

The Use of Rubrics in Creative Writing

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Abstract: *The rubrics are developed as a tool for the standardization of the students' writing tasks' performance. The application of this tool should be based on the idea of complementation of the instructions with the understandable description of the performance expectations. The application for APA format in this regard is a good practice for development of professional language among students and decrease of plagiarism through the proper referencing. The impact of diversity on the application of the rubric suggests the importance of the age, language, and culture in their development. The effective rubrics should incorporate the demands of diversity and emphasize on the supportive role of rubrics in writing instead of grading one. Finally, their development should contribute to the goals of the task and reflect the expectations toward performance, suggesting that rubrics can be used for the acknowledgment of the knowledge level or for providing the thoughtful feedback directed on writing and understanding improvement.*

Keywords: rubrics, assessment, creative writing

1. Introduction

The application of rubrics is a huge step forward to the development of the objective assessment of the student's work and of their subject understanding, thinking skills, and the ability to make judgments. The term itself refers to a method of standardization in the assessment of individuals, their skills, and qualities. There are two types of rubrics, holistic and analytic, that reflect the number of criteria in assessing the students' performance. The effectiveness of the application of each type depends on age, sphere, and purpose of the assessment. Furthermore, the application of publication styles like the American Psychological Association (APA), that decreases the plagiarism with the implementation of the proper references, alludes the incorporation of the style criteria in an overall rubric, standardizing the form of the student's answer. However, this activity itself appears to be a source of discussion regarding the implementation of the rubric. The other side of the discussion is related to the efficacy of rubrics for students assessment, emphasizing the ideological impact and social trends, that shape the values according to which the assessment is maintained. Accordingly, it should be stated that rubrics is a tool and the way how this tool can be applied depends on the professionalism of each specific educator.

2. Literature Review

The issue with exact measurement and judgment by ascertained facts had become a theme of discussion at the beginning of the 20th century, reflecting the changes in society and new paradigms in education. The previous methods of evaluation were significantly based on personal opinion, which is a form of subjectivity [16] (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). On the way of psychometrics, and overall standardization of the human assessment, the popularity of the writing scales application has risen. Therefore, the early form of rubrics, the writing scales, were developed to decrease the impact of the human factor of a teacher's subjectivity in the student's assessment and to provide the "numerical expression of their skills", knowledge, and understanding [16] (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). The state-imposed scales still exist and are applied to assess the

overall writing skills of students, rather than their real knowledge. The opposite side of the implementation of such scales is in their adoption by teachers in an attempt to fix the way the students express their thoughts and to unify a language of their expression [8] (Greve, Morris, & Huot, 2018). The development of rubrics has led to the standardization of scoring of students' performance that ought to make possible the comparison of the knowledge and skills across populations.

Infact, the standardization as a component of a rubric is important and should be applied; however, the prescriptive nature of results and their impact on the development of self-image and attitude toward learning can be devastating. Accordingly, the constructivist classroom ideology suggests that students should come to their own meanings instead of being pushed to some external vision of the situation that can be represented in the form of usual application of rubric [3] (Bradford, Newland, Rule & Montgomery, 2016). Instead, the descriptive rubrics as a form of guidance can significantly increase the subject's understanding and promote the rethinking and thoughts organization. In this regard, the application of the writing styles is an important step by involving students in communication using the scientifically acceptable language. Therefore, the application of the APA style is one of the best solutions, suggesting both the easy citation format and formal standards of language use. The application of APA in essay writing simplifies the creation of rubrics, implementing the demands toward structure, and standardizes the evaluation of the writing language and paper structure.

However, the application of the APA style can be ineffective due to the age of the student, suggesting that there are specific requirements toward rubrics based on the students' abilities and motivation. The use of rubrics should consider the psychological characteristics of the students' age, assuming that children do not have the same understanding of the importance of the order of information expression that the adolescents and young adults have [12] (Mandernach, Zafonte & Taylor, 2016). Simultaneously, the impact of the second language should also be considered due to its effect on the writing strategies.

3. Types of Rubrics

The typology of rubrics differs depending on the sphere of application and role in assessment. The most common classification of rubrics utilizes the diversity, based on the number of categories on which the evaluation is based. In this regard, the main two groups are analytic and holistic rubrics. The first one refers to multiple criteria that are spread between two dimensions that form a table. The rows in this table refer to the names of criteria, and the columns represent the level of the criteria fulfillment with the mark that correlates with it. This type of rubrics supports the evaluation of the different sides of writing, simultaneously highlighting the strong and weak sides. In contrast, the holistic rubrics have only one criterion of the level of performance, suggesting that each specific demand refers only to the constation of the successfulness of fulfillment. The best application of this type of rubrics is in a case when there are no objective answers, and the main focus is on the overall quality of the paper and on proficiency and understanding of a topic.

The other typology suggests that rubrics can be distinguished based on obligatory and descriptive and guidelines. The first category assumes that rubric installs certain expectations toward the quality and content of a writing, avoiding the explanation of what should be incorporated for the achievement of the best mark. This is a case of essays that can help students express their own thoughts in a frame of the limitations installed by a teacher. The second category provides both the expectations toward quality and the descriptions of criteria of the good mark. This is the usual form of the rubric implementation when there is a certain criterion of the task performance and the variation of factors that should be achieved to meet the requirement of the grade. The third type adds to the previously mentioned categories the instructions of how the mentioned criteria can be achieved. The application of guiding rubrics is especially important when the task assumes that student will have to come to certain conclusions during the research and writing.

4. Rubric in Essay Writing

Content

The assessment of the content in essay writing is an important part of the overall students' performance scoring, and it assumes the application of certain criteria. On the one hand, the digitalization of the content assessment has reached the new heights using the big data methods and applying the theoretical frameworks of different approaches from McClelland's to Pennebaker's algorithm of Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). These assessment methods have made it possible to estimate the content of the paper by searching the keywords and establishing the context of their use [15] (Stemler, 2015). On the other hand, the application of the machine learning and big data to the assessment of the content in such creative work as essay writing is understudied and lacks the validation. There is a high possibility that the author's perspective of the information expression can be underestimated by the algorithm, and the importance of the unique ideas will be neglected. Therefore, the digitalization

of the content analysis estimates a significant standardization that ignores anything that goes beyond the implemented mechanisms.

The application of the rubrics for the assessment of the content of an essay assumes the development of the strict and task-related criteria. However, this approach suggests a high responsibility for the personal position of the educator toward the written information. For instance, if the paper is about an arguable topic, in which the student defends the position opposite to the one the teacher has, the conflict of opinions can affect the quality of the content assessment. In this regard, the impact of ideology and social trends plays a significant role, affecting the perception of answers. However, this issue can be avoided if the rubric will be developed in such a way that there will not be any equivocation in interpretation and expectations toward the content [9] (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). Such rubric can decrease creativity and thoughtfulness of the essay, which according to the idea of the constructivists' approach will violate the student's originality.

Structure

There are different approaches toward the structure of the students' writing that are used in grading rubrics, but the majority of them depend on the type of assignment. This paper narrows the type to an essay, which applies the frame of Introduction, Body, and Conclusion (IBC) structure. The development of structure should include answering the main questions of the expressed idea. The first question that should be answered is what the paper is about? This question leads to the creation of the introduction that should end with a strong thesis statement [9] (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). The thesis statement should incorporate the main idea of the whole essay. The second question is "what?", and integrate the beginning of the body part in which the information about the object of the essay will be expressed. This part can incorporate the literature review on the topic and the evidence in support or rejection of the idea. Logically, the second question will be "how?", reflecting the way the arguments can withstand the opposite position and rejections. The next question that will conclude the body part will be "why?", addressing the value of the paper and the importance of it [7] (Ene & Kosobucki, 2016). The conclusion part only summarizes the mentioned ideas and does not provide any new interpretations or views.

The application of such a structure in rubrics assumes that IBC should be incorporated with the explanation and guidance. There can be an additional requirement regarding structure like transition sentences and writing tone, assuming integration of the ideas in the holistic thought expression [9] (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). In this regard, the application of formatting styles performs an important role. The integration of the structure demands and writing style is needed for the coherent reflection of the ideas. Furthermore, the part of the structure that is dedicated to the references should be used in relation to style guidelines to provide proper information about the literature sources exploit.

Citation Style Application

The application of the citation style in rubrics should provide a simple writing style that can be plagiarism-free due

to the proper in-text citations and references use. The rubric itself can increase the students' understanding of the purpose of the writing assignments and support while learning the subject through the available components that are checked. With the goal of unification of the writing language and style, the students perform their tasks in when the application of certain templates becomes an important part of the standardization of the assessment [14] (Stellmack, Konheim-Kalkstein, Manor, Massey & Schmitz, 2009). In this regard, the main emphasis should be done on the easiest style, which has a common application. The best solutions for this purpose are APA, MLA, and Harvard style, providing the balanced demands toward structure and citations use. Among the mentioned styles, the APA can be assumed as the best choice for the grading rubric due to easy formatting, referencing, and especially developed language guidelines for the written text that can support students in avoiding the impolite words.

The application of the APA as a part of rubrics assumes the positioning of this writing style as part of demands toward the paper references or the content. In the first case, the evaluation component can be based on assessing only the proper citation and references use, which should support avoiding plagiarism. In the second one, the application of the APA as a style of the content assumes the implementation of special language, which should refer to the goal of assignment [14] (Stellmack et al., 2009). For instance, the application of APA style as part of rubric related to content in writing a formal reflective essay suggests that the entry will be assessed regarding the complexity of speech and avoidance of personalization.

The issue with an APA formatting is a common problem among scientists' articles, where the majority of the mistakes are related to the inappropriate references. Therefore, the implementation of this style in rubrics is an important step forward to education and eliminating the mistakes in the scientific literature. In this regard, the implementation of the APA teaching strategies should be incorporated in the overall education program. The best practices in the use of APA styles in rubrics assume the writing program of learning the basics of APA and its sphere of application, the installation in rubrics the links to sources or manuals that can be read for familiarization, and the direct APA template sharing [12] (Mandernach et al, 2016). The application of all these strategies will result in an understanding of APA style and in the proper use of it in writing tasks.

Effectiveness of Rubrics

The application of writing styles and the precise structure of the essay do not ensure the effective use of rubrics. The adequate implementation of the rubric is based on the understanding of the components of the subject that should be evaluated. Therefore, the criteria and performance scale description play an important role while acting as a part of the communication chain between the educator and student, enhancing the self-assessment and feedback acquisition. The two main issues that negatively affect the reliability of rubrics are the clarity of the rubric itself and investments in its design [4] (Brookhart & Chen, 2015). If the first course is based only on one category, the second incorporates

all implemented efforts, resources, and evaluations, applied to create the design of the rubric. The clarity of the assessment scale and descriptions are based on the precise and detailed characterization of what is expected from the student's work. One can argue that the excessive detailing can be harmful to the students' creativity, but the truth is that it makes the evaluation component clearer and directs the efforts of the student on the right track.

The resources spent on the design of rubrics significantly predict the effectiveness of the design and its overall validity in the assessment of students' performance. Therefore, it should be stressed that rubrics are good in the evaluation of groups, but their effectiveness in the evaluation of the personal level of knowledge of a specific student remains arguable. However, due to lack of studies, the issue of the validity and reliability of rubrics in assessing the big groups is currently under-researched [4] (Brookhart & Chen, 2015). Thus, the estimation using rubrics provides important and useful data that should be included in the overall grading of the course and be complemented with information from other sources like testing. Therefore, the development of rubrics is an important task that incorporates the feedback exchange with the possibility of the improvement, related to the individual differences in perception of the task and its meaning. If rubrics are created with violation of these criteria, there is a high possibility of their misuse.

Use and Misuse of Rubrics

The main reason why the rubrics can be misused is in their abuse and application for student's grading but not toward the enhancement of their understanding. The misuse in this regard is a complex phenomenon of extensive implementation of rubrics in all possible spheres. The application of rubrics for the development of an accurate and reliable scoring system leads to summative thinking with the ultimate goal of grading the students' performance [8] (Greve, Morris, & Huot, 2018). The rubrics abuse is a widely spread phenomenon that is based on the demands of contemporary society toward the standardization of the assessment. However, the misuse of rubrics leads to the exclusion of students from the educational process and to narrowing their participation in memorization and implementation of the educator's thoughts on their work [13] (Overmeyer, 2009). Creativity and personal insights are ignored in such a case. Moreover, the personality and opinion of a teacher in such a setting can cast a shadow on students' motivation and become a cause of a decrease in their interest in education. Finally, the diversity between the demands toward grades can be unreasonably high, depending on the attitude toward the competencies that the A-level student has to show.

In contrast, the proper application of rubrics is based on the involvement of students in the process of their development and reorientation from the grading to the explanatory purpose. The rubrics ought to complement the instructions, increasing their comprehensibility, directing the students' efforts toward the fulfillment of the objectives of a course [13] (Overmeyer, 2009). Therefore, the involvement of students in the process of rubrics development becomes a vital step toward their better understanding of the demands of the course and the achievements that should be

accomplished. Furthermore, the explanation of the instructions during the creation of rubrics provides students with a frame, in which their scale of criteria is developed. Finally, the educator's obligation is to justify the correlation between the points and the demands toward their acquisition for the students [8] (Greve, Morris, & Huot, 2018). The students' feedback can be a crucial indicator of their perception of assessment fairness. Their diversity can significantly impact the effectiveness of the implementation of the rubric and the possible ideas toward the criteria.

Diversity-Related Rubrics Application

The use of rubrics should consider the diversity of class and the traits of students, utilizing the different approaches toward the application. The main aspects that should be highlighted are cultural, age, and lingual diversity, that affect the students' perception of the rubrics' criteria and their role in grading. The cultural diversity is related to the paradigm of the multicultural classroom and that there can be a different attitude toward the same phenomenon that is related to the students' background. The age diversity suggests that the developmental stages should be accounted for the creation of such rubrics that will match the students' abilities and motivation. Finally, the lingual diversity assumes that some of the students can be of other languages and that the instructions and the criteria should be developed to support their learning. The in-depth analyses of the mentioned factors can contribute to a better understanding of how rubrics can be complementary to diversity.

Culture

The multiculturalism applies the two main paradigms regarding the creation of the rubric. The first paradigm states that the cultural background should be neglected to equalize everyone and ignore any differences. It emphasizes that there should be no impact on the development of the rubric and that students should be treated based on their background. Such an approach is ineffective since it does not include the significant information that the other culture can share and the experience they have [1] (Bal & Trainor, 2016). Moreover, it decreases the intercultural competency of students. Therefore, this approach is not the best solution. The other paradigm suggests that any culture is important and should be incorporated into the educational process as a valuable source of information. In this regard, it is important to involve students from other cultures in the development of the criteria of rubrics to express different views on the same phenomenon and to develop effective grading. Simultaneously, the culture of students should be tolerated in the form of feedback they will get from the teacher, suggesting that the educator should ask about how the tasks are performed in their culture. For instance, the Japanese culture suggests that there can be no discussions between student and supervisor, which is perceived as a form of rude behavior [6] (Donahue, 1998).

Language

The lingual diversity is a significant challenge toward the development of rubrics especially when it comes to the way of thoughts expression. From one side, there is an idea that there should be only one language of the expression of thought in the classroom, and it should be English. This idea

is supported by the suggestion that the English-speaking students will not understand the dialects and unfamiliar language, which will confuse them. This standpoint is confuted by [5] Conference on English Education (2016), where the opposite idea of the importance of the dialects and other languages in education was expressed, which raise the multicultural competencies of students, encourages them to learn a second language, and motivates them to preserve the dialect, increasing the cultural diversity of the society. From the other side, the opposite idea is that the native language and dialect should be preserved and the thoughts should be expressed in such a way that satisfies the students' lingual background [2] (Behizadeh, 2017). The above-mentioned position casts limitations on rubrics' criteria narrowing them to a descriptive one, transforming them into a form of explanations toward the performance. Simultaneously, such kind of rubrics is the most contributive to the students' talents development, decreasing the standardization component, and reliability as a derivative, in favor of freedom of thought expression.

Age

Whereas the application of rubrics assumes self-assessment as a component of correspondence to the instructions, the age performs an important role affecting this factor. Therefore, it is important to mention that self-assessment appears as a category only in the early childhood, but on this stage, it is egocentric and rather refers to correspondence to socially accepted norms [17] (Whaley, Cate, Dell, Vinh & Neitzel, 2017). There is no understanding of why the action is acceptable or not, but only following the instructions. Accordingly, the implementation of rubrics for this age assumes the explanation of why the rubrics are important and how the tasks should be assessed when the task is performed.

The self-assessment in puberty is significantly based on the emotional component related to the egocentric worldview. The effectiveness of rubrics is arguable due to the fact that any rules can cause a pubertal revolt. Therefore, the role of the educator is more important than the quality of rubrics itself, suggesting that the previously built relations will contribute to the understanding of the task and development of the objective self-assessment. Finally, in young adulthood, the self-assessment as a component of consciousness is already developed and is enriched with the previous experience [11] (Lynch, 2017). It contributes to the creation of the understanding of the rubrics importance and their correspondence with the goals of education. On this stage, the involvement of students in rubrics development performs an important role, providing both sides with needed feedback on task performance.

Rubric Development

The first and the most important step in the preparation for the development of rubric incorporates the assessment of the task, for which it is ought to be created. On this stage, it is important to understand what is the final goal of the task and who is the subject of an assessment – individual or a group. If the application of rubrics for task instructions is justified, it would be important to choose the type of rubrics. In this regard, the application of rubrics is related to the final goal of the assessment [10] (Kind, 2019). If the rubrics are ought

to support in providing thoughtful feedback– the application of analytical type would be the best solution. In contrast, if the goal was to acknowledge the level of students' familiarization with the subject, the application of holistic type would contribute most notably. After the type of rubrics was chosen, the following step assumes the development of the benchmarks, according to which the task should be performed.

The development of criteria suggests their correspondence with the instructions and course materials and should be developed in cooperation with students to enhance their understanding of the demands toward their performance. It is important to mention that criteria should be assessable and objective to avoid the impact of the educator's personal position on the paper assessment. It is important to divide the factors into three main types [10] (Kind, 2019). The structure-related criteria should outline the demands toward the paper structure, while the benchmarks toward the style should contribute to the assessment of the paper correspondence to the chosen writing style. Finally, the third type of criteria is related to the content of the paper and assumes that the expressed thoughts should reflect a certain position or milestones, which together express the students' understanding of the topic. If the factors are chosen and applied, the all needed templates and guidelines should be given to provide students with a thoughtful understanding of how they should perform their task.

The final stage of the rubrics development is the creation of the assessment scale. In the case of holistic rubrics, the assessment scale is rather declarative, suggesting the acknowledgment of the fact that the answer is correct or incorrect. Such a scale should be used only if there are no expectations toward the feedback and writing improvement [10] (Kind, 2019). In contrast, the multiracial scale of analytical rubrics assumes the different grades according to the quality of performance. The application of analytical rubrics suggests that the grades diversity should be justified and that the impact of each criterion on the acquisition of it is outlined before the assessment. This grading type is better for the development of students' thinking and writing skills due to the possibility of providing thoughtful feedbacks.

5. Conclusion

A rubric is a tool that is created for the standardization of assessment of the students' writing tasks performance. The way how this tool can be applied depends on the professionalism of each educator. Due to a short history of development and constant discussions about the implementation of the rubric, it can be stated that this tool is understudied and should be evaluated precisely to reflect the objective position in terms of its effective implementation. There are two types of rubrics, and the implementation of each of them is related to the goals of a course and of a specific task. Furthermore, there is an impact of diversity on rubrics use, which is based on a certain cultural, age, and language aspect. Therefore, the application of rubrics should address them to be accurate and fairly used. In this regard, the effective rubric should be instructions focused and explanation oriented rather than grading students' performance. The application of APA style in rubrics is a

step toward such a goal, creating the common way of thoughts expression and decreasing plagiarism through proper referencing. Finally, the development of rubrics should incorporate all of the mentioned aspects to provide the most effective and reliable grading system.

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