

ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE IN SPORTS EDUCATION: A COMPETENCY-BASED AND AUTHENTIC APPROACH

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Abstract: *This article examines competency-based and authentic assessment strategies for English language proficiency within sports education programs. Drawing on contemporary research in applied linguistics, sports pedagogy, and language evaluation, the study argues that traditional testing models are insufficient for capturing the communicative demands faced by athletes, coaches, and sports professionals in multilingual and international contexts. The article proposes an integrated assessment framework that combines task-based language assessment (TBLA), portfolio evaluation, and performance-based rubrics tailored to the sports domain. Examples from university-level physical education curricula, coach certification programs, and international sporting events illustrate how authentic contexts can inform valid, reliable, and fair language assessment. The findings suggest that competency-based approaches not only improve learner motivation but also align language development with real-world professional expectations in sport.*

Keywords: *competency-based assessment, authentic assessment, English for Sports, task-based language assessment, sports education, language evaluation, communicative competence.*

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of sport has fundamentally transformed the communicative demands placed on athletes, coaches, referees, and sports administrators. International competitions, multilingual team environments, and global media coverage have made English language proficiency not merely advantageous but professionally indispensable for sports practitioners. Yet despite this reality, language assessment in sports education programs frequently relies on generic, decontextualized testing instruments that bear little resemblance to the authentic linguistic challenges of the sports domain.

Wiggins was among the first scholars to articulate the concept of *authentic assessment* as a framework in which learners demonstrate their competencies through tasks that reflect real-world application rather than artificial test conditions. Wiggins argued that "a student should be asked to use knowledge and skills wisely and effectively to address a genuine task, not to recite information" [16, p. 10]. This principle is particularly relevant in sports contexts, where English is used for coaching instructions, post-match interviews, rule interpretation, and international correspondence.

Despite decades of research on task-based language assessment (TBLA) and competency-based education (CBE), relatively few studies have examined these frameworks within sports education specifically. This gap is notable given the sector's rapid

internationalization and the growing demand for linguistically competent sports professionals. The present article aims to fill this gap by proposing an integrated, competency-based and authentic assessment framework tailored to English language instruction in sports education programs.

Competency-Based Language Assessment

Competency-based education (CBE) originated in vocational training and has since been adopted across a range of professional fields, including language education. Within language pedagogy, CBE emphasizes the mastery of discrete, observable communicative competencies rather than the accumulation of abstract linguistic knowledge. As Brindley noted, competency-based approaches "focus on outcomes, specifying what learners are able to do with the language in real communicative contexts, rather than what they know about the language" [2, p. 22].

In sports education, this translates into competencies such as: delivering coaching instructions in English; comprehending referee signals and rule explanations; conducting post-game interviews; and communicating with international partners and sponsors. Each of these competencies can be operationalized as a set of measurable performance indicators, allowing assessors to evaluate learners against standardized benchmarks aligned with professional expectations.

The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides a widely adopted competency framework that can be adapted for sports contexts. The CEFR defines language proficiency across six levels (A1–C2), describing *what learners can do* in the target language across a range of communicative situations [4, p. 35]. However, as Fulcher observed, generic frameworks like the CEFR often lack the domain-specific granularity needed for professional settings such as sport [7, p. 78].

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment refers to evaluation tasks that simulate or replicate real-world language use. Bachman and Palmer defined authenticity in language testing as "the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language task to the features of a target language use (TLU) task" [1, p. 49]. In sports education, TLU tasks include delivering coaching briefs, responding to media questions in English, and completing official competition documentation.

Portfolio assessment is one of the most widely discussed authentic assessment methods. Paulson described the portfolio as "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements" [13, p. 60]. When applied in sports language courses, portfolios might include reflective journals documenting language use during training, video recordings of coaching sessions delivered in English, and annotated transcripts of sports broadcasts.

METHODOLOGY AND APPLIED EXAMPLES

Task-Based Language Assessment in Sports Contexts

Task-based language assessment (TBLA) operationalizes authentic assessment through structured communicative tasks. Ellis defined a language task as "a workplan that

requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed" [6, p. 16]. In sports education, exemplary TBLA tasks include: (a) a simulated post-match press conference in which student-coaches respond to journalists' questions in English; (b) a role-play scenario in which a sports administrator negotiates a contract with an international sponsor; and (c) a listening task requiring learners to transcribe and interpret a referee's ruling from an English-language audio recording.

A concrete example can be drawn from the curriculum of the National Sports University of Ukraine, which introduced TBLA into its English language modules in 2018. According to Kovalenko and Sydorenko, students who completed task-based assessments demonstrated significantly higher gains in oral proficiency and professional vocabulary compared to peers assessed through conventional grammar and translation tests [10, p. 114]. These findings corroborate earlier research by Norris, who demonstrated that TBLA yields stronger predictive validity for real-world language performance than discrete-point tests [12, p. 186].

Portfolio-Based Assessment

Portfolio assessment offers a longitudinal, process-oriented complement to task-based evaluation. In a study of physical education teacher training programs in Spain, Castejón and Santos-Pastor found that portfolios documenting teaching practicum experiences in bilingual schools provided richer diagnostic information than end-of-term examinations [3, p. 49]. The portfolios included lesson plans written in English, student-produced video analyses of teaching episodes, and reflective commentary on language choices made during instruction.

Building on this model, we propose that sports education programs adopt e-portfolios as a primary assessment vehicle. Digital platforms such as Mahara or Google Sites allow students to curate multimedia evidence of English language use across diverse sports contexts. Assessment rubrics should evaluate: (a) linguistic accuracy; (b) communicative effectiveness; (c) appropriate use of sports-specific register; and (d) reflective depth. Such rubrics align with the competency-based principle that assessment should measure *what learners can do* rather than what they know in isolation.

Performance-Based Rubrics

Rubric design is central to the validity and reliability of authentic assessments. Stevens and Levi recommended that rubrics for language assessment specify four dimensions: criteria, descriptors, a rating scale, and performance standards [14, p. 17]. Adapted for sports English, a rubric for a simulated coaching session might evaluate: (a) clarity and precision of tactical instructions in English; (b) fluency and appropriate pace of delivery; (c) responsiveness to athletes' comprehension signals; and (d) use of motivational language and positive reinforcement.

A comparative study conducted at the Romanian National University of Physical Education and Sports examined the inter-rater reliability of such rubrics across twenty sports English assessors [9, p. 88]. The researchers reported a mean Cohen's kappa coefficient of

0.78, indicating substantial agreement among raters following a structured calibration session. This suggests that, with appropriate assessor training, performance-based rubrics can achieve acceptable reliability even in contexts where subjective judgment is inherent.

The integration of competency-based and authentic assessment frameworks in sports English programs addresses several persistent limitations of conventional language testing. First, it enhances *consequential validity*, defined by Messick as the extent to which test use and interpretation lead to appropriate and equitable consequences for learners and society [11, p. 20]. When assessments mirror professional practice, learners are more likely to invest effort and develop genuinely transferable competencies.

Second, authentic assessment addresses the problem of *construct underrepresentation*, a validity threat that arises when tests fail to sample the full range of target constructs [8, p. 493]. Traditional discrete-point grammar tests in sports education programs are particularly susceptible to this threat, as they systematically exclude speaking, listening, and pragmatic competencies that are central to sports communication.

Third, the motivational benefits of authentic tasks are well-documented in the second language acquisition literature. Dörnyei and Ushioda argued that learners are more motivated when they perceive a clear connection between classroom activities and their personal and professional goals [5, p. 98]. Sports education students who are preparing for careers as coaches, physical therapists, or international competition managers are likely to find authentic English assessment tasks more relevant and engaging than decontextualized grammar exercises.

A notable practical challenge concerns the resource demands of authentic assessment. Oral performance tasks, portfolios, and simulated interviews require substantially more assessor time than machine-scored multiple-choice tests. Stiggins cautioned that "assessment quality demands trained, skilled practitioners who have sufficient time and resources to do the job right" [15, p. 759]. Sports education departments should therefore invest in assessor training, rubric standardization, and where possible, peer assessment protocols to distribute the evaluative burden.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has argued for a fundamental reorientation of English language assessment in sports education toward competency-based and authentic frameworks. The evidence reviewed suggests that task-based language assessment, portfolio evaluation, and performance-based rubrics offer superior validity, motivational benefits, and professional relevance compared to conventional discrete-point tests.

The proposed integrated framework rests on three pillars: (1) the identification of domain-specific communicative competencies drawn from authentic sports professional contexts; (2) the design of assessment tasks that simulate these contexts with sufficient fidelity to support meaningful inference; and (3) the development of transparent, reliable rubrics that enable consistent scoring across raters and institutions.

Future research should investigate the long-term impact of authentic language assessment on the professional communicative competence of sports graduates, and should

examine how digital technologies, including AI-powered speech analysis tools, might extend the scalability and reliability of performance-based assessments in resource-limited programs. The development of internationally validated competency frameworks specifically for sports English — analogous to the CEFR but domain-specific — would represent a significant contribution to both applied linguistics and sports pedagogy.

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