

THE AUTHENTICITY PARADOX: ESL INSTRUCTORS' NEGOTIATION OF REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS AND 'SAFE' SPACES IN DIGITAL ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper study plans to explore the central pedagogical paradox faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors in Malaysian higher education, which is to balance between the tension between authentic assessment and creating a low stress environment for the students. The research acknowledges the crucial need for authentic tasks to simulate real-life experience while utilising digital technologies to prepare the learners for contemporary communicative demands. However, these tasks can heighten the learners anxiety, which results in impeding the performance, thus aligning with Krashen' Affective Filter Hypothesis. Therefore, providing supportive, low stress environment can boost the learners confidence but may impede real-world rigour. This paper examines how ESL instructors can navigate this tension, drawing from second language acquisition theory, and review of recent literature related to authentic assessment, digital pedagogy and language anxiety.

Keywords: *ESL instructors, authentic assessment, digital assessment, affective filter*

INTRODUCTION

Acquisition of a language requires the learners' subconscious effort to acquire a language (Krashen, 1982). This is akin to how a child acquires a language, where the child subconsciously learns the vocabulary and the lexical rules, learning requires a substantial effort for the students to learn the rules of the language. According to Krashen (1982), in a second language (L2), acquisition is more crucial than learning a language to attain fluency in a language. As English is a global language that is used in many different context, ranging from commerce, technology, and education, this has created a community of English a second

language learners. Therefore, to be able to use English effectively is crucial in this era of globalisation.

Kim et al. (2020) highlighted that learners need to immerse themselves in the language community to be able to use the language effectively. This is because to learn a language, it requires the learner to engage with the way of life and how the language is used in context. The application of language should not be restricted to the four walls of the classroom, but also prepare the learners to use the language in daily life. Language is used to participate and to be part of social and emotional activities. So when language is taught in isolation, this causes the students to miss out on the opportunities to engage with the language. Therefore, this raises interest in authentic language assessment.

Authentic language assessment encourages students to engage in task mirroring the situation and challenges that they will face outside the classroom walls. In language learning, authenticity is valued due to its interaction with motivation and the relevance of the students' future needs. Through authentic language assessment, the learners apply their linguistic and cultural knowledge in real-life scenarios (Koh, 2017), such as conducting interviews, giving a presentation to a live audience, and creating social media content to interact with the wider audience. Learners have to draw upon various skills from problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, collaborative teamwork, and effective communication, to successfully execute an authentic assessment (Hu et al., 2023b). By situating communication of the target language in meaningful contexts, these assessment help learners to make connection between classroom learning and real life situations, thus preparing the students for workplace interaction and social interactions in English.

Authentic language assessments have also highlighted the increasing application of digitalisation as a medium of communication and learning. The integration of digital technologies and multimodal communication has offered significant advantages for Second Language (L2) teachers by supplying them with novel opportunities to develop interactive, contextually and relevant, and authentic task (Lee, 2016). According to a study conducted by Pullu and Gömleksiz (2021), the shift in approach has positively influenced the learners' academic success by enhancing their attitude towards learning and fostering the development of crucial skills such as problem-solving and creative thinking skills. Therefore, the deficiencies in competence and skills in utilising digital tool for digital assessment can directly result in generating inaccurate evaluation. This, in turn, can significantly and negatively compromise the students' educational experience and outcome (Suyansah et al., 2025). This marks a crucial shift in the ESL pedagogy towards communicative competence, where the ability to apply and use the language appropriately is based on the context.

However, it cannot be denied that authentic tasks often come with higher pressure and stakes. Real-world conversation is typically spontaneous and allows little room for error. When speaking, learners need to process the linguistic input, while simultaneously rearrange their thoughts to process an output. Research shows that speaking a second or foreign language is identified as a stressful aspect in language learning (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; Ajabshir, 2024a). This is heightened when learners have to speak in front of a crowd, and this can trigger the learner's anxiety response, which will affect the learner's experience and impede their performance (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025a). To address this issue, ESL instructors have opted to intentionally cultivate a more supportive environment where students feel secure, comfortable, and free from judgment when using the language (Ohata, 2005).

In a supportive environment, mistakes are viewed as a natural step in learning rather than failure. This encourages the students to take the risk of speaking without having the fear of being ridiculed by their peers, while simultaneously having the support of their peers (Chuang, 2019). Establishing a low-stress environment is important as it lowers the learners' affective filter, resulting in a more effective language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Digital assessment has created new avenues to balance authenticity and comfort in assessment. Therefore, this study plans to explore the practices carried out by instructors in conducting authentic assessments while simultaneously leveraging technology to cultivate low-stakes, supportive learning environments to create low-anxiety digital assessment environments.

KRASHEN'S PERSPECTIVE ON ACQUISITION AND AFFECTIVE FILTER

A key theoretical lens that probes the understanding of authenticity is Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory. This theory is a well-renowned theory in the language field. In the non-technical context, acquisition and learning are deemed to be interchangeable; this is not the case scenario in the fields of linguistic and education. This theory consists of five hypotheses, which are the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Comprehension Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This study will closely relate to the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

According to Krashen, the affective variable may not directly affect the learner's acquisition of the language, but it may prevent the input from reaching the 'language acquisition device' as coined by Chomsky. The language acquisition device is a part of the brain that is responsible for language acquisition. If the learner expresses anxiety, exhibits low self-esteem, or does not see themselves as a potential member of the language target, this may lead to the learner's understanding the input, but it does not reach the language acquisition device (Krashen, 1982). Therefore, this metaphorical barrier filters the incoming language input based on the learner's emotional state. If the learner exhibits high anxiety, low motivation, and a lack of confidence in learning, this will raise their affective filter barrier, preventing comprehensible input from being fully processed. However, if the learner has low anxiety, high motivation, and high-confidence, then the learners barrier will be lowered, leading to better retainment of comprehensible input, which leads to the absorption of the comprehensible input to the language acquisition device.

It should be noted that some researchers have argued that not all anxiety is purely detrimental. A distinction is sometimes made between facilitative anxiety, where learners attempt to cope with the language learning experience, and debilitating anxiety, where learners become defensive against the learning experience (Scovel, 1978). Therefore, facilitative anxiety is a positive learner's attitude towards language learning, despite the learner experiencing anxiety in the learning process. Although evidence on facilitative anxiety is limited, in language learning, a consensus can be made that when anxiety goes beyond a minimal level, it tends to be counterproductive (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025b). Krashen's Framework, despite being developed decades ago, still remains highly relevant. It provides a theoretical justification as to why ESL instructors must manage the learners' affect, even as they push for more authentic use of the language in a digital environment.

EVOLVING ASSESSMENT PARADIGM IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Assessment in the education field has evolved from traditional examinations towards a more learner-centred approach. Assessment of learning (AoL) is a method of assessment that is most frequently utilised in the education setting. The primary function of AoL is to gauge the learners' standing in relation to their peers, and to also communicate the students' progress to the stakeholders, which are the school and the parents (Earl, 2003). Interchangeable with summative assessment, AoL systematically measures the learners' performances against a set of predetermined objectives, and this is typically using a numerical scale up to a specific benchmark (Ahmed et al., 2019). This form of assessment is generally used to determine the effectiveness of a curriculum or instructional design administered. Standardisation is crucial to ensure the validity of the assessment across different groups over a period of time (Lane, 2018). The core focus of this assessment type is to compare the learners' performances, with feedback primarily taking the form of grades and marks. A major downside of AoL is that it only measures the students' performances. However, it fails to provide data that acts as guidance to improve learners' future performances (Brown, 2006). Therefore, this approach lacks a mechanism for teachers to evaluate and refine their instructional strategies with the current cohort, as the measurement is only conducted after the learning cycle is complete (Ahmed et al., 2019). In essence, while AoL can indicate what the students have achieved, but it does not directly inform how they can or how the teaching can be modified for better outcomes.

In contrast, Assessment for learning (AfL) gives a different perspective to assessment when compared to traditional assessment methods. It involves frequent interaction between the students and the teacher to evaluate the students' ongoing comprehension development (Gipps, 1994). The emphasis is placed on summative assessment, which can provide descriptions for the next stage of the learners' learning. Instructors collect data from a wide range of sources and can tailor their assessment for the students. This directly allows instructors to narrow and adjust their instruction to meet the students' needs (Alahmadi et al., 2019). In assessment for learning, making comparative judgments is not the focus of marking. It aims to highlight the learners' strengths and weaknesses and to provide feedback that will enhance the students' performance (Earl, 2013). To achieve this, it involves the learners' ability to recognise, appraise and respond to the feedback in their learning. This is achieved when student undergo self-reflection, peer review and receiving feedback from instructors. In essence, AfL involves understanding the learners that is elicited from a variety of tasks and activities, and this evidence will be used to supplement and support the learners' learning (Carless, 2007). Therefore, AfL empowers both teachers and students to modify instruction and learning, as this can boost achievement.

A more recent concept is Assessment as learning (AaL). AaL gives emphasis on making judgments about the students' learning process. Compared to AoL and AfL, it is still a young concept. According to Earl (2006), assessment as learning develops and supports the learners' metacognitive process, where students play a crucial role in connecting the assessment and learning. The learners are responsible for connecting their prior knowledge with new knowledge. This is enhanced when the students are active, engaged, and become critical assessors of their learning. When students have the ability to monitor their own learning, they are able to make adjustments and adaptation to their learning process, therefore adjusting their knowledge base. Instructors play a big role in developing the learners' skills to reflect and critically analyse their learning. The learners' role in AaL is more pronounced. Unlike AfL, which gives emphasis on the next test, AaL requires the students to effectively and actively

construct new knowledge based on their interaction with the assessment itself (Z. Yan & Boud, 2021). This gives emphasis to learners to give self-feedback rather than relying on external criticism (Nicol, 2021). This continuous loop of reflection and amendment provides instructors with valuable opportunities to improve and adjust the future trajectory of their lessons.

The evolving paradigms in assessment have set the stage for alternative assessment strategies that move beyond traditional tests as a form of assessment. As the education scene increasingly recognises the value of formative and learner-driven assessment, there has been a growing interest in assessment methods that not only measure the learning process but also enhance it. Authentic assessment arises in this context as a supplementary approach that aligns with the principles of AfL and AaL. This is achieved by focusing on the applicable skills and the real-world tasks in the assessment.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN ESL: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Beyond the traditional assessment, alternative assessments, such as authentic assessment, have gained relevance. The demands of authentic assessment, which prioritise real-world application and skills over rote memorisation, have increased. This method of assessment requires students to engage in complex, ad hoc problem-solving skills and produce output that simulates real-life scenarios (Sutadji et al., 2021). The tasks in authentic assessment help students to understand the relevance of their assessment for their future employment.

Authentic assessment exposes learners to practical skills that enhance communication, therefore effectively developing the learners' employability skills and professional identity. (Gaikwad et al., 2023). The learners are required to apply what they have learnt in the classroom to an authentic situation that is not in a controlled environment set up by the instructors. The students must be able to solve the problem that arises, and this mirrors the problem that may arise in a real-life setting (Hu et al., 2023a), and this can lead to deeper learning and better retention for the learners. This exposure decreases the gap that the students experience in tertiary education and in the work setting. These situations have challenged the conventional and decontextualised approaches in assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

The experiences that the students experience in their authentic assessment enhance the learners' skills that increase their employability. (Sotiriadou et al., 2020). Furthermore, authentic assessments permit the learners to practice their skills in real-time (Bagnato et al., 2014). This increases the learners' motivation due to the relevance of the context. Learners become more acquainted with the situation, instead of it being an abstract situation that does not translate into a real-time situation. This also provides scaffolding for the learners as they are able to practice what they have learnt in a controlled situation until they are ready to be independent. This allows the learners to engage in a meaningful learning process, which will lead them to experience deep reflection in their own learning process (Sabtiawan et al., 2019).

Despite these advantages, implementing authentic assessment does come with its own set of challenges, such as facing difficulties in designing and administering authentic assessment due to the lack of training and resources (Mohamed & Lebar, 2017). Authentic assessments are also more complex to design and grade than traditional assessments. Past research found that teachers experience multiple challenges prior to preparing for authentic assessment. This study emphasized the lack of clear guidelines and formal training by the

ministry for the instructors (Aziz et al., 2020). Instructors only depend on articles and books in their leisure time for training. The instructors had expressed their hope for the ministry to design courses for authentic assessment training.

Similarly, Nirman Darong and Guna (2025) highlighted the key constraints that contributed to the difficulties in authentic assessment. Based on the study, the instructors faced challenges in time constraints and objectivity. As the assessment requires the materials to be relevant to the real-world context, the instructors spend more time digesting the content of the project. During the assessment, both the students and instructors also spend more time completing the assessment. Objectivity also proves to be a problem as the instructors become concerned about the validity and reliability of the assessment while developing the instrument. The instructors still find it difficult to meet the requirements, which allows for subjective interpretation. Therefore, highlighting the need for the instructors to receive more training in authentic assessment. Educators have also raised their concern that authentic assessment may negatively impact the students who are not ready to perform such tasks, especially when they are under time pressure or performance pressure (Natalia et al., 2018; Aziz et al., 2020; Nirman et al., 2025).

It is worth noting that authentic assessment does not inherently guarantee that the learners will have a positive experience or exhibit low anxiety. As noted above, it can be quite stressful for the students due to the complexity and unpredictability of the assessment. This will result in the students being overwhelmed with the demands of the authentic task, and the intended learning benefit may not fully materialise.

AUTHENTIC DIGITAL ASSESSMENT IN ESL

The integration of digital technology has transformed how authentic tasks can be delivered. In an online or blended learning environment, ESL instructors have access to a variety of tools that can facilitate authentic language assessment. Digital tools such as discussion forums and social media platforms can be used to facilitate authentic communication where students can interact with their peers or with the external audience in the targeted language. Video conferencing tools can also be used for presentations and interviews, allowing the students to connect beyond the classroom setting. These technologies allow learning experiences that were previously not possible, logistically.

The utilisation of digital platforms in language learning makes language learning more interesting. There has also been an increase in attention on the incorporation of video-based assessment as a form of authentic assessment in recent years (Atkinson et al., 2024). The digitalisation in assessment provides instructors with many opportunities to diversify and make the assessment more creative. However, instructors need to ensure that the assessments are sufficiently structured to align with the learning outcome and to ensure that the assessment criteria are clear and fair. As authentic digital assessment by nature is more open-ended and may vary due to the context, it is important to select materials that match the context and the aim of the learning objectives.

Past research has demonstrated many advantages of using authentic digital assessment. In a study conducted by Mekheimer (2025), involving the use of video podcast (vodcast), discovered that with this type of instructional design, the learners are able to experience a more

stimulating learning experience, and it provides a more interactive environment. This demonstrates that authentic digital assessment adopts a more holistic approach in language learning that gives more priority to the improvement of both receptive and productive skills of higher education students. Instructors perceive authentic digital assessment. Another study looked into the integration of a video conferencing tool and its impact on the authentic conversational language produced by the learners (Tran et al., 2024). In this study, every week, a student will volunteer to speak English with other speakers from other countries using a video conferencing tool. This study demonstrated a positive result, whereby the students became more motivated to speak and listen, but also increased their confidence to converse in English.

Based on the studies above, it can be concluded that digital authentic assessment has positively impacted the learners' receptive and productive skills in language learning. However, it is important to note that instructors must also be prepared to conduct a digital assessment. As learning involves both students and instructors, insufficient digital assessment literacy among instructors can lead to ineffective assessment design and even inaccuracies in evaluating the students' performance (Suyansah et al., 2025). Therefore, it is important for instructors to also receive professional development courses and help to ensure that they are able to utilise the digital tools in pedagogically sound ways. Instructors must not only know how to integrate the tools in their assessment, but also ensure that their learning objectives and assessment align with each other.

SAFE DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT'S INTERACTION WITH AFFECTIVE FILTER

According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, a learner's acquisition of a language is influenced by their anxiety, motivation, and confidence (Krashen, 1984). High anxiety, along with low motivation and low self-confidence, acts as a filter that blocks comprehensible input from being processed, hindering language learning. This section will explain more about how language anxiety in digital assessment affects the learner's acquisition of a language. Language anxiety is a topic that receives extensive research in the field of second language acquisition (Barua, 2022). Language anxiety is a primary component of the affective filter. It is defined as a specific set of self-perception, attitude, and responses tied to the classroom environment, triggered by the unique challenges inherent in acquiring a new language (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety can stem from multiple reasons, ranging from fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation from teachers, low self-confidence in speaking, or past negative experiences. Studying the factors of language anxiety and how to overcome it can help reshape the teaching methodologies and assessment design to guide both instructors and learners.

The impact of a high affective filter is significant. It can lead to learners avoiding participating in activities or assessments. A high affective filter may manifest in physical symptoms or mental blocks that impede the communication (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025b). This leads to higher anxiety in the learner that makes the learner progress slowly. Given these challenges, creating low-anxiety, safe space for language learning becomes a priority for many language instructors. A safe learning environment is one that allows the students to feel comfortable in taking risks, without or with minimal fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed for it. Digital assessment can act as a buffer by providing the learners with private, self-paced opportunities to use the language skills without having the external pressure of presenting in front of their peers (Metwally, 2025). This can therefore reduce the learners' stress

load and boost their confidence. Digital assessment platforms, such as interactive simulations or collaboration video platforms, allow learners to engage with their peers in a way that is relevant and socially interactive for the learner.

Past studies looked into how authentic digital assessments interact with the affective filter. looked into the effectiveness of digital storytelling (DST) and how it contributed to improving the language learners' command of the language (Alemi et al., 2022; Ajabshir, 2024b). As the learners were provided with a safe learning environment, this resulted in an increase in motivation to master the writing component and higher engagement from the students. Moreover, the students exhibited lower anxiety as they were able to contribute more towards the authorship in their assessment. This indicates that the learners become more empowered to take charge of their learning in a digital space as they have lower anxiety in language learning. The learners' confidence increases, resulting in the learners tackling more difficult tasks that involve higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Being confident in approaching more difficult tasks indicates that the learners have higher cognitive skills.

In the digital environment, the notion of safe space takes on new dimensions. The learners feel more at ease communicating through text or video, as it grants them more control in their learning as compared to live speech. This lowers anxiety for the learners, serving as a bridge for more spontaneous interaction in the future. In the future, other students might feel anxious about technical issues, and this aligns with studies. Students were seen to have a lower affective filter in their online English classes, as the learners are encouraged to collaborate and communicate with their peers, but they experienced a high affective filter due to the instability of the internet connection (Bunghanoy et al., 2023). The students wanted to improve themselves in their learning, so when there are external factors beyond their control hindering them from improving, then this results in students' high affective filter. Therefore, it is essential for instructors to gauge their learners' comfort with different modes of communication and to provide the necessary support accordingly.

Despite the best efforts to create a safe learning environment, anxiety cannot be completely eliminated in the learning process. A certain degree of anxiety often accompanies the challenge of using a new language. Therefore, the goal is to keep anxiety at a facilitative or manageable level.

THE AUTHENTICITY-ANXIETY TENSION: A PEDAGOGICAL PARADOX

From the above discussion, a tension emerges between the drive for authenticity in assessment and the imperative to maintain a low anxiety learning environment. Authentic tasks push learners to go beyond their comfort zone by demanding performances in scenarios that feel 'real' and unscripted. This is excellent for promoting the skills and knowledge transfer desired by instructors, but it also pose a risk of overwhelming the learners. This further worsens when the student is already anxious with their language skills. On one hand, the practices that like providing support, allowing a longer preparation time or simplifying the task can alleviate anxiety, but it can also make the assessment less authentic or rigorous.

This paradox raises a critical issue on the abilities of ELS instructors to reconcile these two important goals. The literature to date indicate there is relatively few studies that have directly examined how instructors balance authenticity and affective consideration in their

digital assessment practice. However, by piecing together the insights from various sources, it can be identified that there are some emerging principles. One strategy is scaffolding authenticity. Instructors can introduce real-world tasks to the students progressively to the students (Richardson et al., 2022). For example, the instructors can provide the learners with examples on how to do the assessment prior to executing the assessment and . By doing so, this does not tamper with the authenticity of the assessment, but can help to lessen the anxiety for the students with gradual skill building.

Properly acknowledging and openly addressing the authenticity-anxiety paradox is important. Instructors who are aware of this tension can intentionally design their assessment to meet a balance. This may require them to compromise on the authenticity to ensure that the learners do not become paralysed with anxiety, especially in the beginning of the learning. Conversely, it can also mean that instructors can invest their time to make students resilient and exposing the students with coping strategies to empower them in handling stress in real-world communication.

Although authenticity presents a challenge, it can be overcome. Therefore, this calls for a nuanced, student-centred assessment design that can include the benefits of facing real world scenarios against the learners' psychological readiness. Through careful scaffolding support and empathy for the learners, instructors can move towards assessments which are both authentically meaningful and comfortable for the learners.

NEGOTIATING AUTHENTICITY AND SAFE SPACE IN DIGITAL ASSESSMENT

The interaction between authentic assessment and learner anxiety becomes especially pronounced in a digital learning environment. As ESL instructors incorporate more technology-driven assessments, they find themselves at the forefront of mediating the balance between the two. The past literature suggests that ESL instructors do indeed value authentic tasks and strive to include them in their assessment repertoire. In practice, many instructors integrate real-world communicative tasks such as virtual job interviews, online presentations or meetings, or digital storytelling projects as part of the assessment. These tasks align with the goal of preparing and exposing the students to English in context and beyond the classroom.

To overcome or lessen anxiety in the students, the instructors would deliberately pair scaffolding with the tasks (Purnawarman & Darajati, 2020; Nguyen, 2022; W. Yan & Lowell, 2024). The instructor would prepare the students by providing clear guidelines and practice before the assessment. Scaffolding after the assessment takes the form of students receiving questions or feedback to redirect or reinforce their thoughts, rather than being a method to criticise the learners' performance. The instructor recognises that proper preparation and understanding can lead to better performances from the students.

Instructors have also developed various strategies to maintain a 'safe' space for the students. One strategy highlighted by Chuang (2019), is by allowing the students to feel a part of a 'community'. This is executed by using the peer's influence. The instructor would include peer support by asking, permitting or inviting other students to help the struggling learner with the task and also including group work. The group tasks motivate the students to contribute as they do not feel isolated in the assessment, and it can be used as a method of scaffolding by grouping students with different proficiency levels to assist one another. Chuang (2019), also

normalises mistakes in the assessment. The instructor emphasises that errors are expected in communication, and this helps to reduce the learners' anxiety and fear of imperfection. In the digital context, the students may include the integration of tools like an automated grammar checker or recording software to reduce their anxiety, as the students can do self-correction before presenting to the public.

Instructors can also use technology as a medium to reduce anxiety. Video-based formative assessment has been utilised widely. Empirical studies show that integrating video assessment in the formative can help learners to reduce negative emotions and enhance academic performance (Simpson et al., 2019; Ge, 2022). As noted, a recorded video or audio assessment allows the students to attempt multiple takes, which can ease their anxiety. Some platforms also enable anonymous question submission or participation, which can encourage the shier students to contribute without the fear of judgment. By varying the modalities in authentic assessments, instructors can cater to different comfort needs while still maintaining and promoting authentic use of the language. By rotating the modalities, it also ensures that the students have faced all forms of communication.

The authenticity paradox invites further research and innovation in language assessment. Future studies can examine the outcomes of different balancing strategies. There is also room to explore new facets that inherently integrate affective support, such as game-based language assessment or peer-assessed authentic tasks, as this could distribute the pressure evenly, therefore decreasing individual anxiety.

CONCLUSION

The tension between authentic real-world assessment and a low-stress environment represents a pedagogical paradox that ESL instructors must navigate, especially in the digital era. An authentic assessment is crucial as it exposes students to scenarios that they will encounter once they have left the university, and this can motivate the students to develop the relevant English language skills to ensure proficiency and execution. However, it also creates high anxiety for the students, and students may perform badly due to the anxiety.

Resolving this paradox requires a balanced, empathetic approach to language assessment. Instructors are encouraged to continue innovating with authentic tasks, using a variety of tools and platforms that are available now, but do so in a way that includes scaffolding, clear guidance and pedagogical support. By gradually introducing real-world challenges and normalising the challenges that come along with them, the teachers can help the students expand their comfort zone. A supportive classroom, both traditional and technology-driven, plays a crucial role in cushioning the impact of stress and turning this intimidating experience into a more positive growth opportunity.

The reconceptualization of this issue also requires a shift in how success is defined in language assessment. Success should not only be measured by the learners' language performance in real-world tasks, but also by how well the students can engage with the task without experiencing debilitating anxiety. The goal should be to produce learners who are both competent and confident in using the language in the real-world context. Therefore, instructors can transform this paradox from a dilemma into an opportunity to develop a more holistic approach that supports both cognitive and emotional facets of language learning.

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