Title of Project:
Investigating the Authenticity of Paper- and
Computer-Based ESL Writing Tests

Researcher:
Mingxia Zhi
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Mingxia.Zhi@utsa.edu

Research Supervisor:
Dr. Becky Huang
The University of Texas at San Antonio

Mingxia Zhi

Project Summary:
This current study aims to compare the authenticity of English as a second language (ESL) writing assessment in paper-based (PB) and computer-based (CB) modes. Studying test authenticity is crucial because it relates to the construct and consequential validity of a test by influencing the domain of generalization of the test task and the perceptions of the test-takers (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; 2010). The proposed study is particularly important now that the use of technologies has become a common practice in language testing (Shirzad & Shirzad, 2017; Weir, O'Sullivan, Jin, & Bax, 2007). Many studies on the effect of using computers in language test administration claim that CB writing tests are more authentic than PB with little empirical evidence to support this claim (Lee, 2004; Lessien, 2013). While the validity and reliability of the CB writing tests have been addressed by previous research (Cheung, 2016; Chan, Bax, & Weir, 2017; Kohler, 2015; Wolfe & Manalo, 2004), virtually no research has empirically compared the authenticity of the CB and PB writing tests.

Guided by Liu's (2005) model of five aspects of authenticity, this study employs an embedded correlational model of mixed-methods design to examine the effect of test modality on the situational and interactive authenticity of an ESL writing test. The proposed research extends test validation practices to include authenticity measurements. Results from the research will also have practical implications for test administration policies and stakeholders when choosing the delivery format of ESL direct writing assessments.