

## Teacher Perspicacity to Using Rubrics in Students' EFL Learning and Assessment

Vipin Sharma

*English Language Institute, Jazan University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Vipin Sharma; vipin\_parashar@yahoo.co.in

### ABSTRACT

There have been several researches going on about using rubrics to foster students' learning in writing context abetting their performance. But there is a dearth of studies on teacher perspicacity to students' rubric use in English as a foreign language context and fewer studies have investigated how teacher constructive approach affects rubric effectiveness endorsing student EFL learning and assessment. The paper reports the findings workshop-based inquiry into teachers' perception of using analytic rubric in students' EFL learning and self-assessment in writing context and the factors affecting its efficacy. The data was collected during the workshop on rubrics that included forty English teachers at Jazan University. Results showed that the rubric was employed professed as a handy evaluative and instructional tool for nurturing students' learning, self-assessment and self-regulation. The teacher should steer students consistently through meticulous planning, guidance, performance indicators and criteria, robust design, evaluation and feedback. The findings are discussed with reference to Saudi students' attitude to EFL and design features of rubrics. Propositions drawn invite attention for seminal use of rubrics in classroom and advance teachers' perspicacity to rubrics. Finally, it promotes students' autonomy, sense of pride and belonging to their work, self-regulation, peer evaluation, virtual learning milieu and efficacy.

**KEY WORDS:** EFL writing; rubric; self-assessment; teacher perspicacity

### INTRODUCTION

Begin with an adage 'Learning is from womb to tomb'; learning treated as a worldwide phenomenon for all mankind today, has taken a central stage in the most dynamic and vibrant academic scenario. This volatile milieu constitutes a triangle: student, teacher and environment, which needs prompt action to address students' problems. This study would strive constructively sort out the grave issues in writing skill using rubrics that develops and enhances students' learning and assessment through consistent supervision, standard criteria and feedback mechanism. The rubric design, evaluation principle and application of global standards have imposed immense challenges to EFL teachers to transform and take on new approach to contribute and affix utmost to students' language learning. Use of rubric both as an instructional and evaluation tools dictates well defined goals, robust-flexible design, key performance indicators and predetermined standards setting the tone for the effective teaching and learning. The effective use of rubric empowers and motivates the students to put in best in time to develop a sense of pride, belonging, autonomy and accountability on each practice rectifying the mistakes through elucidation of rubrics, guidance, feedback, self-reflection, and peer evaluation. Jonsson and Svingby (2007) stated that use of rubric in teaching facilitates student self and peer assessment, especially for aiding them to generate self and peer feedback. Besides, it also improves the efficiency of teachers' grading of student work, helping them justify the scores assigned to student performance (Andrade 2000).

It's a well-known fact that assessment multiplies learning. Each experience and each situation influence and add new dimensions to one's personality, learning and knowledge. Rubric being a novice concept has flourished mainly in this century, and there is a dearth of studies on rubrics (Andrade, Du and Wang 2008). This study underlines that rubric in general promotes and develops learning and knowledge. Andrade (2008) elaborated it in these three studies carried out on use of rubrics in writing skill: Andrade, 2001; Cohen, Lotan, Scarloss, Schultz & Abraham, 2002. No study has so far focused much on the teacher perspicacity to use of rubric on students' learning and assessment. Hence, a qualitative and quantitative research on teacher perspicacity and use of rubric on students' learning and assessment in academic writing has been embarked on. Research done in English as a foreign language contexts in Arab countries is also rare and hence how far the teacher of English as a foreign language could disseminate and help students acquaint themselves with the use of rubrics, has become a subject of significant study.

The Saudi Vision 2030 in 'learning for working' accentuates continue investing in education and training so that the young men and women are equipped to take up the jobs of the future. It also focuses on high quality, multi-faceted education, development of early childhood education, refinement of its national curriculum and training of teachers and educational leaders. (Sharma: 2018) In pursuit of this vision and improvement in writing skills, this study is a seminal attempt to explore the influence of teachers' perspicacity and use of rubrics on students' learning and assessment. The researcher first reviews preceding analogous works, passes through research objectives, methodology, data collection, analysis, discussion and finally concludes with some suggestions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of rubric has been a major area of interest in teaching, learning and assessment for about 30 years. Much has been written about rubric, its rationale for encouraging it, and its application for teaching and learning. The scholars have considered students' perspective on the use of rubric and found it instrumental in enhancing the quality of language learning, promoting students' autonomy and preparing individuals for life-long learning, finally transforming related to learning into a social activity. It also permits learners to make the best use of learning opportunities in and out of classroom context. We observed that teachers' voices have been largely unheard from such analyses, and little is actually known about what rubric, in fact, means to EFL teachers. It creates a significant gap between teachers' belief, their teaching style, and interest and how they seek to promote use of rubric in the context of EFL writing. This study has addressed this gap by examining what 'rubric' means to English teachers at Jazan University. Furthermore, these insights into teachers' belief have been used to intend and deliver teacher training development workshop on using rubric in students' learning and self-assessment under preparatory year academic development plan.

The use of rubric in learning has become a buzz component of learning today. It brings teacher, student and environment (socio-cultural) settings together to attain learning outcomes. In EFL context at Jazan University, a rubric is a measurement tool that describes the criteria used to evaluate a specific task i.e. student writing of paragraph, e-mail and poster, and oral presentation etc. Beginning its journey in the last century, use of rubric has broadened its scope and territory to a number of realms as noticed in several works (see Jonsson and Svingby 2007; Reddy and Andrade 2010; Panadero and Jonsson 2013; Brookhart and Chen 2015). Scholars differ in perceptions and constructs of rubric appropriate to their respective disciplines and levels of education. Rubrics are useful for teachers and learners because it is used as a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work and one that articulates gradations of quality for each criterion, from excellent to poor (Andrade 2000). The teacher conveys learning expectations to students to ensure uniformity and reliability in award of scores and grades. Rubric facilitates teacher and students in assessment and self-assessment in developing writing skill.

Assessment is assessing someone or something or the act of judging or deciding the value, quality, or importance of something and self-assessment is assessment or evaluation of oneself or one's actions, attitudes, or performance. Zimmerman (2000) defined it as self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals. Panadero (2011) calls self-assessment in learning as the qualitative assessment of learning process, and of its final product evaluated on the basis of pre-established criteria. It is a focal constituent of self-regulated learning (Panadero and Alonso-Tapia 2013) and, if used effectively, may enhance students' ability to assess their own work and eventually improve their self-regulated learning skills (Panadero, Jonsson, and Strijbos 2016).

Rubric is vital both as instructional and evaluation tools to impart and enhance learning by assessment and can be applied as both summative (evaluative) and formative (instructional) instruments (Andrade 2005; Jonsson and Svingby 2007). Rubric is not simply a checklist or just a checklist (Andrade 2005; Petkov and Petkov 2006) but a well-defined-designed rubric that covers all the elements contributing to students' better learning (Dunbar et al 2006; Truemper 2004).

Rubric constitutes key performance indicators required to develop specific skill. Besides the abovementioned tools, rubric has two categories of traits: analytical and multiple consisting of multiple, separate scales that provide a set of scores (Rezaei and Lovorn 2010; Dunbar et. al. 2006). This set of scores is characterized by three critical features: evaluative criteria, quality definitions of those criteria and a scoring strategy (Popham 1997; Reddy and Andrade 2010). Later, Brookhart (2013) described rubric as a coherent set of criteria for students' work that includes description of levels of performance quality of criteria. The concept of rubric is not only relevant to disciplines of science like algebra and biology (Schafer,

Swanson, Bené and Newberry 2001), but also to language skill acquisition (Lane and Tierney 2008; Sadler 2009).

Rubrics extensively used in assessment in academic milieu today face a swing from traditional mode of testing towards increasingly authentic tool of assessment of learning (Dochy, Gijbels, & Segers, 2006). Rubrics are not self-explanatory' and teachers need to explain them to students (Andrade 2005). Designing and using rubrics as assessment criteria in regular classes will not suffice unless shared and explained to the students well before actual learning commences in order to have a clear understanding of the learning goals and can plan their work correspondingly (Panadero and Alonso-Tapia 2013; Panadero, Johnson, and Strijbos 2016). Zimmerman and Moylan's (2009) cyclic model has three segments of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance and self-reflection. Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2013) elucidated these stages: the forethought phase allows students to analyze the task, use assessment criteria to set realistic goals for task performance and identify the strategies for task completion, the performance phase to use the criteria to monitor their works-in-progress and finally in self-reflection phase checking the learning product against the criteria. Mostly, the previous studies on rubrics covered students' perception and effects of scoring rubric on self-assessment of students' writing in other languages and Best (2009) found the transferability of scoring rubrics across different languages and claims that it is more successful when languages are similar but is less successful when the languages have marked differences.

Thus, the present study endeavors to widen its scope further and explores teachers' perceptions to using rubrics in Saudi students' EFL learning of writing skill and their assessment used in classroom. Specifically, the present study focuses only on perspicacity of teachers' use of rubrics to Saudi students' learning and assessment in writing context and attempts to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are teachers' perspectives on using rubrics as an instruction and evaluation tool?
- (2) Does the use of rubrics in teaching and assessment affect students' writing?
- (3) Does the use of rubrics induce a sense of pride and spirit of belonging in students' writings?
- (4) To what extent is the use of rubric appropriate in classroom context?
- (5) Is the use of rubrics effective on teachers' performance?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Collection**

The researcher followed mixed design approach (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007 & Brown, 2015) to ensure accuracy and reliability of responses. A workshop was conducted on 'Using rubrics in students'

EFL learning and assessment'. Total fifty-six teachers' had registered but only forty-eight teachers participated. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to collect data and responses by administering an objectives-based, well-designed and self-prepared questionnaire study prior literature (likert scale) and sought individual views in intense but constructive interactions where teachers were vocal and liberal to air their views on using rubrics for Saudi students' learning and assessment in regular practice in virtual and formal classroom settings. The writing performance scores were evaluated on five constructs: Title, Indent, Punctuation, Content and Organization (Appx. B) and later on two more of them as required. The responses have been sought as strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (DA) and strongly disagree (SDA). The teacher-centered approach of data collections prevents any ambiguity, misinterpretation and first-hand information ensuring its viability, reliability constructing "complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses" (Johnson et. al. 2007). The teachers presented their views on both Jacobs et al. (1981) ability bands and numerical scores utility used to evaluate students' writings. The researcher proposes and presents a concrete process of designing rubrics life cycle to be put in practice.

### **Data Analysis**

The closed questionnaire data were analyzed using percentile method. Descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages) was used for all questions. Inferential statistics was also used to examine relationships between variables and differences among them. The questions in the questionnaire and the discussion provided an initial structure within which specific answers could, then, be further categorized. The teachers participated were from Bangladesh, Hungary, India, Jordan, Pakistan, Sudan and Yaman. It includes 39 masters and 9 doctorates with over five years' experience of teaching of English as a foreign language. The open questionnaire responses during and after the workshop were categorized for qualitative analysis and accuracy of responses. Data analysis also involved a comparison of the questionnaire and discussion response data; facilitate to confirm particular response from two perspectives, to show both quantitative and qualitative findings with qualitative. It also endorses a constructive thought of why a teacher answered particular question in the ways he did.

## **RESULTS**

### **What are teachers' perspectives on using rubrics as an instruction and evaluation tool?**

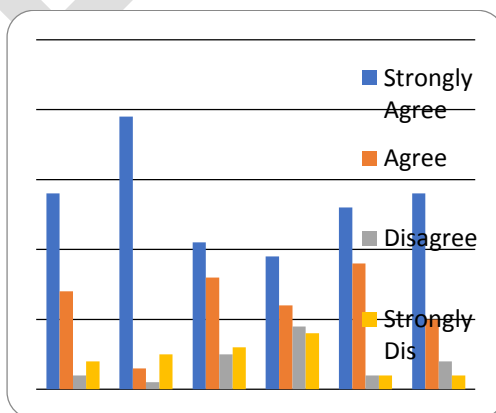
Teachers usually consider rubric as an evaluative tool and only a few teachers know that rubric is very useful instructional tool. The students concentrate more and follow rubrics explained to them meticulously in writings. The students get to know their slog area through consistent feedback and overcome with guidance, self-monitoring and peer evaluation. The students gain momentum, self-confidence and motivation when eventually improve upon in writing and start peer evaluation. The consequential outcomes

purely dedicate to teacher’s cognizant and deliberate instructions on the use of rubric. Schafer, Swanson, Bené and Newberry (2001) examined the effects of teacher knowledge of rubrics on students’ achievement in biology and algebra proved that when teachers clearly explain the expected achievement levels in their instruction it leads to higher performance on tests. Andrade, Du and Wang (2008) showed the effects of a scoring rubric on self-assessment of students’ writing.

The results show 87% of teachers believe that rubrics, if explained properly, would increase students’ interest in writing because students need help in understanding rubrics and their use which are not self-explanatory (Andrade 2005). The findings of the present study support this view. Around 76% of teachers (table & figure 1) opined that the rubric helps students in goal setting. But, 55% of teachers feel that thorough explanation and constant scaffolding and guidance given to the users of rubrics are necessary to bring positive outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment. Besides this, the teachers who were interviewed also claimed that students (especially the low achievers) do not show any interest in any novel practice like using rubrics for self-assessment unless they are specifically trained to do so.

**Table1:** Teachers’ perspectives on using rubrics as an instruction and evaluation tool

	SA	A	DA	SDA
A	58.33%	29%	4.17%	8.33%
B	81.25%	6%	2.08%	10.42%
C	43.75%	33%	10.42%	12.50%
D	29.17%	25%	29.17%	16.67%
E	54.17%	38%	4.17%	4.17%
F	58.3%	21%	8.3%	4.17%



**Figure 1:** Teachers’ perspectives on using rubrics as an instruction and evaluation tool.

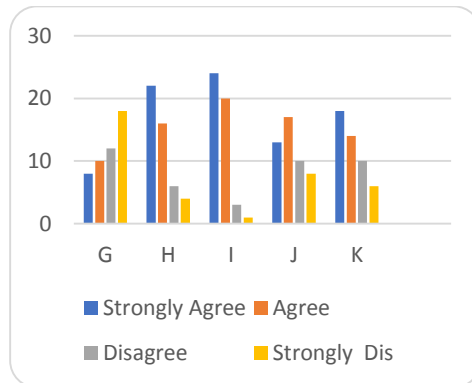
Post workshop results showed that the teachers (92%) used rubric extensively not only an evaluation tool but also as an instructional tool for nurturing the students' learning, self-assessment and self-regulation. Johnson and Svingby (2007) stress that effective design, understanding and competent use of rubrics is crucial, no matter they are used for high-stake or classroom assessments but, encounter a major problem is the maintenance of validity and reliability. A narrow perspective of rubrics as a tool for current teaching practice limits teachers' creativity in extending the possibilities of assessment for learning to improve the teaching and learning of authentic and analytic study.

**Does the use of rubric in teaching and assessment affect students' writing?**

The second question using rubric in teaching and assessment affect students' writing has been studied extensively using quasi-experimental design (e.g. Andrade and Boulay 2003; Andrade, Du, and Wang 2008; Andrade, Du, and Mycek 2010; Coe et al. 2011).

**Table 2:** The use of rubric in teaching and assessment affect students' writing

	SA	A	DA	SDA
G	16.67%	21%	25.00%	37.50%
H	45.83%	33%	12.50%	8.33%
I	50.00%	42%	6.25%	2.08%
J	27.08%	35%	20.83%	16.67%
K	37.50%	29%	20.83%	12.50%



**Figure 2:** The use of rubric in teaching and assessment affect students' writing

This has been further strengthened by Andrade, Du, and Mycek (2010), who concluded that using model-generated criteria in self-assessment brings improvement in students' writing scores. But, the current study (table 2 & fig. 2) shows that only 38% of teachers agreed that the students hardly take interest in novel practices and around 66% of teachers feel that the rubric develops students' critical thinking and helps create their goals and objectives. While the revised rubric can continue to be fine-tuned, this study describes how we developed an ongoing rubric analysis, something that we recommend to be developed more regularly in other contexts; speaking, reading etc. that use high-stakes performance assessment. Based on the current research, a rubric life-cycle design has been proposed in this study that can be referred to or followed as a guide by the teachers to design the rubric to cater to students' demand for efficient and effective teaching-learning and assessment.

The previous studies showed the effects of rubric use on student self-regulation, motivation, self-efficacy and self-grading accuracy (e.g. Andrade et al. 2009; Panadero, Tapia, and Huertas 2012; Panadero and Romero 2014; Wollenschläger et al. 2016). The optimum use of well-designed, well-instructed, supervised, guided rubric followed by instant feedback resulted in more improvements in students' performance, motivation, self-regulation and self-grading accuracy. (Wollenschlager et al. 2016).

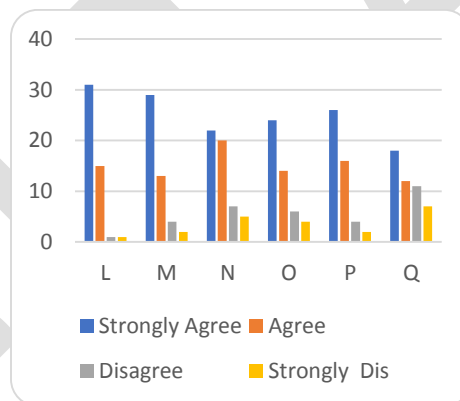
#### **Does the use of rubric induce a sense of pride and spirit of belonging in students for their writings?**

The fact that the use of rubric induces a sense of pride and spirit of belonging in students for their writings is endorsed by Jaidev (2011). He advocates that knowledge of writing rubrics also helps students become more accountable for their own writing, and it allows them to gain a greater sense of ownership of what they have written. In table 3, the most teachers (97%) accepted that the rubric makes student motivated and more focused and 88% support that the students learn independently. The students gain confidence and develop a healthy spirit of participation and coordination through peer evaluation and reflect upon their flaws in writings to prevent reoccurrence in future. 79% of teachers have agreed that rubric facilitates better work and instills a spirit of self-esteem, self-recognition and self-belief of the quality of work. 87% of teachers have revealed that it helps the learners identify their own strengths, weaknesses and needs and 62% declared that learners go beyond the classroom and make links between what they learn in class and the outside world.



**Table 3:** Use of rubric induce a sense of pride and spirit of belonging in students for their writings

	SA	A	DA	SDA
L	65.9%	31%	2.1%	2.1%
M	60.4%	27%	8.3%	4.2%
N	45.8%	42%	14.6%	10.4%
O	50%	29%	12.50%	8.5%
P	54.2%	33%	8.3%	4.2%
Q	37.5%	25%	23%	14.5%



**Figure 3:** Use of rubric induce a sense of pride and spirit of belonging in students for their writings

But the researcher differs with Sundeen’s view (2014) that both explicit instruction in teaching students about a rubric’s elements and simply giving them the rubric had the same effects on their writing performance. But, it is found that the students better comprehend, focus, perform and become more confident and motivated when rubrics better explained. Andrade et al. (2008) also established that students’ self-assessment using a rubric leads to improvement in writing.

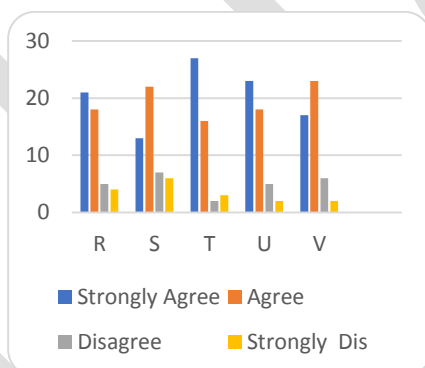
The onus rests on the teacher to evolve and design rubric on students’ prior knowledge on writing skills to develop a standard and criteria at par international standards. Scrupulous and conscious explanation with consistent guidance and feedback to students on rubric preceding and during its use are indispensable to bring the desired outcomes in triangle: teaching, learning and assessment.

### To what extent is the use of rubric appropriate in classroom context?

Rubric is not a complete notion. There are different scales of rubrics, and the extent to which it is practicable and useful for language learners to embrace rubrics will depend on factors to do with the level, prior knowledge, interest of the learner, their goals in learning second/foreign language, teachers' perspicacity, language and the cultural context within which the learning takes place. The teachers deliberated on the scope of its use and highlighted a range of factors that limited the extent to which they (83%) were able to encourage the use of rubrics in writing. These related to a triangle: learners, the classroom and teachers.

**Table 4:** To extent the use of rubric is appropriate in classroom context

	SA	A	DA	SDA
R	43.75%	38%	10.42%	8.33%
S	27.08%	46%	14.58%	12.5%
T	56.25%	33%	10.42%	4.17%
U	47.92%	38%	10.42%	4.17%
V	35.42%	48%	12.5%	4.17%



**Figure 4:** To extent the use of rubric is appropriate in classroom context

Most of the teachers have identified several adverse factors: limited learner proficiency in English, lack of previous knowledge of foreign language, predetermined curriculum, learner dependence on the teacher, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, learners' main focus on passing tests, lack of learner ability to utilize available resources, lack of teacher autonomy and teachers' limited expectations of what learners can achieve limit its extent. But 73% of teachers feel that an overreliance on rubrics may foster an instrumental attitude towards it and 89% of teachers believe that overuse of rubrics lessens students' original (inner) writing skill and creativity. A total 86% of teachers declared that it is similar to the extent the rubric is applicable to the assessment of other genres of EFL writing and 83% believe the quality of his

work result ample opportunities ahead to learn and excel. They also opine that learners at PYD do not understand the importance and need of developing writing skill and learning it independently.

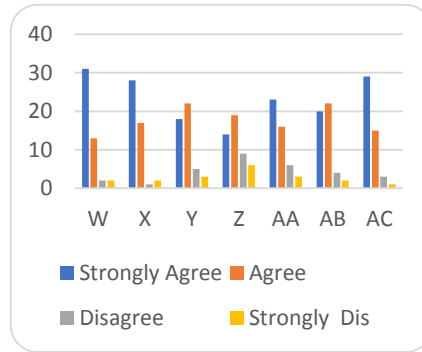
On the basis of discussion above, we have outlined a rubric life-cycle which would perhaps be feasible and have practical potential to develop various skills in academic milieu at learning centers.

**Does the use rubric have any effect on teachers’ performance?**

The majority of the teachers (93%) in Table 5 and fig. 5 believe that the use of rubric improves their efficiency of grading students’ work and facilitates goal-setting and planning. They promote use of rubrics in their classroom teaching. Most (83%) say rubric helps justify the scores assigned to student performance, 69% feel gain insight into a framework for developing writing skills and 80% favor saving time in evaluation process. It also helps in making changes in design on feedback (87%) and 93% of teachers consider easy to deal diverse students and heterogeneous classes. Their descriptions of how they did so highlight a range of rubric designs from basic to advance, formative to summative, and awareness-raising to independent formal/ informal cultural context language learning activities. Panadero and Romero (2014) found that rubric use promoted pre-service teachers’ use of learning strategies, performance and self-grading accuracy. Stevens and Levi (2005) see the rubric as a translator device to gain a level playing field in the learning activity.

**Table 5:** Use rubric have any effect on teachers’ performance

	SA	A	DA	SDA
W	64.58%	27%	4.17%	4.17%
X	58.33%	35%	2.08%	4.17%
Y	37.50%	46%	10.42%	6.25%
Z	29.17%	40%	18.75%	12.50%
AA	47.92%	33%	12.50%	6.25%
AB	41.67%	46%	8.33%	4.17%
AC	60.42%	31%	6.25%	2.08%

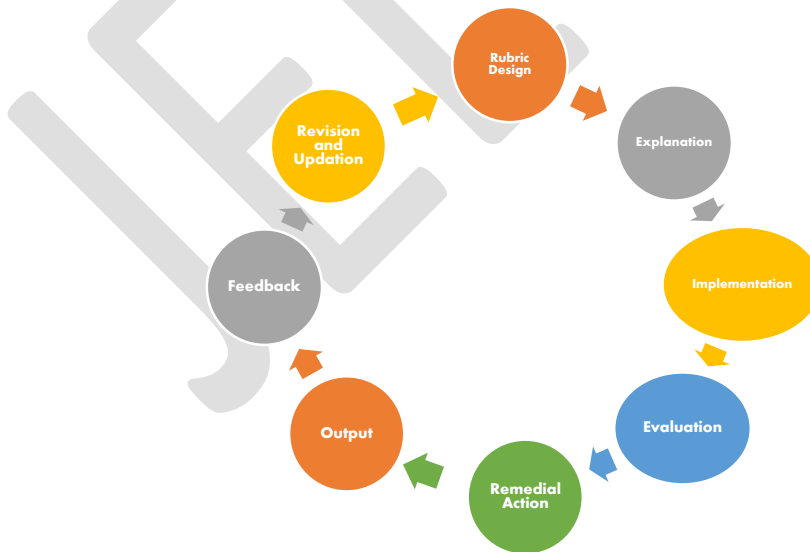


**Figure 5:** Use rubric have any effect on teachers' performance

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Rubric's Life Cycle

The proposed cycle is an offshoot of the workshop highlights and bridges the gap between teachers' theoretical and reported classroom practices about using rubrics. It further adds to existing concerns in the academic literature that rubric is a notion around which theoretical ideals and pedagogical realities may not always coincide. Although the research is predominantly learner-oriented in its focus, there are also some interesting qualitative insights into the work of teachers seeking to promote rubric in their classroom teaching and students using in virtual classroom.



**Figure 6:** Rubric Life-cycle

This will assist teacher to prepare rubrics on students prior study skills, develop and modify it progressively eventually, ease teachers avoid over-dependence for their learning. This will, therefore, equip

not only teachers but also endow students with the skills and techniques which will enable them nurture more independence, convinced, self-governed and autonomous to become effective learners. Andrade (2005) shows that rubric if carefully designed, helps students to understand the goal of an assignment and support teachers in unbiased grading, giving feedback and assigning more challenging work to students.

### **Conclusion**

The study included only male participants and hence the influence of gender could not be gauged. The teachers gave their opinions on students' performance measured on writing skills. Some criticisms of the use of rubric are with regard to 'validity, reliability and fairness' particularly in relation to students in view of a lack of empirical evidence to support. The study finds the need for further development of the scope and scales in the questionnaire through which teachers' perspicacity about different orientations to rubric were assessed. Further, it did not observe teachers' classroom practices and for this reason had to rely on their responses during the workshop. The number of respondents, too, was not as high as expected. Despite all these, the study is methodically sound, that the instruments and rubric-life-cycle we developed provide the basis for further research of this kind, and that the findings will be of general interest in the field of FL learning.

At the outset, the researcher has shed light on rubrics' definitions, its role and importance to students' self-assessment in writing. The need and value of instructional rubrics in teaching, learning and assessment has also been highlighted. In conclusion, the use of rubric has improved students' writing and establishes the objectives of the research. This assures that the use of rubric may be fruitful, by making students more aware of its utility and why they are using rubric in their writing skill. Another argument in favor of using rubric is that it not only helps teachers but also gives students the mechanism to be more self-directed, autonomous and independent learner. Results have shown that the students by and by, become more accountable for their own writing, gain a greater sense of autonomy and ownership for their learning, become aware of for their own learning goals and taking absolute control of their learning at all places achieving goals efficiently and effectively. The Use of Rubric in students' self-assessment indubitably could still be "a fig-leaf for a transition" in the years ahead to improve students' writing performance. In time, this would absolutely empower the youth to participate and stand at par with international community in diverse milieus to excel globally their requisite to accomplish the Saudi Vision 2030. The researcher recommends that the teachers should collaboratively design a new training manual based on samples of writing of students in question and their feedback. The study opens boulevards for more research and workshop on rubric applied to other subjects including language skills of speaking, reading and listening.

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