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Assessment Rubrics as Effective Feedback: Prospective Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

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Abstract: *This paper examines the receptiveness among prospective teachers for rubrics as effective feedback for learning and assessment. It also investigates the dispositions among prospective teachers toward the practice of rubrics in their future classrooms. It uses a qualitative research approach and collects data from 15 participants who were selected through a purposive sampling method from four universities. The data is analyzed using NVivo 12 Pro, and themes are derived and calculated based on the frequency of responses. The paper finds that using rubrics for grading has various benefits for both prospective teachers and their learners, such as improvement in grades, motivation, awareness, feedback support, skillfulness, quality, time management, critical thinking, etc. The paper also finds that there are some challenges and gaps in the implementation and practice of rubrics in the Pakistani education system.*

Key Words: Rubrics, Feedback, Assessment Tools, Data-Driven Decision-Making, Authentic Assessment

Introduction

Providing detailed, timely, and constructive feedback about the strengths and areas of improvement in students' learning and learning performances is already in demand. Numerous studies have already shed enough light on the importance of feedback, which works for both the teachers as assessors and evaluators of students' learning performances in classroom assessments and the students, the main actors of the whole learning process (Dawson et al., 2019). Feedback, a piece of "information communicated to the learner" (Shute, 2008, p. 126), impacts the learning performance and

learning itself effectively (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Shute (2008, p. 153) has quoted Cohen (1985) while discussing the importance of feedback that it is "one of the more instructional powerful and least understood features in instructional design." On the other hand, the teacher also benefits from it by gathering important academic information about learners' performance and making necessary changes to their instructional designs and strategies for further learning progress (Cohen, 1985, p. 154).

The escalating popularity of "restructuring and reformulation of knowledge demands

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authentic performance-based classroom assessments” (Ali, Yasmin, & Afzaal, 2020). These assessments involve the learners in accomplishing the tasks related to their active learning progressions rather than enforcing upon them the rote-memorization process only (Mede & Atay, 2017) to evaluate the learning outcomes in the domain of higher-order skills. These include “critical thinking, analyzing, communication skills, problem-solving skills” (Ali, Yasmin, & Afzaal, 2020, p.795), social interaction, self-monitoring, and self-regulation (Vasileiadou & Karadimitriou, 2021).

Rubrics-based assessments, “a set of scoring guidelines,” facilitate evaluation and reporting by the facilitator on the learners’ learning achievement(s) (Ali, Yasmin, & Afzaal, 2020, p. 794). Effective rubrics, conducive to a positive effect (William, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004), support the teachers and the learners in assessing their learning performance (Reynolds-Keefer, 2010) by understanding and integrating the element of quality. While attaining the learning goals, the important quality indicators described in the rubrics for the assigned work are meant to be evaluated. At one end, the alignment of rubrics with learning outcomes intrinsically motivates the learners (Hussain, Shaheen, Ahmad, & Islam, 2019) with clarity of perception of the assessment benchmarks before their learning performance.

The adaptation of the grading policy on the part of the learner is crucial for encouraging them to correct and modify (Wolf & Stevens, 2007) during the self-assessment process and also to fill the breach in teacher-student perceptions (Hussain, Shaheen, Ahmad, & Islam, 2019, p.89). On the other end, it supports the teachers in effectively focusing on strengths and areas of improvement in student learning performance with specific feedback (Darling-Hammond & Pecheone, 2010). Zahid and Mansoor (2020) quoted Stoyhoff and Chapelle (2005), who observed that though teachers inculcate various methods of assessments and through routine teaching and test scores, many teachers find the feature of

principles of assessment as ‘difficult to update and apply efficiently’ (p. 21).

However, despite the importance and benefits of feedback and rubrics-based assessments for both teachers and learners, there are still challenges and gaps in their implementation and practice in the Pakistani education system. The inclusion of rubrics as tools of assessment dates back to the study conducted by Noyes (1912), who claimed the prevailing assessment methods for compositions being measured predominantly on personal opinions varying in level with the individual inclination. He insisted upon a “clear-cut, concrete standard of measurement which will mean the same thing to all people in all places and is not dependent upon the opinion of any individual.” (Noyes, 1912. p. 534). Turley and Gallagher (2008, p. 88) observed that though, the rubrics designed by Noyes and his contemporaries were structured as a homogenous form of measurement for the “administrators and investigators measuring and evaluating the nationwide school system efficiency” (Brooks, 2013). However, recent studies on rubrics’ use and effectiveness reveal that the teacher-made rubrics, specifically, not only serve as a reflection of the teacher’s expectation towards the learning of their learners but also assist the teachers in thinking primarily what to teach and what direction to set for their learners in the learning process (Rini, & Purnawarman, 2019, p. 362). Reynolds-Keefer (2010, p. 1) aptly referred to Zimmerman & Schunk (2001), and Brookhart (2003) also highlights the need for preservice teachers in this regard primarily to enable them to assist their future students in being well-informed of their learning goals along with the apt implementation and practice of feedback simultaneously.

In recent years, the assessment agencies in the province of Punjab in Pakistan, such as Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs), have incorporated many documents into their examination system for making credible and reliable assessments, including the Rubric of Essay assessment (BISE Training Manual for Head/Sub-Examiners,

2016). In the Pakistani education system, the assessment in public and private schools has always faced question marks in terms of clear marking criteria and a lack of communication with learners regarding the specific standards of rubrics and their marking elements (Zahid & Mansoor, 2020), and most importantly, the credibility of the assessments in terms of “reliability and validity” (Khattak, 2012).

This study critically explores the lack of understanding and following the alternative methods of assessments that lead most Pakistani schools to follow the traditional grading system for both summative and formative assessments in both the public and private sectors. The negative perception and attitude of the teachers toward using rubrics (Chileshe & Jacob, 2019) also count for their ineffective practice. This sometimes follows a trail of injustice while dealing with the marking criteria and effectively communicating the strengths and areas of improvement with students, which is also the focal point of this study.

Many recent studies have claimed that the designed study materials for prospective teachers were insufficient in providing knowledge and skills for modern concepts of assessment. These include performance-based and authentic assessments along with other assessment types with an absence of rubrics, portfolios, projects, etc. (Akhtar, Hussain, & Ahmad, 2021). Therefore, this study investigates and analyses the prospective teachers' receptiveness towards feedback through grading rubrics and their readiness in relation to its application in their classrooms/future classrooms with adaptation and innovation.

The purpose of this study is to examine the receptiveness among prospective teachers for rubrics as effective feedback as rubrics for learning and assessment. It also aims to investigate the dispositions among prospective teachers toward the practice of rubrics in their future classrooms. Moreover, it seeks to explore the readiness and expertise of supervisor teachers in enabling prospective teachers to design and implement teacher-made rubrics in

their future classrooms. Furthermore, it intends to inspect the extent of preparedness among prospective teachers for using teacher-made rubrics as effective feedback in their future classrooms. Additionally, it attempts to inspect the extent of preparedness among the prospective teachers for using the ‘adopted and adapted’ rubrics as effective feedback in their future classrooms. Finally, it explores the level of satisfaction among the prospective teachers on the quality of the learning material on rubrics during their course of study.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method.

Data collection

For the qualitative data collection, 15 participants were selected through the purposive sampling method (Marshall, 1996) selected from each university based on the completion of the third/fourth semester or in the final year with the completion of the internship program. Participants were asked questions during face-to-face sessions through semi-structured interviews. Their interviews were re-checked and re-analyzed after closely evaluating them on-the-spot, and many a time afterwards. For fulfilling the purpose of member checking the qualitative data collected, these 15 participants were re-contacted through live calls for further expansion of the ideas presented during their interviews. The researcher faced a restriction from the participants, the student-teachers, in the form of objection to recording their voices or giving responses through voice messages on ‘WhatsApp.’ This was experienced in almost all the four universities participants from where the data was collected. Therefore, in order to keep their privacy, the researcher probed deeply for each question and took extensive notes, which were re-read word-to-word to each of the 15 participants to gain their consent on the response they intended to give.

Data analysis

The qualitative data collected through interviews was sorted out and coded through NVivo 12 Pro (Dhakal, 2022). Prompts were provided to the interviewees in open-ended form for the purpose of further elaboration and expression of experiences by the interviewees to gain more enriched data. Themes were derived, and percentages were obtained for each coded data. Common trends that existed in the themes were documented as per the objectives of the research at hand.

Findings

Themes were identified and calculated based on the set of responses to the corresponding questions, even if some of the themes crossed over across the study questions. Ideas that often appeared in the open-ended survey question responses served as the basis for each research question's topics.

Usage of Rubrics at the University Level

Improvement in Grades

Participants reported that using rubrics for grading helped them improve their grades. As one participant said, "We get motivated towards studies while improving our grades. Rubrics will make students more attentive and alert to look at their mistakes deeply and find them even in their minor mistakes in the assessments." Another stated, "Our CGPA gets improved through clarifying mistakes with rubrics."

Making the Task of Assessment-Designing and Rating Easier

Participants stated that using rubrics for grading made the task of assessment-designing and rating easier for them. One participant shared, "A lot of help was received during the restructuring of my assessment methodologies and techniques." Another expressed, "I also learned about the evaluation process, test or assessment designing, table of specification alignment with the set goals of teaching. All

this has a systematic approach, of which I was unaware till now."

Alignment of the Assessment with SLOs and Classroom Activities

Participants mentioned that using rubrics for grading helped them align their assessment with student learning outcomes (SLOs) and classroom activities. One participant said, "Student Learning Outcomes that are usually pre-set and are aligned with the teaching and learning process and also with the assessment tasks and types."

Motivation, Awareness of the Lead Teacher's Expectations towards their Learning Performance

Participants indicated that using rubrics for grading motivated them and made them aware of the lead teacher's expectations of their learning performance(s). One participant commented, "During my internship, I used to evaluate my students' work through the grades they achieved. That was the first time I applied grading and rubrics (verbally, on the simplest level) as there was no awareness and culture of marking students' work with grading, let alone through rubrics. Students were also not familiar with this assessment technique. So, to get them into the loop, I introduced and practised the simplest form of rubrics grading and then proceeded to a comparatively better level." Another remarked, "Through the grading rubrics, I was able to already know the evaluation criteria."

Awareness of Students' Learning Abilities by the Teacher

Participants reported that using rubrics for grading helped them become aware of their students' learning abilities. One participant stated, "I can use already made rubrics available online and can modify them as per my assessment goals and the learning abilities of my students."

Improvement in Student-teachers' Own Learning Performances

Participants stated that using rubrics for grading helped them improve their own learning performances. One participant said, "I have consciously tried to make rubrics easier in language and understanding for the students." Another said, "Out of my experience, I have learned a lot about how to design a good assessment task for my students."

Awareness of the Evaluation Criteria

Participants mentioned that using rubrics for grading helped them become aware of the evaluation criteria. One participant said, "Rubrics make us aware of what is expected from us in our assignments." Another said, "Rubrics help us understand how we will be graded and what we need to focus on."

Availability of Positive Feedback for Learners

Participants reported that using rubrics for grading provided them with positive feedback for their learners. One participant said, "Rubrics give us constructive feedback on our strengths and weaknesses." Another said, "Rubrics help us improve our work by giving us specific suggestions."

Teacher/rater a Support System for Learners' Improvement Level and Progress

Participants stated that using rubrics for grading made the teacher/rater a support system for their learners' improvement level and progress. One participant said, "Rubrics help us communicate with our teacher/rater about our progress and difficulties." Another said, "Rubrics help us trust our teacher/rater and feel supported by them."

Quality of Prospective Teachers' Work Skillfulness in Developing and Restructuring Rubrics for their Learners

Participants reported that using rubrics for grading helped them develop and restructure

rubrics for their learners. One participant said, "I have learned how to design rubrics according to the learning outcomes and the assessment tasks." Another said, "I have learned how to modify rubrics according to the feedback from my learners and peers."

The Balance between the Quality of Work and Time Management

Participants stated that using rubrics for grading helped them balance the quality of work and time management. One participant said, "Rubrics help us save time by giving us clear guidelines and expectations." Another said, "Rubrics help us prioritize our work and manage our time effectively."

Areas of improvement regarding the Quality of Rubrics

Participants mentioned that using rubrics for grading helped them identify areas of improvement regarding the quality of rubrics. One participant said, "Rubrics help us reflect on our work and see where we can improve." Another said, "Rubrics help us compare our work with the best practices and standards."

Unbiased and Merit-based Rating of Learners' Performance

Participants reported that using rubrics for grading helped them achieve an unbiased and merit-based rating of learners' performance. One participant said, "Rubrics help us grade our learners fairly and consistently." Another said, "Rubrics help us avoid personal bias and favouritism."

Systematic Scoring System

Participants stated that using rubrics for grading helped them implement a systematic scoring system. One participant said, "Rubrics help us score our learners objectively and accurately." Another said, "Rubrics help us use a common language and criteria for grading."

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with

previous studies that have highlighted the importance and benefits of feedback and rubrics-based assessments for both teachers and learners (Sadler, 2010; Ghazal, Gul, Hanzala, Jessop, Tharani, 2014; Gul, Tharani., Lakhani, Rizvi, Ali, 2016; Dawson et al., 2019; Shute, 2008; Hattie, & Timperley, 2007; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Pecheone, 2010; Rini, & Purnawarman, 2019). The findings also support the claim that rubrics help teachers and learners in assessing their learning performance by understanding and integrating the element of quality (Reynolds-Keefer, 2010). Moreover, the findings confirm that rubrics help teachers and learners in aligning their assessments with learning outcomes and classroom activities (Ali, Yasmin, & Afzaal, 2020). Furthermore, the findings corroborate that rubrics help teachers and learners communicate and collaborate effectively about their progress and difficulties (William, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004).

However, the findings also reveal some challenges and gaps in the implementation and practice of rubrics in the Pakistani education system. The findings suggest that there is a lack of understanding and following the alternative methods of assessments that leads most Pakistani schools to follow the traditional grading system for both summative and formative assessments in both the public and private sectors (Zahid & Mansoor, 2020). The findings also indicate that there is a negative perception and attitude of the teachers toward using rubrics (Chileshe & Jacob, 2019) which also counts for their ineffective practice. The findings also imply that there is a lack of content and theory on rubrics in the syllabus of the prospective teachers which makes them unclear about its scope and impact (Akhtar, Hussain, & Ahmad, 2021). The findings also show that there is a lack of practice on rubrics during the degree program of the prospective teachers, which makes them unprepared and unskilled for designing and implementing teacher-made rubrics in their future classrooms. The findings also demonstrate that there is a lack of extra or additional information or practice rubrics for the teachers, which makes them unable to update and apply the

principles of assessment efficiently (Zahid & Mansoor, 2020).

Conclusion

There are a few limitations that could make the results of this study less reliable and less useful in the real world. This study used a qualitative research method and collected data from 15 participants from four universities who were chosen through a method called “purposive sampling.” Therefore, the problem is that only 15 people from four universities were chosen to take part in the study and this might not be how all prospective teachers in Pakistan feel or what they have done. Another problem is that there is no voice recording from the people who did not want to take part because they were worried about their privacy. This could have changed how accurate and full the data collected was.

The study found that using rubrics to grade had many benefits for both future teachers and their students, such as better grades, motivation, awareness, feedback, support, skillfulness, quality, time management, critical thinking, etc. The study also found that the implementation and use of rubrics in the Pakistani education system had some problems and gaps. For example, there was not enough information and theory about rubrics in the curriculum, there was not enough practice with rubrics during the degree Programme, the lead teachers were not prepared and skilled enough to teach and use rubrics during the degree Programme, and teachers did not have any extra information or practice with rubrics. The most important thing that this study adds is a thorough and in-depth understanding of how prospective teachers think about and have used rubrics as effective feedback for learning and assessment. The study also talks about the problems and gaps that need to be fixed to improve how rubrics are used and implemented in the Pakistani education system.

In conclusion, this study has shown that rubrics are useful tools for giving effective feedback for learning and assessment. However, there are still some problems and

gaps that need to be fixed before rubrics can be used and accepted more widely in Pakistani schools. The study also came up with some conclusions, recommendations, suggestions, and directions for making teaching and

learning with rubrics better and more effective. The study hopes that its results will add to what is already known about rubrics and lead to more research on this subject.

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