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A Program Based on Online Professional Learning Communities to Develop Cognitive Authentic Assessment Skills of EFL Teachers

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article history Received: 20 August 2024 Accepted: 29 September 2024 Published: 10 January 2025</p>	<p>This paper investigates the synergistic relationship between online professional learning communities (OPLCs) and authentic assessment within the context of situated learning theory. The paper aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of an OPLCs program in developing cognitive authentic assessment skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers from Port Said Governorate in preparatory schools, enabling them to create, implement, and evaluate authentic assessments proficiently. A semi-experimental design with one group of 30 EFL teachers in preparatory schools was employed OPLCs program during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024. The study involved a ten-session OPLCs program. The researcher administered pre- and post-cognitive authentic assessment skills tests as study instruments. The results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in overall cognitive authentic assessment skills, highlighting the efficacy of the program in enhancing EFL teachers' abilities to create, implement, and evaluate authentic assessments.</p>
<p>Keywords Online professional learning communities (OPLCs), authentic assessment skills.</p>	
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Introduction

Authentic assessment has emerged as a cornerstone in the evolving landscape of English language teaching, offering a valuable means to measure students' language proficiency through real-world tasks and contextualized language use. While widely recognized for its potential, implementing authentic assessment strategies presents significant challenges for many EFL teachers. A deep understanding of its underlying principles and practical applications is essential for effective implementation.

The term 'authentic' is associated with a range of related concepts in Turkish, including 'real', 'original', 'reliable', 'primary', 'genuine', 'correct', and 'fundamental', as noted by Kinay and Bagceci (2016, p.52). Authentic assessment stands out for its non-standardized approach and focus on real-world application. This form of assessment offers valuable insights into student performance by providing both quantitative and qualitative data. In contrast to traditional assessments, authentic assessment integrates learning and assessment environments, facilitating a more holistic evaluation of students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Ultimately, this method informs and enhances the teaching process (Alam & Aktar, 2019, p.164).

Several studies have investigated the impact of authentic assessment across various domains. Al-Banna (2018, p.10) validated authentic assessment for assessing fluency skills in IELTS speaking tests in Egypt. Guest et al. (2020) explored how authentic assessment improves academic integrity, skill development, and employability through oral evaluations. Moreover, Khusna's (2021) study focused on the implementation of authentic online assessment for English writing skills, with an emphasis on enhancing time management and feedback provision.

Essentially, this study aims to bridge the theoretical-practical gap in authentic assessment by virtually training teachers via platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp. Learning and

practice communities serve as arenas for individuals to cultivate practices, values, standards, relationships, and identities that resonate with these communities.

The traditional face-to-face Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in educational settings were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, virtual or online PLCs emerged, leveraging platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Edmodo, Google Docs, and Drive. These virtual communities facilitated collaboration and knowledge exchange among educators, supervisors, and educational leaders in Egypt, emphasizing online communication and interaction.

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on EFL teaching and learning. Research has demonstrated that PLCs significantly improve EFL teaching and learning outcomes (Battersby & Sharyn, 2015; Abdullah & Ghani, 2014; Alsaeri, 2014; Al-mutairi, 2018). PLCs promote collaboration, shared decision-making, and professional growth among teachers, resulting in enhanced student performance (Dahawy & Khater, 2016; Shahein, 2019; Bennett, 2017; Hurley et al., 2018; Abbott, 2014; Dufour, 2016; Brown et al., 2018). Despite the benefits of PLCs, challenges like lack of support and teacher readiness can impede their successful implementation (Zhang & Pang, 2016).

The rationale for designing assessments to promote 21st-century skills is rooted in the alignment of authentic assessment with contemporary educational objectives (Brookhart, 2017), the collaborative potential of Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs), and the potential for enhanced student learning outcomes through authentic assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2017).

This theoretical exploration delves into the convergence of OPLCs and authentic assessment within the realm of EFL teaching. It scrutinizes the theoretical foundations of both concepts, emphasizing the capacity of OPLCs to deepen EFL teachers' grasp of authentic

assessment principles. By examining the advantages of OPLCs, this study aims to elucidate the transformative impact of these communities in empowering teachers to adeptly devise, implement, and assess authentic evaluations, ultimately augmenting student learning outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem is identified as follows: Many EFL teachers at the preparatory stage lack knowledge regarding cognitive authentic assessment skills and continue to employ traditional assessment methods. These teachers do not utilize the necessary tools to measure deep thinking and problem-solving skills, focusing instead primarily on assessing visual and written skills. Furthermore, traditional assessment methods fail to support realism, creativity, critical thinking, or provide opportunities for feedback. Consequently, the current study aims to answer the following research question:

"What is the effectiveness of an online professional learning communities program in developing cognitive authentic assessment skills of EFL teachers in the preparatory stage?"

This main question is further divided into the following procedural and research questions:

1. What is the cognitive authentic assessment skills need to be developed among EFL teachers in preparatory schools?
2. What are the features of an online professional learning communities program designed to enhance cognitive authentic assessment skills among EFL teachers?

Hypothesis of the study

The present study tests the following hypothesis:

There are statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the study group in the pre-test and post-test of cognitive authentic assessment skills in favor of the post-test.

Aim of the Study

The current study aimed to assess the effectiveness of an online professional learning communities program in enhancing cognitive authentic assessment skills among EFL teachers at the preparatory stage.

Literature review

An Overview of Online Professional Learning Communities and Authentic Assessment

Nature of Online Professional Learning Communities

Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) serve as virtual platforms where educators can connect, collaborate, and share resources to enhance their teaching practices. The concept of OPLCs emerged in the early 2000s, facilitated by technological advancements that offered flexible and convenient modes of professional development (McKee & Isbell, 2012, p. 292). Defined as "an online community of educators who share a common purpose, are supported by technology, and are committed to ongoing learning" (Trust et al., 2016, p. 16), OPLCs come in various forms such as social media groups, online forums, webinars, and virtual conferences (Leask & Pachler, 2013, p. 108).

Further, Richardson and Mandernach (2015) and Smylie and DiPaola (2023) underline the collaborative essence of OPLCs, portraying them as communities that employ technology to unite teachers across schools and districts. Through collaborative projects, resource sharing, and experience exchange, these online communities empower educators to refine their practice and enhance student achievement.

Several studies have illustrated the effectiveness of Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) as a valuable approach to professional development for educators. OPLCs offer tailored learning opportunities, peer feedback, and collaborative experiences (Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016, p. 176-177; Gray & Lewis, 2015, p. 141). Moreover, they

provide greater flexibility compared to traditional professional development avenues, allowing educators to engage at times and locations convenient to them (Leask & Pachler, 2013, p. 109). Carpenter et al. (2020, p. 15) underscore the importance of educators honing their digital literacy and online communication skills to effectively participate in OPLCs. They stress the significance of these skills in light of their critical role in navigating the demands of the 21st-century workforce.

In conclusion, Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) offer educators a promising pathway for continuous professional development and networking. Educators can leverage the flexibility and convenience provided by OPLCs while connecting with peers in their field. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the success of OPLCs hinges on meticulous planning and facilitation to ensure their efficacy and benefits for all participants.

Features of Online Professional Learning Community

Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) have been a focal point of research and discussion over the past decade. Various sources have highlighted key features that contribute to the effectiveness of OPLCs: Benson and Morgan (2013, p. 12) propose that effective OPLCs are united by a shared vision and goals centered on enhancing teaching and learning, including a keen focus on student learning outcomes and a dedication to continuous professional development.

Moreover, some researchers have highlighted distinct features of OPLCs that differentiate them from traditional face-to-face models:

- **Flexibility:** Dempsey and Sassi (2013, p. 12) assert that OPLCs offer accessibility from any location at any time, catering to the convenience of busy educators.
- **Accessibility:** Richardson and Mandernach (2015, p. 16) argue that OPLCs can transcend geographical boundaries, welcoming educators globally and fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

- **Collaboration:** O'Donnell (2017, p. 12) observes that OPLCs provide varied collaboration tools like discussion forums, shared documents, and video conferencing, enhancing teachers' ability to collaborate on projects and share ideas effectively.
- **Reflection:** Vonderwell and Zachariah (2020, p. 13) note that OPLCs often integrate reflective practices like journaling and self-assessment, aiding educators in deeper self-reflection and identifying areas for growth.

Previous studies have demonstrated that effective OPLCs can positively impact student learning outcomes and teacher professional development (Gray and Lewis, 2015, p. 140; Trust et al., 2016, p. 177). However, successful implementation and facilitation are crucial for the efficacy of OPLCs (Benson and Morgan, 2013, p. 13). Thoughtful planning and facilitation are essential to ensure that OPLCs deliver value and benefits to all participants.

In conclusion, effective OPLCs exhibit key features such as shared vision and goals, collaborative culture, data-driven decision-making, and supportive leadership. These characteristics foster ongoing learning and collaboration among educators, ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes and professional development.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Professional Learning Communities

According to Smith (2012, p. 393) and Hord (2018, p. 42), online professional learning communities (OPLCs) offer numerous advantages over traditional face-to-face professional learning. Key benefits include flexibility, as OPLCs can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection, enabling learners to integrate learning into their busy schedules. Karahan and Eryilmaz (2018, p. 13) highlight that OPLCs present both advantages and disadvantages for educators, with a significant advantage being their flexibility and convenience. Educators can participate in professional development activities regardless of their location or schedule, benefiting those with demanding timetables or limited access to traditional professional development opportunities.

Furthermore, collaboration and networking opportunities are key advantages of OPLCs. Learners can collaborate with peers globally, sharing ideas and learning from one another. Carpenter and Herro (2019, p. 80) highlight how OPLCs facilitate connections and collaborations among educators, aiding in building professional relationships and expanding networks.

Increased access to resources is also a notable advantage of OPLCs. Educators gain access to a wide array of resources, including articles, videos, and multimedia materials, enabling them to stay updated on current research and best practices in their field (Carpenter and Herro, 2019, p. 41). Lastly, personalized learning experiences are a significant benefit of OPLCs. Karahan and Eryilmaz (2018, p. 13) mention that OPLCs can be tailored to meet individual educators' unique learning needs, allowing them to acquire skills and knowledge at their own pace and in alignment with their learning preferences.

In conclusion, OPLCs serve as a valuable tool for professional development. However, it is crucial to consider potential disadvantages before engaging in an OPLCs program. These communities can be instrumental in fostering skills like collaboration, problem-solving, and authentic assessment, which is the primary focus of the present study. The subsequent discussion delves into authentic assessment in detail.

Procedures Required for Applying Online Professional Learning Communities

OPLCs have gained popularity in recent years, facilitated by advancements in technology that enable educators to collaborate and learn remotely. Several previous studies have delved into the processes involved in effective OPLCs:

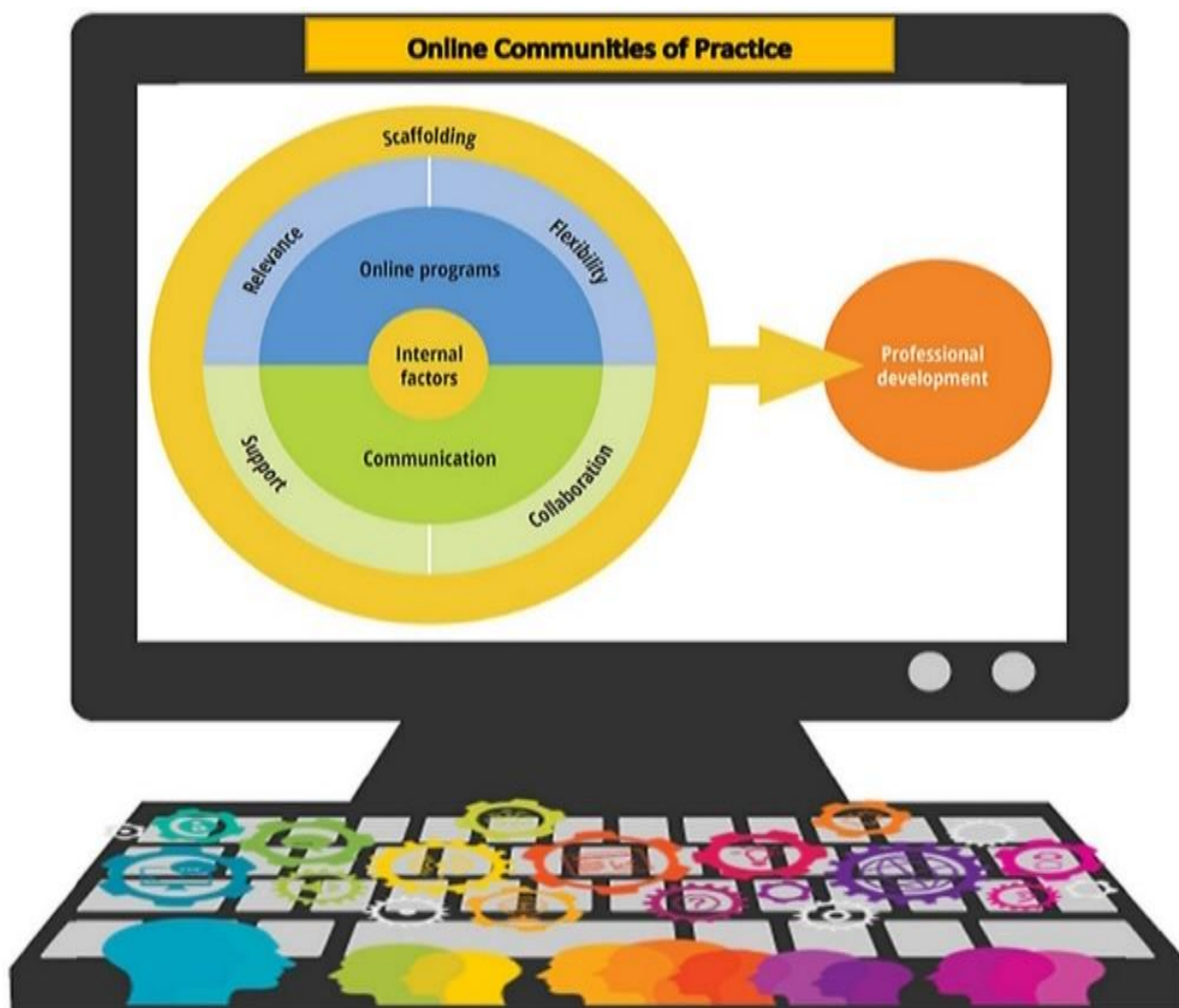
According to Banister and Ross (2015, p. 14), effective OPLCs commence by establishing clear expectations for participation, communication, and collaboration. This includes setting norms for communication and ensuring that all participants are dedicated to active engagement. Jang and Chen (2018, p. 19) emphasize that effective OPLCs concentrate

on specific topics or objectives, such as enhancing student learning outcomes or implementing innovative instructional strategies. This focus ensures that discussions are pertinent and that participants can witness the direct impact of their collaboration.

The subsequent Figure 1 outlines the steps essential for implementing online professional learning communities:

Figure 1

Diagram of the Procedures of Online Professional Learning Communities



Note: Adapted from “Teachers’ professional development in formal online communities: A scoping review” by K. Dille and F. Røkenes, 2021, *p. 15, Journal Homepage, 105* (103431) p.22 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103431>) Copyright 2021 by Elsevier Ltd

The mentioned studies suggest that effective online professional learning communities (OPLCs) can positively impact teacher professional development and student learning outcomes. Banister and Ross (2015, p. 486) and Kumpulainen et al. (2019, p. 33) discovered that OPLCs can assist teachers in acquiring new skills and strategies, collaborating with peers, and reflecting on their teaching practices, ultimately benefiting student learning.

In alignment with this, Vonderwell and Zachariah (2020, p. 14-54) and Smylie and DiPaola (2023, p. 17) concur that OPLCs typically adhere to a set of procedures that contribute to their success. These procedures may encompass:

1. Introduction to OPLCs.

2. Setting up an OPLCs.

- Step 1: Identify the goals and objectives of the OPLCs.
- Step 2: Identify the participants.
- Step 3: Select appropriate activities and resources. (DuFour and Eaker, 2008)

Furthermore, there are various ways to evaluate an OPLCs, including:

- Participant satisfaction surveys.
- Tracking OPLCs outcomes.
- Monitoring OPLCs processes.
- Assessing OPLCs impact on teaching practices.

Effective OPLCs commonly involve key procedures such as establishing clear expectations, utilizing diverse communication tools, focusing on specific topics or goals, and promoting continuous reflection. These procedures foster ongoing learning and collaboration among educators, leading to enhanced student learning outcomes and professional development.

Nature of Authentic Assessment

The concept of "authentic" in relation to assessment tasks focuses on the situational or contextual realism of the task (Newman et al., 1998, p. 20). Terwilliger (2019, p. 134) raises concerns about the use of this term, suggesting that labeling traditional assessments as less "real" can be misleading, as they might not directly align with higher-order thinking and learning domains (Wiggins, 1993, p. 10). Wiggins argues that while traditional assessments may not be unreal, they often lack fidelity to performance contexts essential for deeper learning.

Authentic assessment, a term coined by Grant Wiggins in the late 1980s, has evolved from educational movements such as progressive education in the early 20th century and competency-based education in the 1970s (Ravitch, 2000). Wiggins and his colleagues advocated for authentic assessment as performance-based, contextualized, evaluative, and formative, providing a real-world application for students' learning experiences (Wiggins & McTighe, 1988). The 1990s witnessed a rise in the popularity of authentic assessment as educators sought alternatives to standardized tests, leading to its adoption in various statewide assessment programs (Shepard, 2014). This trend continued into the 2000s, with educators recognizing the benefits of authentic assessment, making it a widely used practice in schools globally today (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 2010).

While the term "authentic assessment" was officially introduced by Wiggins in 1989 within K-12 education (Wiggins, 1989), the concept of evaluating skills through practical tasks had earlier roots, as seen in Dewey's holistic assessment approach (Dewey, 1938). The shift towards authentic assessment gained momentum in the 1990s, offering a viable alternative to standardized testing and emphasizing real-world applications in learning environments (Shepard, 2014). Today, authentic assessment continues to be a prominent practice in educational settings worldwide (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 2010).

Key features of Authentic Assessment

The following are some key features of authentic assessment:

Carless (2015) suggests that authentic assessment incorporates various measures of student learning, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher feedback, to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Tan et al. (2019) also identify key characteristics of authentic assessment, including the use of performance-based tasks, student choice and voice in assessment processes, and opportunities for feedback and refinement of work.

Mittelsteadt (2020, p. 1) argues that authentic assessments are distinguished by their real-world relevance, linking learning to practical situations and tasks to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills to everyday life. By enabling students to apply their learning in meaningful contexts, authentic assessments play a crucial role in preparing them for success in both professional and personal settings.

Edmentum (2021, p. 8) emphasizes the significance of integrated skills in authentic assessment, necessitating the utilization of multiple skills like reading, writing, speaking, and problem-solving in conjunction. Rather than isolating these skills, authentic assessments challenge students to apply them collectively to tackle complex tasks that mirror real-world scenarios.

Authentic assessment not only enhances students' readiness for real-world challenges but also promotes deeper learning and critical thinking. It increases engagement, motivation, and academic achievement by incorporating meaningful tasks, student participation, clear evaluation criteria, and diverse assessment methods aligned with learning objectives and real-world contexts.

Benefits of Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment can provide a more comprehensive picture of student learning than traditional assessment methods, such as multiple-choice tests.

The following lines discuss some of the benefits of authentic assessment:

As for Heritage (2017, p. 18), authentic assessment helps students become more engaged in their learning. He argues that authentic assessment tasks are often more engaging than traditional assessment methods. This is because they allow students to use their creativity and problem-solving skills, and they often involve real-world applications. For example, a student who is learning about history might be asked to create a podcast about a historical event, or to design a historical reenactment. These tasks would allow the student to use their creativity and to learn about history in a more engaging way.

According to Andanawarih (2019, p.1), the benefits of authentic assessment are listed as the following points:

- It can assess students meaningfully.
- It can determine if students are achieving expected outcomes.
- It can improve the quality of the learning process.
- It can accurately and clearly measure a student's ability.
- It can improve knowledge, skills, and thinking skills, such as critical and creative thinking.

It can encourage students to strive to solve problems, discover problems, understand, and apply their knowledge.

In summary, while authentic assessments have many benefits, it is important for educators to be aware of the challenges and limitations in order to use them effectively.

Procedures of Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment, as outlined by Aghazadeh (2013), is an evaluation method that aligns with real-world learning. To effectively implement authentic assessments, educators should first identify the learning objectives, purpose of the assessment, and appropriate format. Next, they should develop a clear rubric, collect student work, score it using the rubric, and reflect on the assessment process. By following these steps, educators can create meaningful assessments that accurately gauge student learning and inform future instruction (Brookhart, 2013; Popham, 2018).

Rationale to Develop Authentic Assessment Skills of EFL Teachers

There are several reasons why it is important for EFL teachers to develop their authentic assessment skills:

- **Motivation:** Authentic assessments engage students by relating to real-life tasks, increasing their motivation to learn.
- **Real-World Practice:** These assessments allow students to practice and demonstrate their skills in contexts that enhance their communicative competence and confidence in using English.
- **Comprehensive Skill Assessment:** Authentic assessments evaluate a broader range of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) can significantly aid EFL teachers in enhancing their authentic assessment skills. OPLCs are online platforms where teachers collaborate, share ideas, and support each other's professional growth.

Benefits of OPLCs for EFL Teachers:

Learning Opportunities: OPLCs allow teachers to explore various authentic assessment methods, sharing experiences and ideas.

Collaboration: Teachers can work together to develop authentic assessment materials tailored to their students' levels and interests.

Feedback: Teachers can share their assessments with peers and receive constructive feedback for improvement.

Support: OPLCs provide a space for teachers to discuss challenges and successes, gaining advice from experienced colleagues.

Additionally, OPLCs help EFL teachers by enabling them to:

- Stay updated on research and trends in authentic assessment.
- Reflect on their teaching practices and adapt based on peer feedback.
- Set and pursue professional development goals.
- Specific Examples of OPLC Utilization:
 - Collaborating on authentic listening assessments based on real-world tasks, such as podcasts or videos.
 - Sharing and refining authentic writing tasks with peer feedback.
 - Creating discussion forums for questions and ideas related to authentic assessment.
 - Organizing webinars or training sessions on specific topics in authentic assessment.

In summary, OPLCs are valuable resources for EFL teachers aiming to develop their authentic assessment skills. By engaging in these communities, teachers can learn from one another and enhance their assessment practices.

Instruments of the Study

To achieve the objectives of the present study, the researcher devised and utilized the following quantitative and research tools:

Pre-post Cognitive Authentic Assessment test (Quantitative Instrument): This assessment was conducted to evaluate the authentic assessment competencies of EFL instructors both before and after the program implementation. Its purpose was to gauge the degree of enhancement in the teachers' proficiency in authentic assessment practices.

The Pre-Post Authentic Assessment Test

The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of an Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) program on enhancing authentic assessment skills among EFL teachers. The research employs a pre-post test design to assess participants' authentic assessment capabilities through a written assessment. Initially, a pre-test was administered to establish the teachers' proficiency in authentic assessment before the program. After completing the program, a post-test was conducted to evaluate their understanding of authentic assessment tasks, their ability to design such tasks, and their skills in assessing and providing feedback. The pre-post test consisted of six multiple-choice questions, each targeting specific aspects of authentic assessment skills, including the creation of an authentic assessment for a hypothetical EFL classroom. The authentic assessment skills test was developed based on:

- A review of prior research on authentic assessment skill evaluation.
- An examination of studies focusing on teaching performance evaluation.
- A previously prepared list of identified authentic assessment skills.

The final version of the test, refined through expert feedback, included two main sections addressing six sub-skills across six questions. Each question was valued at one point, resulting in a total score of six points, which qualifies as a scale due to:

- **Ordered values:** Scores indicate levels of knowledge or understanding.
- **Equal intervals:** Consistent score increments, with each question worth one point.
- **Relative zero point:** Although lacking an absolute zero, a score of 0 indicates no knowledge or understanding of the subject matter.

This structured approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the OPLC program on EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills.

The following table 1 describes the number of questions for each sub-skill:

Table 1

The Number of Question for Each Sub-skill

Cognitive authentic assessment skills	Number of sub-skills	Number of questions	Points per question	Total points
Defining the concept of authentic assessment	1	1	1	One Mark
Justifying the benefits of authentic assessment.	1	1	1	One Mark
Identifying authentic assessment tools.	1	1	1	One Mark
Explaining the characteristics of authentic assessment.	1	1	1	One Mark
Differentiating between authentic and traditional assessment skills.	1	1	1	One Mark
Differentiating between advantages and disadvantages of authentic assessment.	1	1	1	One Mark
Total	6	6	1	6 Marks

Note: There are 6 questions in total and 6 point, each question have one point.

Test Validity

The validity of the test was confirmed through expert review with a panel of 9 EFL experts, including professors of English curriculum and instruction and a former English general inspector. The experts assessed the test items for relevance and suitability, providing

feedback for potential enhancements. The finalized test, approved by the expert panel, is included in Appendix A

Items Validity

To ensure item validity, pilot sample responses were analyzed using SPSS version 22. Correlation coefficients between each item's score and the total scale score were calculated after excluding the item's score under evaluation. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Item Validity of the Test

Items No.	Correlation Coefficient
1	.616**
2	.391**
3	.419**
4	.364**
5	.537**
6	.287*

Note: (*) Statistically significant at the (0.05) level (**) statistically significant at the (0.01) level

Table 2 shows that the values of the correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the 0.01 level, except for item 6, which was significant at the 0.05 level.

Overall Test Validity

To assess the validity of the test as a whole, construct validity was analyzed using responses from the pilot sample participants. The correlation coefficients between each item's score and the total test score were computed. The results are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3*Correlation Coefficients between Item Score and Total Test Score*

Item	R
1	0.666**
2	0.418**
3	0.483**
4	0.460**
5	0.616**
6	0.532**

Note: (**) statistically significant at the (0.01) level

Source: Original

Table 3 shows that all items exhibited statistically significant correlation with the total test score at the 0.01 level.

Test Reliability

Before the main study, a pilot test was conducted with 100 EFL teachers from preparatory schools to determine the reliability and completion time of the research instruments. The average completion time was 20 minutes. Test-retest reliability was assessed by administering the same test to the same group twice with a two-week interval to ensure consistency.

Items Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the test items by determining the effect of including or excluding each item on the overall reliability value. The results are detailed in Table 3.6, confirming the consistency of each item with the set of test items.

Table 4

The Item Stability Coefficients in the Case of Deleting the Item's Score from the Total Score of the Authentic Assessment Skills Test

Items No.	Alpha coefficient α
1	.819
2	.831
3	.827
4	.829
5	.820
6	.832

As illustrated in Table 4, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire test is 0.834 when no items are removed. This value demonstrates good internal consistency, as Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7 are typically deemed reliable. When recalculating Cronbach's alpha after excluding the score of each item individually, the coefficient ranges from 0.819 to 0.832. Comparing the overall alpha with the alpha after eliminating each item, it is apparent that all individual item values are lower than the overall Cronbach's alpha value. Consequently, all test items contribute to the scale's internal consistency and can be considered reliable.

Overall Test Reliability

The overall reliability of the test was assessed using the split-half method to determine the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale employing Spearman-Brown and Guttman's formulas. After applying the split-half method to the current pilot sample, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient using Spearman-Brown's formula was 0.812, and using Guttman's formula was 0.825. These values indicate a high reliability coefficient, affirming the test's overall reliability. Table 5 provides a summary of the results:

Table 5*Overall Reliability of the Test*

Method	Overall Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Spearman-Brown	0.812
Guttman	0.825

Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) Program

The OPLCs program was designed to enhance EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills through a ten-week online course covering various aspects of cognitive authentic assessment, including its definition, benefits, tools, characteristics, differentiation, and advantages/disadvantages. The program consisted of five modules:

- Introduction and defining authentic assessment
- Justifying the benefits of authentic assessment
- Identifying authentic assessment tools and illustrating characteristics
- Differentiating authentic assessment from traditional methods
- Analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of authentic assessment

Key objectives of the program included:

- Enhancing EFL teachers' cognitive authentic assessment skills
- Boosting motivation and refining assessment skills
- Providing a supportive learning environment
- Promoting professional development through online learning
- Demonstrating improvement via pre- and post-tests

The program employed a structured approach, featuring:

- Online delivery through Zoom and WhatsApp
- Weekly sessions lasting approximately two hours
- Lectures, group discussions, and practical activities

- Pre- and post-tests to measure skill development

In conclusion, the OPLCs program offered a comprehensive strategy for enhancing EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills through online learning, effectively supporting their professional development.

The Procedures Followed in Implementing Authentic Assessment Skills Sessions

The OPLCs program aimed to enhance EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills through a ten-week online course. Each module included various activities such as readings, videos, discussions, and assignments, with participants required to complete each activity before advancing. Synchronous sessions facilitated interaction between participants and the instructor. The program consisted of two sessions per module, focusing on specific authentic assessment skills. Participants engaged in hands-on activities to practice designing and implementing assessments, with the sessions facilitated by the researcher, incorporating peer feedback and reflection. The study followed these procedures over ten weeks:

- A pretest assessed participants' authentic assessment skills before the intervention.
- Weekly tasks, discussions, and collaborative activities were conducted within the OPLCs program.
- A posttest measured the development of participants' skills at the program's conclusion.
- Statistical analyses were performed on pretest and posttest scores to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

The program included one online session per week, lasting approximately two hours, featuring lectures, discussions, and practical activities. Teachers were assigned tasks to design and implement authentic assessments in their classrooms and reflect on their experiences. In summary, the OPLCs program provided a structured approach to professional development for EFL teachers, focusing on enhancing their authentic assessment skills.

Session Plan Implemented Throughout the Program

The program adhered to a structured session plan, with each module building upon the previous one. Each module included two sessions featuring the following components with brief explanations of the covered content:

- **Objectives:** Outlining the intended outcomes of the sessions, specifying what participants should achieve by the session's end.
- **Materials:** Listing tools and resources used during training, such as presentations, handouts, examples, templates, and interactive platforms.
- **Content:** Detailing the main topics covered, including key concepts and principles for EFL teachers' learning.
- **Procedures:** Describing the step-by-step process followed during the program, including information presentation, participant activities, and time management.
- **Activities:** Identifying tasks and exercises completed by participants to reinforce learning and provide hands-on experience.
- **Assessment and Feedback:** Explaining methods used to measure program objective attainment, encompassing tests, assignments, observations, and providing constructive feedback to participants.

Study Results

Examining the First Hypothesis: Results of the Pre-Post Authentic Assessment Test

This section analyzes the data to test the primary hypothesis of the study: "There are statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the study group in the pre-test and post-test of Authentic Assessment skills, in favor of the post-test." To evaluate this hypothesis, a paired-samples t-test was conducted, which is appropriate for comparing scores within the same group before and after an intervention, such as the OPLCs program. The

analysis aimed to determine the program's impact on enhancing EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills. The data were collected from a sample of 30 actively participating EFL teachers, with their scores on the authentic assessment skills test recorded before and after the intervention. According to Table 6, the results show statistically significant differences at the 0.01 level between the mean total scores of the participants in the pre-test and post-test. This indicates that the authentic assessment skills program had a substantial positive effect on the development of authentic assessment skills among the study group.

Table 6

"Paired-Sample T-test Results of Comparing the Pre-test and Post-test Measurements of the Study Group (n=30) in Overall Authentic Assessment Skills."

Application Variable	Authentic Assessment Skills "Pre"		Authentic Assessment Skills "Post"		t-test			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	N	Significance
Authentic Assessment Skills Test	11.73	4.61	21.20	0.85	29	11.3291**	30	Highly Significant

Note :(**) Significant at the (0.01) level.

Table 6 presents the results of a paired-samples t-test conducted on the Authentic Assessment Skills Test with a sample of 30 participants. The mean score for the pre-test was 11.73 (SD = 4.61), while the post-test mean score rose significantly to 21.20 (SD = 0.85). The computed t-value was 11.3291, indicating significance at the 0.01 level. These results strongly suggest a substantial enhancement in the participants' authentic assessment skills following the OPLCs program. The statistical analysis confirms a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores ($t = 11.3291$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the program effectively improved the authentic assessment skills of the teachers in the study group.

Analyzing the Results for Testing the Second Hypothesis

This section delves into the pre-post test outcomes to evaluate the efficacy of the OPLCs program in cultivating two sub-categories of authentic assessment skills: cognitive and performance skills. Alongside the overall analysis, the study explored the hypothesis that there exist statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the study group in the pre- and post-test for cognitive authentic assessment skills, with post-test scores surpassing pre-test scores.

The results robustly support Second Hypothesis 1. A significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between pre-test and post-test scores for the total score of cognitive authentic assessment skills and all its sub-skills was discovered (Table 4.2). This marks a considerable enhancement in teachers' grasp of fundamental concepts linked to authentic assessment.

- **Pre-test Scores:** Initial scores indicate that before the program, teachers possessed a foundational understanding of certain cognitive aspects of authentic assessment. However, the standard deviation highlights variability in this baseline knowledge.
- **Post-test Scores:** The notable uptick in post-test scores (Table 4.2) showcases a substantial advancement in teachers' capacity to define, justify benefits, identify tools, explain characteristics, differentiate from traditional assessment, and analyze advantages and disadvantages of authentic assessment. The low standard deviation post-test suggests a more uniform level of proficiency across teachers post-program.

These outcomes furnish compelling proof that the OPLCs program effectively bolstered teachers' cognitive knowledge and comprehension of authentic assessment practices. A paired-samples t-test was utilized to scrutinize the teachers' authentic assessment skills pre- and post-participation in the OPLCs program. The t-test results indicated a statistically significant difference between teachers' mean scores on the authentic assessment skills test before ($M = 11.73$, $SD = 4.61$) and after ($M = 21.20$, $SD = 0.85$) program involvement ($t = 11.3291$, $p <$

0.01). This hints at the Online PLC program's efficacy in nurturing teachers' authentic assessment skills.

Analyzing the Results for Testing the Main Hypotheses

The t-test results for the disparity between mean scores of the study group (n=30) in the pre-test and post-test on the total score for cognitive authentic assessment skills (and its six sub-skills) are delineated in Table 7:

Table 7

Paired-Sample T-test Results for the Difference between the Mean Scores of the Pre-test and Post-test on the Total Score for Authentic Cognitive Assessment Skills (and its Six Sub-skills)

Sub-Skills	Pre-test	Post-test	df	t-value	Significance
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)			
Defining the Concept of Authentic Assessment	0.767 (0.430)	1.000 (0.000)	29	2.971**	Highly Significant
Justifying the Benefits of Authentic Assessment	0.167 (0.379)	1.000 (0.000)	29	12.042**	Highly Significant
Identifying Authentic Assessment Tools	0.700 (0.466)	1.000 (0.000)	29	3.525**	Highly Significant
Explaining the Characteristics of Authentic Assessment	0.500 (0.508)	1.000 (0.000)	29	5.385**	Highly Significant
Differentiating between Authentic Assessment and Traditional Assessment Skills	0.467 (0.507)	0.967 (0.183)	29	5.384**	Highly Significant
Differentiating between the Advantages and Disadvantages of Authentic Assessment	0.200 (0.407)	0.966 (0.182)	29	9.761**	Highly Significant
Total Score for Cognitive Authentic Assessment Skills	2.800 (1.472)	5.933 (0.253)	29	11.788**	Highly Significant

Note: (**) Significant at the 0.01 level

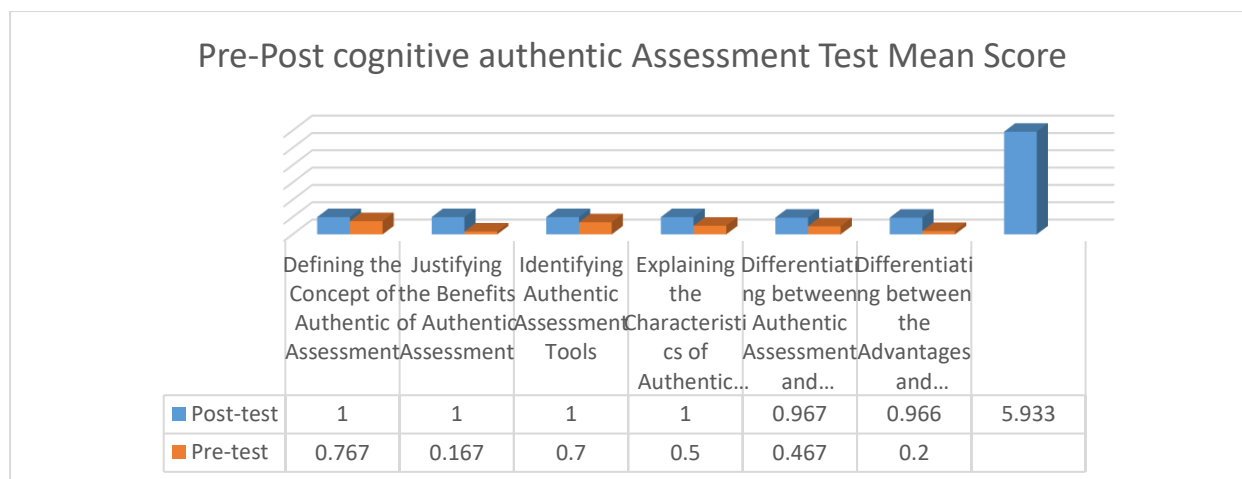
The paired-sample t-test results revealed a statistically significant difference in teachers' mean scores on the cognitive authentic assessment skills test before (M = 11.73, SD = 4.61)

and after ($M = 21.20$, $SD = 0.85$) participation in the program ($t = 11.3291$, $p < 0.01$). This finding supports Sub-Hypothesis 1, confirming the effectiveness of the PLC program in enhancing teachers' cognitive authentic assessment skills. Data in Table 2 show the pre-test and post-test scores of 30 teachers across various facets of authentic assessment, indicating significant differences ($p < 0.01$) in mean scores for cognitive authentic assessment skills and their sub-skills. These sub-skills include defining authentic assessment, justifying its benefits, identifying tools, explaining characteristics, distinguishing from traditional assessments, and comparing advantages and disadvantages. Key Points:

- **Significant Improvement:** A notable increase in teachers' scores across all categories of authentic assessment skills was observed, with highly significant p-values (all below 0.01).
- **Specific Skill Development:** Progress was evident in all areas of authentic assessment, including defining concepts, justifying benefits, identifying tools, and contrasting advantages and disadvantages.
- **Program Success:** The data strongly indicate the success of the OPLCs program in enhancing teachers' knowledge and understanding of authentic assessment, thus confirming the study's first sub-hypothesis.

Figure 2

Diagram of The Study Group Mean Scores on Pre- and Post-Assessment of the Cognitive Authentic Assessment skills Test (Skills and Total Sum)



Study Discussion

To assess the efficacy of enhancing EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills, three assessment tools were utilized. First, an authentic assessment skills test measured changes in participants' scores pre- and post-program, providing an objective evaluation of skill development. Second, an authentic assessment skills rubric offered a comprehensive assessment of participants' performance and progress. Lastly, an online satisfaction questionnaire collected subjective feedback from participants regarding their experiences and challenges during the program. The combined results from these tools clearly demonstrate the success of the OPLCs program in improving essential authentic assessment skills for EFL teachers. The study employed quantitative tools, including pre- and post-tests, to evaluate the impact of the OPLCs program on developing authentic assessment skills. A paired-samples t-test compared participants' scores before and after the program, revealing a significant difference between pre-test ($M = 11.73$, $SD = 4.61$) and post-test ($M = 21.20$, $SD = 0.85$) scores

($t = 11.3291$, $p < 0.01$). This increase of over 9 points indicates a substantial enhancement in teachers' authentic assessment skills after program participation.

- **Pre-test Scores:** The average pre-test score of 11.73 reflects a foundational understanding of authentic assessment skills, with a standard deviation of 4.61 indicating variability in baseline knowledge.
- **Post-test Scores:** The post-test mean score of 21.20 signifies significant improvement in teachers' abilities to create and implement authentic assessments, and the low standard deviation of 0.85 suggests a more consistent level of competency post-program.
- **Statistical Significance:** The highly significant t-value (11.3291) and p-value (< 0.01) provide robust evidence of the OPLCs program's genuine impact.
- These outcomes affirm the study's initial hypothesis, indicating the program's success in enhancing teachers' skills in crafting and utilizing authentic assessments in EFL classrooms. The data strongly support Hypothesis 1, showing a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between pre-test and post-test scores on total cognitive authentic assessment skills and its sub-skills (Table 4.2).
- **Pre-test Scores:** Initial scores reflect a rudimentary understanding of cognitive aspects of authentic assessment, with variability indicated by the standard deviation.
- **Post-test Scores:** The significant increase in post-test scores.
- These results provide compelling evidence that the OPLCs program effectively enhanced teachers' cognitive comprehension of authentic assessment principles.

The study results strongly indicate that the OPLCs program successfully improved the authentic assessment skills of EFL teachers. The significant increase in post-test scores shows that the program positively influenced participants' ability to create and execute authentic assessments in their classrooms.

The notable progress in post-test scores implies that the OPLCs program offered valuable chances for EFL teachers to engage in collaborative learning and professional growth. Through the online community, teachers could exchange ideas, share experiences, and receive feedback from peers, enhancing their assessment skills.

These findings align with prior research emphasizing the advantages of OPLCs in fostering teacher learning and capacity building. The collaborative environment of the online community encouraged teachers to explore innovative assessment strategies, align assessments with learning goals, and ensure the authenticity of assessment tasks. This led to a deeper understanding of authentic assessment principles. The study affirms that OPLCs programs can effectively support continuous professional growth and enhance pedagogical practices in EFL teaching, providing strong evidence that the OPLCs program positively impacted the development of EFL teachers' performance skills in authentic assessment.

This study's outcomes are significant for professional development initiatives targeting the enhancement of EFL teachers' assessment practices. OPLCs can effectively support continuous professional growth and elevate teachers' pedagogical skills. By integrating authentic assessment practices into their teaching, EFL teachers can create more engaging learning experiences for students.

The results suggest that the OPLCs program effectively tackled a significant challenge in assessing students' performance skills. By promoting practices like sharing learning goals, documenting student performance, and providing feedback, the program equipped teachers with effective assessment strategies. This improvement in authentic assessment skills correlated with enhanced student performance, facilitated by the supportive environment for collaborative learning and professional development within the program.

While this study emphasizes the effectiveness of the OPLCs program, there are areas that may require further attention for improvement. Previous studies have highlighted the

lack of authentic assessment skills among EFL teachers, emphasizing the need for programs like OPLCs to equip educators with the necessary competencies to implement authentic assessment strategies effectively, as noted in the studies by Abdullah & Ghani (2014), Al-Banna (2018), Alsaeri (2014), and Dahawy & Khater (2016).

Table 8

Analysis of the Results: Positive and Negative Application Aspects

Positive Application Aspects	Negative Application Aspects
Real-world Application: The program effectively integrated professional tasks within a real school setting, providing hands-on learning experiences.	Time Commitment: The program may have required a significant investment of time and effort from participants.
Interactive Learning: The OPLC format facilitated active participation through questions, discussions, and content repetition, enhancing understanding.	Workload Management: Balancing program requirements with existing workload and limited time might have been challenging for some participants..
High Engagement: Participants demonstrated enthusiasm and motivation to learn, contributing to a positive and productive learning environment.	Technical Challenges: Technical issues such as power outages and internet disruptions could have hindered participation for some teachers.
Collaborative Learning: The program fostered collaboration among colleagues and support from school professionals, enriching the learning experience.	Scheduling Conflicts: The timing of online training sessions may not have been suitable for all participants, leading to scheduling conflicts.
Reflective Practice: Participants were encouraged to analyze unsuccessful implementations, promoting valuable learning opportunities.	Lack of Motivation: A few teachers exhibited a lack of motivation, potentially due to a lack of material or financial resources.
Development of Skills: Participants developed self and peer assessment skills, boosting their confidence within the OPLCs community.	Limited Time and Effort: The program's demands, coupled with existing workload and limited time, may have led some participants to prioritize completing assignments over deeper learning.
Professional Growth: The program offered participants a broader perspective on opportunities for ongoing professional development.	

Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of authentic assessment on student learning. Studies have shown how authentic assessment motivates students, fosters skill development, and encourages self-assessment, thus enhancing the overall learning experience.

Implementing authentic assessment poses challenges for teachers, including a lack of knowledge, time constraints, and logistical issues. Addressing these challenges through professional development and logistical support is crucial for successful implementation of authentic assessment practices in educational settings.

In conclusion, these studies collectively emphasize the positive impact of authentic assessment on student engagement, skill development, and self-assessment in EFL classrooms. They also underscore the challenges teachers face in ensuring assessment quality and managing logistical aspects. Further research could focus on strategies to address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of authentic assessment in EFL contexts.

Conclusion

This research explores how Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) can support EFL teachers in enhancing their authentic assessment skills. OPLCs, grounded in social constructivist and situated learning theories, provide a collaborative environment for teachers to engage in professional development and improve their understanding of authentic assessment principles. Authentic assessment is a valuable tool for EFL teachers, but developing and implementing it can be challenging. OPLCs play a crucial role in supporting EFL teachers by offering opportunities to:

- Learn various authentic assessment methods and techniques
- Share experiences and ideas with peers
- Collaborate on creating authentic assessment materials
- Receive feedback on their assessment practices

By participating in OPLCs, EFL teachers can leverage peer experiences, enhance their grasp of authentic assessment, and acquire the necessary competencies and confidence for

successful implementation in classrooms. In addition to OPLCs, several other strategies can support EFL teachers in enhancing their authentic assessment skills:

- Providing access to authentic assessment resources
- Alleviating administrative burdens
- Offering financial support for assessment development
- Acknowledging and rewarding teachers for using authentic assessment practices
- Schools and teacher trainers can create a supportive environment conducive to developing and implementing authentic assessment practices by implementing these measures. This can lead to more meaningful and effective assessment strategies in EFL classrooms.

Recommendations to Develop Authentic Assessment Skills of EFL Teachers

Leveraging the benefits of Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLCs) to enhance EFL teachers' proficiency in acquiring authentic assessment skills can be achieved through the following recommendations:

For EFL Teachers:

- Engage in OPLCs focusing on authentic assessment
- Integrate authentic assessment tasks into teaching
- Encourage student self-assessment and reflection

Suggestions for Further Research:

The present study has provided valuable insights into the potential of OPLCs for developing EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this approach, further research is warranted in several key areas:

- Examine the long-term impact of OPLCs on EFL teachers' authentic assessment skills
- Develop and assess online resources and toolkits for authentic assessment tailored for EFL teachers.

- Investigating the Impact of Different OPLC Models:
- Explore strategies for addressing the time constraints faced by teachers in participating in OPLCs.
- Investigate ways to overcome technical difficulties that may hinder participation in OPLCs.
- Qualitative Analysis: Conduct a qualitative analysis of the data to delve deeper into the teachers' experiences and perspectives on the OPLC program.
- Case Studies: Conduct case studies of individual teachers or schools to provide in-depth insights into the factors that contribute to the success or failure of OPLC implementation.
- Mixed Methods Approach: Combine quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of OPLCs.

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Appendix (A.)**The Pre-Post Authentic Assessment Skills test (Final Form)**

Directions: Carefully review the questions and scenarios presented below. Select the most appropriate answer from the provided options (a, b, c, or d). If necessary, provide a clear explanation for your chosen answer

Time Allowed: 20 Minutes

- 1. Which of the following is the most appropriate definition of authentic assessment?**
 - a) The use of assessments that measure students' knowledge and skills in a real-world context.
 - b) The use of assessments that are fair and unbiased.
 - c) The use of assessments that are aligned with state or national standards.
 - d) The use of assessments that are easy to grade.

- 2. Which of the following is NOT a benefit of using authentic assessment?**
 - a) Authentic assessment is often designed to assess higher-order thinking skills.
 - b) Authentic assessment often requires students to think critically and solve problems in order to complete the task.
 - c) (Authentic assessment helps students to develop communication and collaboration skills.
 - d) Authentic assessment helps students to develop factual knowledge and recall.

- 3. Which of the following is NOT an authentic assessment tool for speaking skills?**
 - (a) Oral presentation
 - (b) Multiple choice test
 - (c) Role-play
 - (d) Interview

- 4. Which of the following is not a key characteristic of authentic assessment?**
 - (a) Authentic assessment requires students to use their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts.
 - (b) Authentic assessment is often used to assess higher-order thinking skills.
 - (c) Authentic assessment is usually easy to administer and score.
 - (d) Authentic assessment can be used to assess a variety of learning outcomes.

- 5. What is one of the key differences between authentic assessment and traditional assessment?**
 - (a) Authentic assessments require higher grades than traditional assessments
 - (b) Traditional assessments focus on assessing theoretical knowledge, while authentic
 - (c) assessments focus on assessing applied skills
 - (d) Authentic assessments are more aligned with real-world learning, while traditional assessments are more aligned with school-based learning.

- 6. Which of the following is a disadvantage of authentic assessment?**
 - (a) It can be difficult to grade.
 - (b) It can be time-consuming to develop and administer.
 - (c) It can be difficult to align with state or national standards.
 - (d) It can be less reliable than traditional assessments.