entrepreneurship module, highlighting its potential to enhance student engagement, foster deeper learning, and reduce academic misconduct in an era of increasing reliance on AI.

Module Context and Assessment Design

The assessment was originally designed as two separate essays in 2023. In the first essay, the students were required to select a specific topic (Peer to peer lending, ethics in entrepreneurial finance, entrepreneurial exit) for critical analysis, whereas in the second part, based on an interview with an EiR, the students needed to share insights related to entrepreneurial finance. However, due to concerns around academic integrity and a desire to strengthen authenticity, it was revised in 2024 into a single, interview-based task—the version analysed in this paper. This is a response to increasing concerns over AI-enabled academic misconduct, such as students using generative AI to generate or edit large portions of assessed work (Freeman, 2025). The students now needed to discuss how the interview enhanced their understanding of financial management within the EiR's business. They also needed to critically evaluate their insights by integrating learnings from the module and wider readings. As such, the interview-based assessment was intended to promote originality and context-specific analysis.

Applying Theoretical Framework to Practice

There is no clear consensus on what constitutes authenticity (Ellis et al., 2020), an essential feature of good assessment design (Bretag et al., 2020). For this article, we adopted Guliker et al.'s (2004) definition of authentic assessment, an evaluation approach that compels students to apply their competencies—knowledge, skills, and attitudes—in tasks that closely resemble real-world practices. In the presence of fragmented conceptualisations of authenticity, the five-dimensional framework (Gulikers et al., 2004) can offer insights into designing assessments that closely align with real-world tasks. Table 1 shows how the five-dimensional framework can assist in designing an authentic assessment using the latest assessment as an example. It demonstrates how assessment tasks can mirror real-world entrepreneurial challenges by requiring students to conduct interviews with an entrepreneur in residence, work collaboratively with fellow students to design the interview schedule and analyse and interpret financial management practices. This application of the framework highlights how key elements—such as practical engagement, collaboration, digital tools, and reflective learning—align the assessment with real-world practice. It also points to areas for enhancement, including clearer criteria and more structured reflection. As such, the framework offers a valuable lens for bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, making it a valuable model for entrepreneurship education

Reflections and Improvements

Literature suggests that the degree of authenticity needs to be treated as a continuum rather than a binary aspect, which implies scopes for improvement (Openo, 2024). For example, designing and conducting mock interview sessions in future assessments can help the students simulate

the interview process. This results in a positive interview experience and allows for the efficient collection of quality data. Moreover, providing informal feedback on the student draft can also be formally introduced in future academic terms, which will help the students reflect on their own process and adjust, improving metacognition (Callender et al., 2016). This will raise the level of reflection, which is one of the more challenging elements of authentic assessments since Conrad and Openo (2018) argued that not all students are naturally reflective.

Conclusion

The changing face of academic malpractice emphasises the importance of assessment methods focused on integrity, involvement, and learning in the real world. Recent data points the way forward for the increased impact of AI in education with students' higher dependency on the tools for completing assessments (Weale, 2025). This trend raises important concerns about academic integrity since AI-generated content has become increasingly sophisticated and harder to detect. Despite concerns, it also sets the preamble to rethinking assessment design—calling for formats emphasising real-world application, student agency, and critical engagement.

However, integrity risks extend beyond AI. Traditional contract cheating services, such as essay mills, still pose challenges by producing work that can appear convincingly authentic (Ellis et al., 2020). As Sutherland-Smith and Dawson (2022) note, even well-designed assessments cannot entirely eliminate malpractice, and Reich (2020) reminds us that "all assessments are imperfectly designed." Thus, there is no reason to be complacent even though very few malpractice cases were detected for the latest submission.

Despite these limitations, authentic assessment offers a powerful strategy for promoting academic honesty. Involving students in context-rich, problem-solving tasks—such as interviews with Entrepreneurs in Residence—fosters deeper motivation, personal accountability, and meaningful engagement. This case study illustrates a transferable model for embedding authenticity in entrepreneurship education: one that fosters critical thinking and deepens learner engagement while resisting the risks posed by generative AI and contract cheating.

Table 1: Five Dimensions of Authentic Assessment (Gulikers et al., 2004)

Assessment Task	Physical Context	Social Context	Assessment Result or Form	Assessment Criteria
The task of interviewing an entrepreneur in residence and understanding their financial management practices mirrored real-world challenges. It required the students to apply their interviewing skills, critical thinking, and analytical abilities. It also fostered collaborative learning by requiring students to work in pairs and exercise creativity in designing the interview schedule, as no predetermined guidelines or templates were provided. This was a prime example of strategic scaffolding (Koh, 2017) because it prepared the students for the more complex task of writing the essay by instigating their thinking process. The students were also asked to submit a copy of their transcript. In this way, collaboration encouraged academic integrity, especially when students were required to submit the primary input based on which they drafted the final essay.	The students conducted the interview in pairs to collect relevant data using MS Teams. Analysing the collected data to reflect the students' learning and reading critically demonstrated the authentic environment of engaging with business professionals and understanding how financial management was practised in the entrepreneurial domain.	The interview involved social interactions, such as communicating with the entrepreneurs in residence, interpreting their responses, and working with other students in pairs to develop the interview schedule. The students also received informal feedback from the module convenor/lecturer for the draft essay.	The student had to submit a 2250-word essay reflecting on the data collected from the entrepreneur in residence. This demonstrated their understanding of how entrepreneurs practised financial management in their businesses.	The evaluation of the students' essays was based on standards such as clarity, depth of analysis, use of literature, and relevance to the module's learning objectives, as specified in the marking criteria, which were provided to the students at the beginning of the term.

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