



The Authenticity of Assessment Methods in Open and Distance Learning at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania

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Abstract

Authentic assessment has become increasingly important for promoting meaningful learning, knowledge application, and critical thinking. Guided by authentic assessment theory, this study assessed the authenticity of assessment methods among students pursuing their studies through open and distance learning (ODL) at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. This study specifically focused on assessing the effectiveness of assessment methods, including written assignments, mid-semester tests, end-of-semester examinations, portfolios, field projects, and practical-based assessments, and the extent to which they promote the application of knowledge and critical thinking skills among ODL students. A concurrent mixed-methods research design was employed involving 148 participants, including 141 ODL students enrolled in diploma and bachelor's degree programmes and seven tutors drawn from Morogoro Campus, Tanga Regional Learning Centre, and Iringa Regional Learning Centre. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews, and were later analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the institutional assessment framework integrates both conventional and authenticity-oriented assessment methods. Most students perceived the assessment

methods as effective in measuring the learning outcomes. However, evidence from tutor interviews and document analysis indicated that assessment remained predominantly written and examination-oriented, suggesting only moderate alignment with authentic assessment principles. Although projects and field practical activities were utilised, assessment remained predominantly written, providing only moderate opportunities for students to apply knowledge and demonstrate critical thinking in authentic, real-world contexts. The study concludes that the assessment methods at the Institute indicate moderate alignment with authentic assessment theory. The study recommends expanding authentic and technology-supported assessment approaches suited to ODL.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, Assessment Methods, Authentic Assessment, Adult Education

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Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has become increasingly important as a mode of educational delivery due to its flexibility in expanding access to education for students who are geographically dispersed, employed, or constrained by socio-economic responsibilities. In ODL environments, tutors and students are separated by distance and interact through mediated instructional systems, making assessment an essential mechanism for monitoring learning progress and ensuring educational quality (Maijo & Mrema, 2024) and determining the extent to which students achieve intended learning outcomes (Komba & Mwandangi, 2015). Moore and Diehl (2018) reported that assessment methods reinforce independent learning competencies in distance education settings.

Authentic assessment methods are the operational interpretation of Wiggins' Authentic Assessment Theory (1990, 1998), which argues that assessment should enable students to solve problems, make judgments, and demonstrate understanding through tasks that resemble real-life challenges and professional practices. Assessment methods include projects, portfolios, fieldwork, case analyses, presentations, reflective activities, and performance-based tasks that require critical thinking and active engagement. Within the context of ODL,

authentic assessment allows students to connect academic content with practical experiences from their workplaces, communities, and daily lives.

Building on this theoretical foundation, emerging educational reforms emphasise the need to move beyond traditional examination-based assessment towards authentic assessment approaches that evaluate students' ability to apply knowledge, solve real-life problems, and demonstrate practical competencies, which are crucial for meaningful learning and workplace readiness (Machumu, 2025; Mwangi et al., 2022). Authentic assessment has gained increasing significance in the ODL system because it enables students to demonstrate knowledge and skills through real-world tasks situated in their workplaces and everyday contexts, making it particularly suitable for ODL students who often balance education with employment and community responsibilities (Nyinge et al., 2024; Maphosa et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding the authenticity of assessment methods in ODL has become increasingly important for strengthening educational effectiveness and students' competency development in the ODL mode.

This is echoed by Munir et al. (2024), who found that authentic assessment tasks encourage students to move beyond memorisation towards critical analysis, creativity, and practical application of knowledge. The tasks enable tutors to evaluate broader competencies such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and analytical reasoning, which are increasingly emphasised within competence-based education reforms in Tanzanian educational contexts (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015).

In Zambia, assessment methods in ODL contexts commonly include tests, written assignments, portfolios, online quizzes, final examinations, discussion activities, projects and presentations (Lifuka, 2025). A systematic review by Heil and Ifenthaler (2023) argued that written assignments and online quizzes are the most frequently used tasks because they allow institutions to assess large numbers of students while maintaining regular academic engagement. In Tanzania, Maijo and Mrema (2024) found that assessment methods are guided by institutional regulations, emphasising both continuous assessment and final examinations as key components in evaluating students' academic performance. The study revealed that the institution uses a structured assessment framework intended to ensure fairness, accountability, and quality assurance in its ODL programmes.

The existing literature suggests that continuous assessments are widely utilised because they support flexibility in learning while enabling institutions to monitor students' academic progress throughout the course of study. Written assignments and portfolios provide opportunities for students to demonstrate independent learning and reflect on their learning competencies. Online quizzes and continuous assessment tests facilitate timely feedback and support the ongoing evaluation of students' understanding, particularly within technology-supported learning environments. Final examinations remain dominant in determining overall academic achievement and certification outcomes.

The effectiveness of assessment depends on the extent to which assessment methods accurately measure the intended learning outcomes and support meaningful learning experiences. Munir et al. (2024) argued that authentic assessment tasks, such as projects, portfolios, and reflective assignments, promote deeper learning and skill development. Such approaches also enhance students' ability to integrate academic knowledge with their workplace experiences. Project-based assessment tasks support the integration of theoretical understanding with workplace and community experiences. Authentic assessment methods, such as projects, case studies, portfolios, and reflective assignments, are considered more effective because they evaluate students' practical understanding and problem-solving abilities beyond memorising content.

The literature consistently emphasises that authentic assessment in ODL should promote students' application of knowledge and critical thinking through meaningful assessment tasks. Munir et al. (2024) reported that assessment methods grounded in authentic learning tasks significantly enhance students' ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations while fostering critical analysis, problem-solving, creativity, reflection, and independent decision-making. Similarly, Wei et al. (2021) argued that ODL assessment should evaluate students' analytical ability, creativity, communication skills, and independent learning competencies through diverse and authentic assessment tasks rather than relying predominantly on knowledge production. Collectively, these studies argue that authentic assessment promotes deeper learning by requiring students to construct responses, justify arguments, and demonstrate competence in realistic contexts. This body of evidence advocates for assessment systems that evaluate the meaningful application of knowledge and practical competence.

The effectiveness of authentic assessment is influenced by both institutional and contextual factors. Madland et al. (2024) highlighted that institutions with inadequate technological infrastructure and weak assessment support systems often struggle to implement reliable and meaningful authentic assessment methods. Studies by Mdessa and Nyoni (2021) and Kihaga (2019) in Tanzania indicate that authentic assessment methods continue to face institutional and implementation challenges, despite ongoing assessment reforms. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive ODL-specific policies and assessment frameworks may constrain the effective implementation of authentic assessment methods in Tanzanian ODL institutions (Emmanuel, 2023; Ntamt, 2022).

Despite the increasing recognition of authentic assessment in contemporary education, studies indicate that assessment practices remain largely dominated by conventional assessment methods, particularly written assignments, tests, and end-of-semester examinations, with limited opportunities for the practical demonstration of competencies (Mwangi et al., 2022; Maphosa et al., 2024). Practical and performance-based assessment tasks are less common because of technological limitations, large enrolments, and institutional constraints (Fynn and Mashile 2022).

In Tanzania, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been adopted as a strategic approach to widen access to education and promote lifelong learning among adult learners. The Institute of Adult Education (IAE), established under Parliamentary Act No. 12 of 1975 and operating under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, plays a central role in providing adult, nonformal, and continuing education through conventional and distance learning modes. Emmanuel (2023) reports that the IAE introduced its ODL diploma programme in 2013. According to Mariki (2025), the Institute later introduced its first ODL bachelor's programme in the 2021/2022 academic year to expand access to students who could not attend on-campus study because of financial constraints, marital responsibilities, and employment commitments.

The IAE, through its ODL mode, offers ordinary diploma and bachelor's degree programmes under two disciplines, Adult Education and Continuing Education, and Adult Education and Community Development (IAE (2023). Regardless of the level, both are community-applicable programs, and their effectiveness is therefore best assessed through practical, real-world demonstrations rather than paper-and-pencil methods. As these programmes have expanded their enrolment, assessment

has remained a critical component in verifying that ODL students, who often study independently and are largely separated from tutors, have genuinely acquired the knowledge and competencies expected of them as graduates.

Existing studies in Tanzania have primarily focused on access to ODL resources and technology support systems (Stephano, 2025). Little empirical attention has been given to the authenticity of assessment methods within adult education institutions, particularly regarding the extent to which assessment promotes meaningful learning, knowledge application, and critical thinking. Although Emmanuel (2023) and Mtebe and Raphael (2018) acknowledge the use of projects and practical activities, there is insufficient empirical evidence on whether other assessment methods at the IAE align with the theory of authentic assessment. This is an important gap, as employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate practical competence and critical thinking, not just academic qualifications. Without empirical evidence of the authenticity of assessment methods, it is difficult to determine whether ODL assessment adequately develops these competencies among adult learners and prepares them to meet contemporary societal and workplace demands. Therefore, this study was guided by authentic assessment theory, examining the effectiveness of assessment methods and the extent to which they promote the application of knowledge and critical thinking.

This study aimed to assess the authenticity of assessment methods employed in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes at the Institute of Adult Education in Tanzania. Specifically, this study was guided by the following objectives:

- i) To determine the overall perceived effectiveness of the employed assessment methods in promoting meaningful learning and assessing students' competencies.
- ii) To analyse the extent to which the assessment methods promote the application of knowledge and critical thinking in accordance with authentic assessment theory.

Methodology

A mixed approach with a concurrent mixed-methods design was adopted to obtain complementary evidence from the different respondent groups. Students provided quantitative data on their experiences and perceptions, whereas the tutors

contributed qualitative insights regarding the assessment methods employed. Qualitative evidence from tutor interviews and the institutional prospectus was used to explain, contextualise, and illustrate quantitative results obtained from students, thereby providing a better understanding of assessment methods in the ODL context. The study was conducted at the Institute of Adult Education across three selected centres: Morogoro Campus, Tanga Regional Learning Centre, and Iringa Regional Learning Centre. The Institute of Adult Education's 26 centres were grouped into two strata: centres offering both conventional and ODL modes of delivery and centres offering ODL mode only. The Morogoro Campus was randomly selected through a lottery from the five campuses to obtain the perspectives of tutors with experience in both conventional and ODL modes of delivery. Similarly, the Tanga and Iringa Regional Learning Centres were selected from the twenty-one regional centres to capture the perspectives of tutors involved exclusively in ODL programmes. To minimise selection bias and enhance the transparency of the sampling process, the lottery was conducted by an independent third party who was not involved in the study. The study involved a total of 148 participants, comprising 141 ODL students enrolled in diploma and bachelor's programmes: 86 from Morogoro, 36 from Tanga, and 19 from Iringa, together with seven tutors. Convenience sampling was used to select ODL students who were available during the data collection period, which may limit the broader generalisability of the findings. Although several tutors met the criteria, seven with more than two years' experience assessing diploma and bachelor's degree ODL students were selected, as this was considered sufficient for rich qualitative insight. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to ODL students. The questionnaire collected information on the assessment methods employed within ODL, their perceived effectiveness, and the extent to which they promoted the application of knowledge and critical thinking. A structured questionnaire was developed based on the study objectives and Authentic Assessment Theory and used five-point Likert-type response scales. Content validity was established through an expert review of educational assessments. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 15 respondents similar to the study's participants. The internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$). Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with tutors to gain deeper insights into the institutional assessment methods. In addition, the institutional prospectus was reviewed to triangulate the questionnaire and interview findings. Quantitative data were organised and analysed using the Statistical

Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were summarised using frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data from interviews and documentary reviews were analysed thematically through coding, categorisation, and identification of emerging themes. The IAE Prospectus (2023/2024) was reviewed to identify the prescribed assessment methods and procedures. The findings were presented separately, and integration with questionnaire and interview evidence was conducted during interpretation and discussion to identify areas of agreement and divergence. Ethical considerations, including obtaining permission to conduct the study from the IAE-Tanzania, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, were observed throughout the research process. For anonymity reasons, the researcher used Tutor1, Tutor2, Tutor3, Tutor4, Tutor5, Tutor6, and Tutor7 to represent the tutors interviewed. Students' anonymity was maintained by analysing and presenting their data in aggregate statistical form without including any personally identifiable information.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings on the significance of authentic assessment methods in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) delivery mode at the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) in Tanzania. The analysis highlights how assessment methods align with principles that support meaningful learning, competency development, and the demonstration of practical knowledge in real-world contexts. The findings are presented in two sections: perceived effectiveness of assessment methods in assessing students' competencies and application of knowledge, and promotion of critical thinking.

Perceived Effectiveness of Assessment Methods in Assessing Students' Competencies

Understanding the types of assessments employed and how students and tutors perceive their effectiveness is important for evaluating their potential contribution to meaningful learning in ODL settings. Table 1 presents the assessment methods experienced and reported by ODL students across the three selected study centres at the Institute of Adult Education.

Table 1:*Assessment Methods Reported by ODL Students Across the Three Study Centres*

Assessment Method	Frequency	Percent
Written assignments	120	85.1
Online quizzes or tests	50	35.5
Mid-semester tests	130	92.2
Portfolio	102	72.3
Field project	80	56.7
Field practical assessment	83	58.9
End-of-semester examinations	114	80.9
Self-assessment	49	34.8

Note. Percentages exceed 100% as multiple responses were permitted.

The findings in Table 1 indicate that mid-semester tests (92.2%), written assignments (85.1%), end-of-semester examinations (80.9%), and portfolios (72.3%) were the most frequently used assessment methods among ODL students at the Institute of Adult Education. Field practical assessments (58.9%) and projects (56.7%) were moderately utilised, while online quizzes or tests (35.5%) and self-assessments (34.8%) were less commonly used.

Data from the interviews with tutors contextualize the quantitative findings. As Tutor1 explained:

I am not deciding the method to use in assessment, the methods are documented which are written assignments, portfolios, mid-semester tests, and end-of-semester examinations. You have to know that it is difficult to implement other methods such as presentations because of time constraints during face to face.

Also, Tutor4 reported as follows:

We use projects, portfolios, written assignments and end-of-semester examinations. Currently, additional methods such as online tests and Moodle participation have been introduced.

The following quotation from Tutor7 illustrates this finding:

I assess students using end-of-semester examinations, tests, and written assignments. In addition, we have programme-specific assessment activities. Students pursuing Adult Education and Community Development undertake projects, while those studying Adult Education and Continuing Education participate in field practical teaching activities.

The assessment methods reported by tutors across the three study centres were largely consistent with the institutional requirements. The only notable divergence was that, although the prospectus recognised projects as a continuous assessment activity, written assignments appeared to be used more frequently in their place. Nevertheless, the observed assessment methods were generally guided by institutional requirements rather than solely by individual tutors' preferences. These findings indicate that assessment in ODL comprises a combination of conventional assessment methods, including mid-semester tests and end-of-semester examinations, and authentic assessment methods, such as portfolios, projects, and practical assessments. The introduction of methods such as online tests and Moodle participation suggests a gradual shift towards technology-supported assessment approaches, although such methods do not yet appear to be dominant within the broader assessment system.

The IAE Prospectus (2023/2024) review confirmed that the Institute has an institutional assessment framework that guides assessments in ODL programmes. The framework requires each course to include a portfolio, mid-semester tests, a project, and an end-of-semester examination. In addition, each programme requires students to complete either a field project or a field practical once during their programme of study. From an ODL perspective, frequent assessments involve sustained student engagement, continuous feedback, and regular monitoring of learning throughout the semester.

The predominance of mid-semester tests and written assignments reflects institutional efforts to enhance student participation and promote continued interaction between students and instructors, consistent with Fynn and Mashile's (2022) observations. Likewise, Lifuka (2025) argued that regular assessment activities are essential quality indicators because they provide continuous feedback and support students' progression. However, the predominant use of written assessments observed in this study raises concerns about the extent to which assessment tasks sufficiently capture students' practical competencies and their ability to solve problems, analyse and evaluate information, and apply knowledge in authentic real-world contexts relevant to their fields of study.

The use of real-world practical assessment methods, including field practical assessments and group project assessments, suggests alignment with Wiggins' (1998) Authentic Assessment Theory. Authentic assessment requires students to demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills in realistic or collaborative

contexts, communicate and defend their ideas, reflect on their own learning, and solve problems relevant to their fields of study rather than relying solely on written examinations. Similarly, Mwangi et al. (2022) and Maphosa et al. (2024) emphasised that students in distance education perceive authentic assessment activities, such as projects and presentations, as more engaging because they promote critical thinking and real-world application of knowledge. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest that although some authentic assessment elements exist, assessment methods at the Institute of Adult Education remain largely written.

These findings are consistent with those of studies that show a persistent reliance on traditional assessment approaches. Maijo and Mrema (2024) and Emmanuel (2023) found that assessment practices at the Institute of Adult Education largely depend on assignments and formal examinations, partly due to institutional and technological constraints that affect the implementation of innovative assessment methods. Mariki (2025) similarly observed that the contextual challenges faced by ODL students often limit opportunities for practical and collaborative learning. This indicates the need to reinforce authentic assessment methods that encourage students' autonomy, practical demonstration of competencies, and collaborative learning experiences.

To further understand students' experiences with assessment methods, they were asked to provide an overall rating of the perceived effectiveness of the various assessment methods collectively, regardless of their differing weights in measuring real learning outcomes. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:
Students' Perceived Effectiveness of Assessment Methods in Measuring Real Learning Outcomes

Effectiveness	Frequency	Percent
Not effective	1	0.7
Less effective	2	1.4
Moderately effective	35	24.8
Effective	69	48.9
Very effective	34	24.1
Total	141	100.0

The findings in Table 2 reveal that most students perceived the assessment methods used in ODL as effective, with 48.9% rating them as ‘effective’ and a further 24.1% rating them as ‘very effective. Approximately one-quarter (24.8%) considered the assessment methods moderately effective, while very few respondents rated them as less effective (1.4%) or not effective (0.7%).

Positive perceptions of assessment effectiveness are linked to the regular use of mid-semester tests and written assignments that allow students to monitor their academic progress and receive feedback. Bulut et al. (2025) found that continuous assessment positively affects students’ performance by enabling regular evaluation of learning progress and reducing reliance on final examinations. Similarly, Munir et al. (2024) reported that students often perceive assessments as effective when assessment activities are structured, accessible, and aligned with learning objectives. Nevertheless, effectiveness should not be judged only by academic measurements but also in terms of the capacity of assessment to develop practical competencies, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

The interview findings from the tutors revealed differing perspectives on the effectiveness of the assessment methods. Tutor5 expressed support for the effectiveness of the assessment system, explaining that:

I consider the assessment methods to be effective. Our examinations are competency-based and aim to assess students’ actual understanding of the concepts. For example, students may be required to prepare a lesson plan for an adult class. In addition, the design and development of assessments are monitored by course coordinators before they are administered nationally, which helps ensure the effectiveness of the assessment process.

The interview with Tutor6:

In my view, the assessment methods used are moderately effective. I cannot say that they are highly effective because they do not fully demonstrate students’ competencies. Much of the assessment is based on written work with limited emphasis on practice.

These findings imply that ODL assessment is currently more effective in measuring theoretical understanding than in evaluating practical competence. Assessment may be perceived as effective for measuring learning while still providing limited opportunities for the direct demonstration of competence in real-world settings. The interview findings contrast with the views of Wiggins (1990) and Nyinge et al. (2024). Both emphasise that assessment should promote competency acquisition beyond theoretical understanding through collaborative assessment approaches that

enable students to demonstrate practical skills and experiences relevant to their fields. Madland et al. (2024) similarly argued that institutions offering programmes through ODL should rethink their assessment systems to balance accountability with meaningful competency-based learning experiences.

Although the institutional assessment framework promotes consistency across study centres, more weight could be given to continuous authentic assessment tasks rather than end-of-semester examinations. Assessment frameworks should encourage the use of reflective tasks, case-based activities, field-based projects, and other performance-oriented assessments that enable students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations within their respective areas of study. This approach supports both assessment for learning and assessment as learning by fostering continuous learning, reflection, and professional competence throughout the learning process. Within this framework, tutors and students should be guided by clear institutional assessment guidelines that maintain assessment quality, consistency, and academic integrity, while providing sufficient flexibility to design contextually relevant assessment tasks.

Application of Knowledge and Promotion of Critical Thinking

Having analysed perceived effectiveness, the analysis now turns to how far assessment promotes knowledge application and critical thinking. The application of knowledge to practical or real-life situations is the core input of authentic assessment. Table 3 presents the ODL students' perceptions of the integration of knowledge application in assessment methods. A total of 82.2% of ODL students rated "often" to "always" for assessment integrate application of knowledge. This suggests that students strongly perceived the assessment methods used in ODL programmes as often requiring the application of knowledge. Table 3 presents the students' level of agreement.

Table 3:*Students' perceptions on the integration of knowledge application in assessment methods*

Respondents	Never%	Rarely %	Sometimes %	Often%	Always%
Less than one year duration	7.0	0.0	11.6	9.3	72.1
One – two years duration	0.0	0.0	16.3	25.6	58.1
More than two years duration	0.0	0.0	18.5	22.2	59.3
Diploma programmes level	5.3	0.0	8.8	21.1	64.9
Bachelor programmes level	0.0	0.0	20.2	17.9	61.9
All ODL students (Grand %)	2.1	0.0	15.6	19.1	63.1

From Table 3, the finding that the highest percentage (63.1%) of all ODL students reported the ‘always’ level reflects a positive perception that assessment tasks are generally oriented towards practical understanding and application of concepts within learning activities. This finding demonstrates a clear orientation towards competency-based assessment, consistent with the expectations of Authentic Assessment Theory. It shows that 86% of diploma students reported often and always, while 79.1% of bachelor’s degree students reported the same frequency. The findings similarly correspond with Munir et al. (2024), who argued that competency-based assessment approaches are becoming increasingly central within ODL environments because of their relevance to professional practice.

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate that 86.5% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that assessment tasks should promote critical thinking rather than content memorisation. Table 4 below shows the analysis of respondents by programme level and duration of study within the ODL system.

Table 4:*Students' Agreement Level on Assessment Methods Promote Critical Thinking*

Respondents	Strongly Disagree%	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Less than oneyear duration	0.0	4.7	4.7	46.5	44.2
One – two years duration	7.0	4.7	2.3	46.5	39.5
More than two years duration	1.9	3.7	11.1	51.9	31.5
Diploma programmes level	3.5	5.3	3.5	42.1	45.6
Bachelor programmes level	2.4	3.6	8.3	52.4	33.3
All ODL students (Grand %)	2.8	4.3	6.4	48.2	38.3

The pattern in Table 4 suggests that students generally agreed that assessment activities foster analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving skills and the ability to engage within realistic contexts. However, the percentage distribution across almost all levels implies that students' experiences are not entirely uniform, suggesting that some assessment tasks may still emphasise the reproduction of content more than analytical engagement. Therefore, while the overall findings demonstrate positive perceptions regarding the application of knowledge and promotion of critical thinking, the extent to which all assessment tasks consistently operationalise authentic tasks remains variable across students' experiences.

Analytically, the consistency of higher percentages in often and always, agree and strongly agree across programme levels in Tables 3 and 4 may indicate that the institutional assessment system increasingly incorporates knowledge application and critical thinking assessment tasks within both diploma and bachelor programmes. Such perceptions may be associated with the use of assignments, projects, field practical activities, and competency-based examination questions that require students to think critically and apply concepts to contextualise situations.

The interview findings provided further insights into how assessment methods promote knowledge application. Tutors explained that assessment tasks were

designed to require students to apply concepts and theories to practical and context-specific situations, as illustrated by the following remarks of Tutor1:

Field practice and projects are the most direct assessment methods for assessing students' application of knowledge and the development of critical thinking. In addition, portfolios and well-designed examinations are used to assess students' ability to apply their knowledge

Tutor6 explained:

Assessment is more effective when students demonstrate what they can do with what they have learned. Portfolios, written assignments, and field practicals give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge to real situations instead of only answering questions from memory.

Additionally, Tutor3 stated that:

Tests and exams do not only ask students to define concepts. Questions were prepared in practical scenarios and the students were asked to apply those concepts to situations they may face in their field of study or workplace.

In addition to promoting the application of knowledge, the interview findings indicated that assessment methods also aimed to foster students' critical thinking by requiring them to analyse situations, evaluate alternatives, and justify their decisions. Tutor7 stated that:

Whenever possible, we included questions that required students to explain their ideas, analyse real situations, and justify their answers. This helps us to see how well they can think critically and apply what they have learned to their own lives.

Tutor4 added:

We try to prepare questions that make students think instead of simply recalling what they have read. Some questions require them to analyse a situation, explain their reasoning, and justify the decisions they make.

The interview findings showed that, although the tutors recognised field practice and project-based assessments as effective approaches for assessing the application of knowledge and critical thinking, they reported that competencies were assessed mainly through paper-and-pencil methods. Tutors incorporated contextualised questions, case scenarios, and problem-based examination items that required students to analyse situations, justify their responses and apply theoretical concepts. This corresponds with Villarroel et al. (2020), who argued that authenticity can be implemented through the three chronological phases of the assessment process: before, during, and after the act of assessment. The interview findings show that

assessment methods promote realism, cognitive challenge, and evaluative judgement during the planning phase of assessment tasks. These approaches primarily assess students' ability to demonstrate competence in written form rather than through direct performance in practical settings. From the perspective of authentic assessment theory, this suggests that assessment practices have incorporated elements of authenticity but still lean heavily on written examinations, indicating moderate alignment with authentic assessment theory.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the findings indicate that assessment practices within ODL programmes at the Institute of Adult Education are characterised by a hybrid assessment model in which conventional examination-oriented approaches coexist with emerging, authentic assessment practices. The prospectus review confirmed that the framework prescribes portfolios, projects, mid-semester tests, end-of-semester examinations, and programme-based field projects or practicals. Students and tutors reported that written and examination-oriented assessments remain the dominant assessment forms. Students generally rated the methods as effective or very effective, whereas the tutors' views were mixed.

Collectively, the findings from students and tutors indicate that the institution has made deliberate efforts to promote the application of knowledge and critical thinking through assessments. However, these competencies are predominantly assessed using paper-and-pencil methods, such as contextualised questions, case scenarios, assignments, and competency-based examination items, rather than through direct demonstration of competence in authentic, practical settings. Although such written assessment tasks encourage students to analyse situations, solve problems, justify their responses, and apply theoretical concepts, they provide limited opportunities for students to demonstrate their performance in real-world contexts. From the perspective of authentic assessment theory, these findings suggest that institutional assessment practices have incorporated important elements of authenticity but remain largely classroom- and examination-oriented, reflecting only moderate alignment with the principles of authentic assessment.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Institute of Adult Education progressively broaden its assessment framework by expanding authentic and technology-supported assessment approaches that reflect the practical nature of

Open and Distance Learning. Greater emphasis should be placed on integrating performance-based, practical, collaborative, reflective, and interactive assessment tasks that enable students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations within their respective fields of study. While maintaining institutional standards for quality, consistency, and academic integrity, the assessment framework should provide tutors with structured guidance and flexibility to implement authentic assessment methods that promote assessment for learning and assessment as learning.

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