

Use of Rubrics in Developing Learners' English Language Writing Performances: An Analysis

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Abstract: *In this technically smart and digital world the learners of English language have almost forgotten writing in general and the crucial aspects of writing in particular. In other words, the aspects that make any written text ideal have been neglected. Moreover, the learners' written scripts have been evaluated in a conventional manner without edifying them as to how the scores are given to their written text such as assignments, essays, the answers to the questions asked in the exams, or any other script that is evaluated or graded based on the performance. Introducing a rubric at the initial level of any writing skill assessment, especially of the professional students' assessment gives productive outcomes. Rubrics will help the learners know the areas of any written text that are taken into consideration before the allocation of grades or scores to the text submitted for evaluation. If the rubric is provided primarily to the assignment, it will make certain modifications in the presentation of ideas and also help learners pay attention to organize the script in an acceptable manner reaching the expectations of the evaluator. This paper focuses on the types and benefits of rubrics and provides a short analysis of the improvements noted in the writing performances of a group of selected engineering graduates who were given a topic for writing an essay and evaluated through pre-rubric and post rubric basis.*

Key Words: *Writing skills – Rubrics – holistic rubric – analytic rubric - writing performances.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Confusion is always seen between the students' and the teachers' communities in relation to the grading and evaluation of a written script. Most students fail to reach the teacher's expectations whenever they have to write assignments, exams or any other kind of writing practices that require evaluation. If a student is asked to write a paragraph on a certain topic under essay writing competition, the student writes to his ability by concentrating only on the content but the teacher gives him less grade contrary to his expectations. Here the teacher's expectations from the text are crucial; unfortunately, those expectations are indefinite to the student. Thus the student gets a less grade after the evaluation of his script. While writing the script the student concentrates on the content and neglects the structure, grammar and other elements of a text but the teacher expects those aspects besides the content in the text. This confusion results in disappointment in the minds of the learners. This type of traditional evaluation of students' writing skills is a subjective practice of evaluation and makes the students confused. The feedback which is given to the learners often reveals what they failed to do, instead of what they did well in the text that is presented for evaluation (Townsend, Fu, & Lamme, 1997). There must be a bridge between the teachers' expectations and the students' presentation of ideas in relation to writing and evaluating an assignment, an exam or any other written script. Rubrics are used to help the students write any script reaching out to the evaluator's expectations. It also helps the learner know what is important in a written script.

2. RUBRICS:

A rubric is a guide consisting of a list of specific principles for grading or evaluating or scoring academic assignments (Merriam-Webster). Rubrics are basically designed as a matrix that carries presentation levels and broad criteria in horizontal and vertical axes. Each cell in the matrix gives a particular description of the criteria. Generally, a customary rubric contains a point-based scale of assessment of the text. High scores are given to the best presentation of the text that carries the expectations of the evaluator. The top scores are 4, 5, or 6 and the lowest scores are 0 or 1. The teacher has to clearly specify what is required at each level of the presentation of the data in a rubric through simple and apparent language. When the student presents his opinion, explanation or the idea by following the rubrics, the teacher gives scores for the performance level (Jochum, Curran, & Reetz, 1998).

The construction of rubrics can be characterized to be holistic or analytical, based on the varied approaches that are followed by the evaluator. A rubric can be built on the task from the perception of describing the essential aspects of the text (Huba and Freed, 2000; Arter and McTighe, 2001). A rubric designer can approach the task with a clear initiative of the preferred students' learning outcomes not even considering the recommended approach of creating a rubric (Luft, 1999) and importantly it should have a clear picture of what meeting each outcome looks like. If this picture

stays ambiguous, then the outcome is not noticeable or assessable and finally, the rubric is considered unworthy (Luft,1999; Bresciani *et al.*, 2004).

2.1 HOLISTIC RUBRIC

A holistic rubric is a general kind rubric; it lists three to five levels of performance with an extensive description of the attributes. This rubric can be labelled with numbers from 1 to 4 or 5 or letters from A to D or E. The advantage of a holistic rubric is that it is easy to make and it takes less time for preparation; it is easier and faster to grade the performances. The whole assignment can be given an overall grade or score; the only disadvantage with the holistic rubric is that it does not provide the targeted feedback in profound manner. A model holistic rubric is created for the evaluation of an essay writing test.

| Score | Description |
|-------|--|
| 4 | The topic is perfectly presented, presented the expected points clearly, the language and tone are apt, examples are given wherever necessary |
| 3 | The topic is rightly presented, some key points are presented, the language and tone are good, some examples are given |
| 2 | The topic is poorly presented, some points are unclear and carelessly presented, examples are not fitting |
| 1 | The topic is badly presented, most of the points are unclear and carelessly presented, examples are not fitting or no examples are given or bad presentation |

Table 1 Example-Holistic rubric

The given 4 level performance criterion of the rubric is holistic. The description in the rubric is taken as a whole in each level. To understand better, the description of the level of the rubric has to be examined, for instance, if the phrase “the topic is perfectly presented” is taken, the student would get a query as to what kind of aspects in a text could make it perfect – Grammar?, Context?, or the Structure of the sentences?; if the phrase “presented the expected points” is taken, the student would probably get a query like what the expected points of the evaluator would be. Here the holistic rubric is uncertain to some extent and it gives an overall expectation of the evaluator. Thus the holistic rubric is prepared to present the overall expectations of the evaluator and it is most useful when there is no time for detailed feedback or if the detailed analysis of the text is not important.

2.2 ANALYTIC RUBRIC

Analytic rubric splits the characteristics of an assignment or a text through helping the student by defining exactly what aspect has to be strong and what aspect has to be improved. The major advantage of the analytic rubric is that it gives a lucid picture of the performer’s performance in a justified manner. The analytic rubrics have two basic disadvantages: one is the creation, It takes a lot of time and the other is, most of the students do not completely read them and even if some students read but they could find it difficult to understand since the rubric is packed with too many cells filled with full of text pointing the detailed guidelines of the evaluation, still analytic rubrics are very useful when the evaluator wants to cover all the aspects of every level of the performance that is looked for. A model analytic rubric is created for the evaluation of an essay writing test.

| Performance levels/criteria | Beginning 1 | Developing 2 | Good 3 | Satisfactory 4 | Excellent 5 |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| Organization | No data on paper or missed the assignment | No clarity over the purpose of writing, there is no theme developed, focus is missing, there is no proper beginning, and ending or conclusion | The text presented through introduction, body and conclusion with a little development of the theme but loss of focus on it | Clear purpose is visible, the theme is built and the focus on conclusion | The purpose is very clear, strong introduction, body and conclusions are developed, logical arrangement of points provided with suitable and contextual examples |
| Word choice and usage | No data on paper or missed the assignment | Words are not fitting to the context, sometimes misused, no proper | Only a few words are specifically chosen and limited vocabulary, no | Most words are chosen rightly, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs convey good sense | Excellent Vocabulary is used, selective verbs, adjectives and adverbs are used, words are chosen for |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| | | adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions are used | effective word use but common words are used | | creating good effect on the theme |
| Sentence Formation | No data on paper or missed the assignment | Sentences are bisected, difficult to understand ideas, grammatical errors throughout the text, extensive run-ons | Simple sentences to express ideas, minor grammatical errors, less run-ons | Sentences vary in style and formation, communicates ideas well, interesting sentences are made, insignificant grammatical errors | Varied and complex sentences are made, ideas are clearly communicated, excellent flow, No grammatical errors, accurate connectors are used |

Table 2 Example of an Analytic rubric

The given analytic 5 level performance rubric is prepared to project the test performance in a detailed and analytical way. The student would understand the three basic and significant measures of a text that are taken into consideration besides the 5 levels of performance capabilities of the performers in a comprehensive way. Thus the analytic rubric is prepared to present the detailed expectations of the evaluator and it is most useful when the evaluator wants to help the student know the crucial aspects that are generally tested, evaluated and given the best scores. The analytic rubric will allow no question from the students since the detailed analysis of the presentation is projected in the rubric itself. The analytic rubric takes more time for preparation but gives the best outcomes.

3. ADVANTAGES OF RUBRICS:

Arter and McTighe (2001) found three basic advantages for teachers and students from the use of rubrics in evaluating students’ performances. First, there would be an agreement between the significant qualities of the students and the performances permitting the assessment with the reliable performance criteria. Second, the quality criteria provide the lucid instructional targets for teachers and the learning targets for students and the result eventually increases the teacher’s and student’s confidence. The third advantage is the student’s involvement in peer and self-assessment that leads to improvement in the performance. The use of rubrics allows the assessment to be more objective and reliable; it helps teacher clarify the criteria in simple terms; it shows the students how their work would be evaluated and graded; it also helps students engage in self-reflected learning of varied facets in writing.

3.1 DISADVANTAGES

As well-designed rubric is helpful to the students in evaluating their performances, rubrics are sometimes ineffective in making the responses not fruitful due to ineffective or poor rubric designing (Wenzlaff, Fag, Col, 1999). The makers of the rubrics need to understand better before creating rubrics of their own. Many teachers may have no precise knowledge or proper guidance on designing a rubric aiming the performance criteria, this inadequate understanding leads to a problem in the objectives of assessment goals (Schafer, 2001).

4. ASSESSMENT OF WRITING SKILLS:

In the traditional process of testing students’ writing skills, rubrics are not used, a teacher either announces a topic or gives a printed question paper and asks the students to write and there would be no prior guidance or instructions or any type of criterion of the evaluation of the performance is given; after the evaluation of the written text the students find difficulty for what reason they are given the unexpected scores or grades. This leads to many questions and negative impressions in the minds of the students either over the evaluation or on the teacher.

5. PROGRESS IN WRITING:

A sample of twenty professional graduates was taken to examine the changes in writing as well as in scores of pre-rubric and post-rubric essay writing task. The topic of the essay writing task was “Education – Its Importance”. Rubrics were not provided prior to this test and after the test was done the scores from the evaluation were listed. Again the same test was conducted to the same students but this time a 5 level analytic rubric was provided prior to the test and the test was re-conducted on the same day, the scores were listed separately. The scores from the evaluation of the essay writing task of pre-rubric and post-rubric had shown a notable change in the performances of the students’ written texts. An example of pre-rubric and post-rubric performances of two different students is figured in figure 1, figure 2, figure 3 and figure 4 respectively.

Fig.1 Pre-rubric performance evaluation – student 1

Education and its importance 5 years
 Introduction:
 In this world the one thing is surviving that is education. An education is to give a such a great knowledge a man can get the everything with the knowing of education.
 Importance of education
 1) Education will automatically give a respect to the person in the society.
 2) A man can survive the entire world if he is educated person.
 3) now a days, the education playing a very importance, so that the number of persons are in the educational fields, not in the working fields.
 4) At present generation, if we want to live in a good way (B) good manner and then we should learn the education.

Fig.2 Post –rubric performance evaluation – student 1

Education and its importance 5 years
 Introduction:
 In the entire world the only one thing is surviving that is education. An education gives a such a great knowledge to the person. A man knows everything with the knowing of education.
 Importance
 1) A man can survive the world if he is educated person.
 2) An education should provide a respect to the person who is educated in the society.
 3) However, in this generation a person lives in a good way (B) good manner then we should learn the education.
 Conclusion:
 In this world a person has a lot of property but he doesn't have a education he is a loser. A person who doesn't have anything but education is there then definitely he will win, that is the power of education.

Education is very important for every one in life. Education develops confidence, skills. Education is learning each and every communication. one can stole money, gold but cannot steal education. Education helps to communicate with different kinds of persons (or) people. Education gives us knowledge with education we can serve to any where on the world. Education gives us value through our world.
 There are many things taught in schools government should improve literacy rate by implementing different policies.

s. Ayesha Banaganapalle Education
 Education is very important for every one. Today's Education is focusing the knowledge of children. Now a days Education is more concentrated on practical knowledge. Today's Education is killing children's thinking capacity. Education gives us confidence we can develop skills and communication.
 Today's Education is concerned more on theory part. There is no scope for sports (or) practical knowledge. Education system should focus more on practical knowledge.

Fig. 3 Pre-rubric performance evaluation – student 2

Fig. 4 Post-rubric performance evaluation – student 2

6. ANALYSIS OF THE GIVEN RUBRIC

Some of the selected engineering students who are from different rural areas of Kurnool district are chosen for this task of testing pre and post rubric writing performances. An essay topic, “Education – Its Importance” was given to the students; the 5 level analytic performance rubric was provided for the post rubric test; the pre-rubric and post-rubric evaluations were done. While preparing the rubric, organization of sentences and content structures, word choice and usage, and formation of sentences were the three basic criteria taken into consideration.

Organization of sentences and content: Under this criterion, the execution of the purpose of the essay, introduction, body and conclusion, logical arrangement of the covered points, and the suitability of the chosen examples are the sub-criteria chosen for the evaluation of the performances.

Word Choice and usage: Under this criterion, the use of suitable words, adjectives and adverbs, and the word selection for creating a fine impact on the theme are the sub-criteria chosen for the evaluation of the performances.

Formation of sentences: Under this criterion, the sentence formation – simple, complex, the idea presentation, the flow of sentences, grammatical errors, and the use of right connectors are the sub-criteria chosen for the evaluation of the performances.

7. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCES:

Two of the students’ pre and post rubric performances are shown in the figures 1 to 4 respectively. Student 1, Mr. Yunis’s pre-rubric performance evaluation is shown in figure 1 and the post-rubric performance evaluation is shown in figure 2; the progressive score in figure 1 to 2 is clearly seen. The student has improved his performance by scoring 3/5 to 4/5 in pre-rubric to post-rubric performance respectively. Coming to the other student, Miss. Ayesha’s improvement in the writing performance of pre and post-rubric is shown in figures 3 and 4 respectively. In pre-rubric performance evaluation, she scored 2 out of 5 and in the post-rubric evaluation her score had increased to 4 out of 5. The other participants had improved their scores in a similar fashion with little overlap.

| Total Number of students (20) | Number of Students | Pre – Rubric Performance Scores | Post –Rubric Performance scores | Remarks |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 12 | 6 | 2 | 3 | Progressed 60% |
| | 4 | 3 | 4 | |
| | 2 | 2 | 4 | |
| 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | Static 15% |
| | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| 5 | 5 | 2 | 1 | Decreased 25% |

Table 3 Test performance of students’ scores

Out of Twenty students twelve of them have shown progress in their post-rubric writing and increased their grades to either 1 or 2 levels more than what they had scored in their pre-rubric tests; the three out of twenty have remained the same in their grades as well as in their writing and they brought no change in their writing performances; the five out of twenty students had decreased their scores in the post-rubric performance. The rubric here, in this case, has helped the high number of students to increase their performance and test scores. The graphical representation of the Progressed, Static, and Decreased performances of the students is presented in the given graphs respectively. The changes of the performances of the post-rubric writing are clearly shown in the Figure 2, pie diagram the changes are 60%, 15%, and 25% as progressed, static, and decreased respectively.

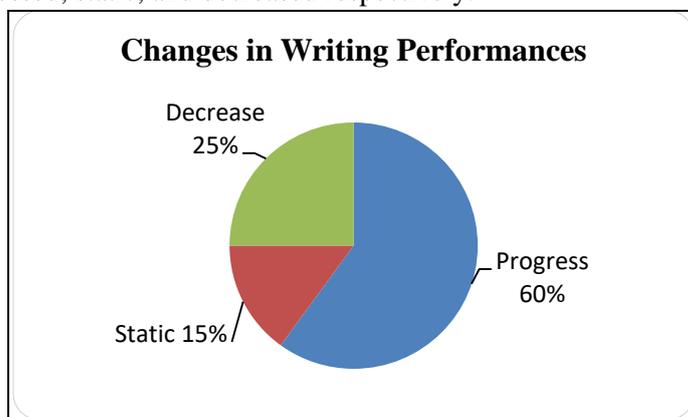


Figure 1: Pie Chart - Changes in performances

8. CONCLUSION:

Overall, 60% of the students improved their writing performances and their writing scores when the rubric was used for composing their essays. There was a very good improvement observed in the areas of the organization of ideas, selecting the right words, and following the originality of thoughts in their writing and also in scores of the post rubric essay writing task. There was a little change observed in the information presented and in the grammar used. Thus the use of rubrics is very supportive through which improving students’ writing skills and placing them on the track is accurately possible. The students who are good at expressing ideas in a creative manner but do not understand the writing principles are able to make any written text readable and acceptable and can also improve their writing skills as well as scores through rubrics.

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