



The Role of Using Rubrics in TESOL Graduate Students' Writing Performance at Kabul Education University

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to explore the role of using rubric by TESOL graduate students in their writing performance at Kabul Education University, identifying the effects of rubrics on their writing performance, their understanding and exposure to rubrics, and their attitudes and motivation toward the use of rubrics in writing. In this study, a quantitative survey design using questionnaire in Likert Scale format was employed. The participants for this study were 27 male students majoring in the TESOL graduate program at Kabul Education University who were selected purposively as they could provide the most useful and relevant information. For analyzing the data SPSS version 24 was used as statistical tool. The findings of this study revealed that TESOL students generally hold positive perceptions regarding the use of rubrics in writing. The study concludes that rubrics can be considered effective tools for improving students' writing performance and supporting learning processes when used appropriately.

KEYWORDS: Graduate students, rubrics, writing performance, TESOL.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a key component of academic success in EFL contexts, particularly in TESOL graduate program at Kabul Education University in context of Afghanistan, where students are often required and expected to write various forms of texts, including research papers, capstone, literature review, reaction papers, reader responses, and reflective essays, which mostly their academic learning performance is assessed based on these written projects and assignments. However, it remains challenging and difficult for many students because a high level of organization, coherence, grammatical accuracy, and analytical and critical thinking are required for writing them. Therefore, meeting these requirement and expectations highlight the need for effective instructional tools that can support and enhance writing performance; therefore, the use of rubrics as one of instructional and assessment tools clearly list the criteria and articulate the level of quality for each criterion for students' assignments (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020).

Theoretically, constructivist theory of learning supports the use of rubrics. From a constructivist viewpoint, learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through guidance and interaction. Rubrics function as scaffolding tools by clearly outlining expectations, criteria, and performance levels, which help learners gradually develop their writing skills. By making the components of effective writing explicit, rubrics support learners in understanding how to organize ideas, use appropriate language, and meet academic standards. This aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where structured support enables learners to perform tasks beyond their current ability (Andrade & Du, 2005; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Additionally, according to Thomas (2023), rubrics as assessment tools in constructivism teaching and learning environment improve student performance by clearly showing the students how their work will be evaluated and what is expected. Overall, a well-designed rubric can be used for the purpose of instruction, motivation, and evaluation in constructivist learning environment (Popham, 1997; Tierney & Marielle, 2004, as cited in Gasaymeh, 2011).

Empirically, many research studies have demonstrated that rubric use has positive effect on students' writing performance. According to Allen and Tanner (2006), using rubrics as instructional tools give students an explicit sense of what the expectations are for a high level of performance on a given assignment. Additionally, Sousa (2015) stated "the criterion of rubrics that assessment will be evaluated for particular learning unit/project include purpose, content, format, research, organization, grammar, spelling, description, and conclusion" (p.69). Furthermore, a rubric can be used to assess a variety of student tasks, such as oral presentations, critical thinking, class participation, literature review, reflective writings, and projects (Chowdhury, 2019). So, using rubric as assessment and instructional tool improves students' writing quality when it is integrated into the course (Turgut & Kayaoglu, 2015), and Sanger and Gleason (2020) highlighted that using it for writing assessment and the teaching of writing are better than any other concept.



Although rubrics are used in writing various academic writing assignments by TESOL graduate students at Kabul Education University, many students have poor academic writing performance in their writing projects. The problem may arise due to limited understanding or improper use of rubrics. Without understanding and using rubrics appropriately, students may find it difficult to write their written assignments based on academic requirement and expectations. Despite extensive research about rubrics other fields of study in other contexts, the role of using rubrics in writing performance in the field of TESOL in the context of Afghanistan remains unexplored. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by exploring the role of using rubrics by TESOL graduate students on their writing performance at Kabul Education University.

Investigating the role of rubrics in TESOL graduate students' writing performance is essential for several reasons. Initially, writing is a core academic skill that significantly affects students' overall academic success. If rubrics can effectively support writing development, their proper use could lead to more meaningful learning outcomes. Further, rubrics as scaffolding tools clarify expectations, support self-regulated learning, and provide constructive feedback for improving academic writing (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Moreover, limited context-specific research in Afghanistan higher education highlights the importance of this study in generating empirical evidence that can inform instructional practices and assessment strategies at higher education institutions.

The significance of this study is to have its contribution for improving higher education, particularly in Afghanistan. Since the emphasis of the higher education in Afghanistan is to facilitate teaching and learning processes for both instructors and learners, the findings of this study may help instructors and educators to refine and boost practices such as instructions, feedback, and assessment. Besides, this study will give students an awareness of what rubric is and its role in academic writing, which the proper use of rubrics can effectively support writing development and lead to more meaningful learning outcomes (Cheng & Chan, 2019).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of using rubrics in TESOL graduate students' writing performance at Kabul Education University, focusing on the effects of rubrics on writing performance, understanding of rubrics, and attitudes and motivation toward using rubrics in writing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of using rubric on TESOL graduate students' writing performance?
2. How do TESOL students understand the use of rubrics in writing tasks?
3. What are TESOL students' attitudes and motivation toward the use of rubrics in writing?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Rubrics

Rubrics as a set of rules or instruction is a performance measurement tool that is very important value chain element of the teaching process to understand the growth and development of students and scholars of higher educational institutions (Karthikeyan, 2023). Additionally, according to Wolf and Stevens (2007), rubrics are a multi-purpose scoring guides which assess students' products and performance working in many ways to develop educational goals. Similarly, Smith, Lipnevich, and Guskey (2023) defined rubrics as simply extended descriptions of what is expected on a given assignment, and they not only communicate the assignment to students, but also help in marking and grading the assignment. Traditionally, rubrics were used simply as grading tools to provide marking frameworks that were transparent to students. More recently, rubrics have been promoted as educational tools to inform students of good practice with the assumption that they engage with these rubrics to guide their learning (Morton & et al, 2021). Karthikeyan (2023) highlighted 4 prominent types of rubrics in different kinds and levels of educational institutions, they are analytic rubrics which assess the students' participation, developmental rubric which assess and support higher levels while learning, holistic rubrics which assess all criteria under one single score, and facilitating rubrics which accommodate heterogenous classes and offer a range of quality levels. Thus, rubric can be considered as a working guide for students and teachers. It is usually handed out before the assignment begins in order to get students to think about the criteria on which their work will be judged (Al-Juboury, 2011).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The use of rubrics in educational assessment is grounded in constructivism learning theory. where learning is viewed as an active process in which learners construct knowledge through interaction and reflection (Gasaymeh, 2011). According to Lev Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learners achieve higher levels of performance when provided with structured support (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). As Olson and Krysiak (2021) stated that rubrics can serve as support to student



learning, consistent and transparent evaluation of students work, and course, program, and institutional learning quality assessment. Thus, rubrics as scaffolds operationalize this process by making performance expectations explicit and transparent (Andrade, 2005). Vygotsky's ZPD and the concept scaffolding have the power of theoretical and practical applicability that could help instructors understand not just the range of what range of techniques they might use in a tutoring session but how those choices might fit into a larger conception of learning and development (Nordlof, 2014). Similarly, Hasan and Karim (2019) stated that the teacher uses the scaffolding techniques to reach this ZPD for the desired learning outcomes. Over all, the integration of rubrics into instructional design is theoretically justified as a means of aligning assessment practices with learner-centered pedagogies and evidence-based educational principle.

2.3. Rubrics and Assessment

The rubric for assessment is a matrix or grid that gives a comprehensive interpretation and grades students' work against criteria and standards set as per the educational activity (Karthikeyan, 2023). According to Sanger and Gleason (2020), "the criteria for student's work is clearly listed by rubrics as assessment tools as well as the levels of quality for each criterion is articulated" (p.74). They also stated that rubrics are helpful for professors determining and communicating to students what they are assessing and how much weight to give different components of an assignment. Rubrics are used to evaluate different types of assignments and tasks that include discussion papers, essays, proposals, presentations, design projects, student's interaction, quality art, group work, and scientific experiments (Gasaymeh, 2011). A study by Panadero and Jonsson (as cited in Sousa, 2015) found that using rubric consistently in both formative and summative assessment improves students learning and self-regulation, and its criteria should assess student effort, ability, and performance

Rubrics as formative assessment tools are useful helping students to understand and master complex learning target (Chappuis & et al., 2014). One of the advantage of rubrics is their usefulness for formative assessment which is an active intentional learning process that partners the teacher and students to continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the express goal of improving students' achievement. Additionally, using rubrics for sharing learning targets and criteria for success with students is the foundational strategy for formative assessment where instructional activities and formative assessments are performance of understanding embodying the learning target in what students are asked to actually do (Brookhart, 2013).

When rubrics are used as summative assessment (grading or scoring), they should be task-specific so that the students know what they are expected to know, understand, and be able to do when they complete the learning task (Sousa, 2015). Using rubrics as scoring guides give students a better understanding of what is being assessed, on what criteria grades are based, and what standards are expected (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020). Besides, the quality of a piece of work or a performance is evaluated by scoring rubrics (Aksit, Isil, & Turner, 2018). Further, grading with rubrics is faster when there is only one decision to make, rather than a separate decision for each criterion (Brookhart, 2013).

Furthermore, rubrics can be used by students for self-assessment. They are excellent tools that allow for easy tracking of student progress and improvement over time, promoting self-assessment and self-improvement (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020). As Krebs and et al (2024) found that rubrics foster self-assessment and support learners in accurately self-assessing their task performance. Similarly, based on Jonsson and Svingby (2007) conclusion, rubrics seem to have the potential of promoting learning by facilitating feedback and self-assessment. Besides, a study by Miknis, Davies, and Johnson (2020) shows that rubric support a more consistent approach to marking, and the self-assessment element provides an insight into the learners' perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses.

2.4. Rubrics and Feedback

Rubrics enhance not only assessment but also improves students learning outcomes, teaching effectiveness, giving feedback and course design (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020). Beyond being assessment tools, rubrics can be an excellent way to provide students with feedback, and improve teaching and learning (McTighe & Frontier, 2022; Smith, Lipnevich, & Guskey, 2023). Besides, assessment and feedback design are inextricably linked and students receive three forms of feedback: their grade aligned with assessment criteria in a rubric, a short-written explanation of how their entry links to the learning outcomes, and a five-minute audio feedback file (Winstone & Carless, 2015). Using rubric can offer students feedback, showing them what they are doing well, what they still need to master, and have them revise their work based on the feedback (Chappuis & et al., 2014).



Furthermore, A study by Sanger and Gleason, (2020) found that a rubric can provide students with informative feedback on their strengths and weaknesses and prompts them to reflect on their own work. They also found that detailed feedback on rubric is useful in analyzing where students' strengths and weaknesses lie and helps students to identify the areas that need work so as to set their own plans for improvement. Students favor the use of rubrics, and in particular instructional rubrics, because they provide informative feedback about students' strengths and highlight areas for improvement as well as they support learning, good thinking, and the development of understanding and skills (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020). Teachers can train students to use rubrics to provide feedback to one another and for self-evaluation (Aksit, Isil, & Turner, 2018). When getting involved in feedback, students are not limited to the correction of errors, but they are encouraged to recognized the merits and shortcomings in their own and peers' writing performance (Turgut & Kayaoglu, 2015).

So, a well-designed rubric can help students by delivering constructive feedback about their common mistakes and by providing further information about how to improve their work (Chowdhury, 2019), as well as good rubrics give us information we can use to differentiate instruction, direct students' attention to the features of work that constitute quality, allow us to give focused feedback, and enable students to self-assess (Chappuis & et al., 2014).

2.5. Rubrics and Instruction

Although the main purpose of rubrics is to assess performances (Brookhart, 2013), rubrics have great instructional value clarifying expectation, and facilitating self- and peer-assessment in the writing classroom (Li & Lindsey, 2015). According to Andrade (2000), instructional rubric is usually a one or two page document that describe varying level of quality, from excellent to poor, for a specific assignment. It is usually used with a relatively complex assignment, such as a long-term project, an essay, or a research paper. are rubrics that have been explicitly designed to support and evaluate student learning. As Jonsson and Svingby (2007) concluded that rubrics have the potential of promoting learning and improves instruction. Andrade (2001) highlighted the following features for instructional rubrics:

- The language used for writing them is understandable for students.
- The quality of work is defined and described by them.
- They refer to common weaknesses in students' work and indicate how much weaknesses can be avoided.
- Students use them to assess their work in-progress and guide revision and improvement.

2.6. Benefits of Using Rubrics

Using rubrics have many potential benefits. They can act as a bridge between the teacher and students building relationship between them in the classrooms (Karthikeyan, 2023). Cox, Morrison, and Brathwaite (2015) stated that rubric can facilitate assessment, feedback, and expectation in today's educational environment. Additionally, rubrics enhance not only assessment but also improves students learning outcomes, teaching effectiveness and course design (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020). Sanger and Gleason also highlighted that the act of creating a rubric helps faculty be clear in their own minds about what they assessing as well as they are helpful because professors can determine and communicate to students what they are assessing and how much weight to give different components of an assignment. Besides, a study by Taylor, Kisby and Reedy (2024) found that effective engagement with rubrics appears to reduce students anxiety. Similar to Taylor, Kisby and Reedy study, Sanger and Gleason (2020) stated that students are less anxious and more confident in working on their assignments when expectations are clearly listed in the rubrics. When writing assignments, using rubrics guide students (Goodwin & KirKpatrick, 2023), helping them improve their academic skills by increasing their grades and decreasing the number of mistakes during the writing process (Trinh, 2020).

According to Chowdhury (2019), notifying students of expectations, providing informative and timely feedback, helping to maintain grading consistency and fair assessment, and fostering student learning and self-assessment are the benefits of using rubrics. Additionally, rubrics seem to have potential to support learning when they are co-created or negotiated with students; they make the expectations for an assignment transparent; and students use rubrics to guide peer evaluation and internal feedback (Winstone & Carless, 2015). Moreover, instructors use measure students' progress (Beckett & Slater, 2020). A well-designed rubric helps instructors not only to judge students' work effectively but also help students acquire certain skills and knowledge (Chowdhury, 2019). The purpose for using rubrics is not limited to teachers for grading or judging students' works. It is also used by students as a tool to improve their learning (Cheng & Chan, 2019). They are also used by students for supporting their academic performance as



well as helping them to focus on their efforts and to produce a work with higher quality (Uddin, 2014).

Al-Juboury (2011) mentioned the benefits of rubrics for students as following:

- Rubrics make the teacher's expectations clear to the students.
- Rubrics show students how to meet the teacher's expectations.
- Rubrics help students evaluate the quality of their work as they use the rubric for self-assessment.
- Rubrics provide students with more informative feedback about their strengths and areas in need of improvement.

He also highlighted the following benefits for teachers:

- Rubrics help teachers differentiate between the qualities of performance.
- Rubrics improve the objectivity of grading especially when more than one person or tester is evaluating the performance.
- Rubrics may reduce the time the teacher takes to grade performance.
- When clarifying their goals, expectations, and focus, teachers' paperwork is reduced because students are a part of the process of assessment development.
- Finally, rubrics are easy to use and explain.

2.7. Challenges with Using Rubrics

However, rubrics are often praised for promoting transparency and consistency, but in practice they can become rigid tools that oversimplify complex learning (Brookhart, 2013). According Andrade (as cited in Qasim, 2015), even a well-crafted rubric does not represent the way learners need models, criticism, and chances to be curious. Also, based on Ling's review (2025), improper use of rubrics may be worse than not using them. Therefore, teachers should have flexibility to decide whether to use rubrics or not. Because being too subjective, too vague or too detailed, restricts students' understanding of learning, and poorly designed are the criticism the many have about the use of rubrics (Sanger & Gleason, Diversity and inclusion in global higher education, 2020).

Additionally, if rubric is designed poorly, it can produce subjectivity rather than eliminate it. Vague descriptors like "good" or "excellent" leave room for inconsistent interpretation across raters, undermining reliability. Even worse, developing high-quality rubrics is time consuming and cognitively demanding for instructors which often results in rushed or low-quality instruments that do more harm than good (Andrade, 2005). Besides, another disadvantage is the negative impact on student motivation and learning autonomy. When overused, rubrics can encourage surface learning, as students aim to meet minimum criteria instead of exploring deeper understanding or taking intellectual risks. They may also limit students' sense of ownership by imposing strict expectations that leave little room for personal voice or alternative approaches (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Thus, the teacher and the students should develop the rubric together by writing down exactly what is expected to complete the project and students should receive the completed rubric before they begin a unit or project (Sousa, 2015).

All in all, almost all of these research studies were conducted in other fields and contexts, which may limit their applicability in TESOL graduate program in the context of Afghanistan. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the role of using rubrics in TESOL graduate program students' writing performance at Kabul Education University.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Design

In this study, a quantitative survey design was implemented to collect data by exploring TESOL graduate program students' perceptions towards the role of using rubrics in their writing performance at Kabul Education University. The design is significance because it collects numeric data from a large number of people using instruments with pre-set questions and responses. Also, in quantitative research questions specific and narrow questions can be asked to obtain measurable and observable data on variables (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

3.2. Participants and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was use to select participants who provide the most useful and relevant experiences and information. The sample consisted of 27 participants (N=27) majoring in the TESOL graduate program at Kabul Education University. Due to the absence of female students, all the participants of this study were male.



3.3. Instrument

A survey questionnaire was designed to investigate the role of using rubrics in TESOL graduate writing performance. The instrument was developed according to the Likert Scale format, which contained five scales aimed at measuring the participants' agreement/disagreement level regarding the effects of rubrics on writing, their understanding and exposure to rubrics, and their attitudes and motivation toward using rubrics. This survey questionnaire contained 18 statements with limited pre-defined responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree". Regarding the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the questionnaire was developed by the researcher. To ensure validity, both face validity and content validity were established through evaluation and confirmation by three subject-matter experts in the relevant field. To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, producing an overall value of 0.877, which indicates a high and acceptable level of internal consistency for the instrument.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

For data collection procedure, at the beginning, TESOL students' permissions were asked for participating in the research study. Then, everything about conducting this research was explained to students ensuring to understand the purpose of conducting this research. After that, the questionnaires were administered by explaining the items and asking them to choose their responses for each statement by ticking (√) from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Finally, questionnaires were collected back soon after the students completed the questionnaires for data analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was conducted at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, statistical indices including mean, standard deviation, kurtosis, skewness, and variance were employed to summarize and describe the characteristics of the data. At the inferential level, an independent samples t-test was utilized to test the research questions. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software, version 24.

4. FINDINGS

Table 1: Variables Descriptive Statistics

	UER	ERWP	AMUR	Rubrics
Mean	4.26	4.38	3.54	4.07
Std. Deviation	0.63	0.48	0.58	0.47
Variance	0.39	0.23	0.33	0.22
Kurtosis	1.20	0.23	0.061	-0.09
Skewness	-1.28	-0.82	0.53	-0.54
N	27	27	27	27

Note: UER= Understanding and Exposure to Rubrics, ERWP= Effects of Rubrics on Writing Performance, AMUR= Attitudes and Motivation toward Using Rubrics)

The descriptive statistics for the four constructs (part1, part2, part3, and Rubrics) indicate generally high mean scores, ranging from 3.54 to 4.38, suggesting that participants' responses are above the midpoint and reflect overall positive perceptions. Specifically, part2 shows the highest mean (M = 4.38, SD = 0.49), followed by part1 (M = 4.26, SD = 0.63) and Rubrics (M = 4.07, SD = 0.47), while part3 has the lowest mean (M = 3.54, SD = 0.58), indicating comparatively less favorable responses in this dimension. The standard deviations and variances across all variables are relatively low, demonstrating limited dispersion and a reasonable level of agreement among participants. Skewness values reveal that part1 (-1.281), part2 (-0.816), and Rubrics (-0.540) are negatively skewed, indicating a concentration of responses toward higher values, whereas part3 (0.529) is positively skewed, suggesting a slight tendency toward lower ratings. Additionally, kurtosis values show that part1 (1.201) is leptokurtic, reflecting a more peaked distribution, while the remaining variables are close to normal distribution



(mesokurtic), particularly Rubrics (-0.089). Overall, these results suggest that the data are reasonably normally distributed with slight deviations, and participants generally hold positive views across the constructs, although part3 appears relatively weaker compared to the others.

Table 2: One-Sample t-Test Results for the Main Variable and Its Subcomponents

Variables	T-value	P-value	Mean	SD
Rubrics	11.854	0.000	4.0705	0.47
UER	10.353	0.000	4.2593	0.63
ERWP	14.787	0.000	4.3810	0.48
AMUR	4.880	0.000	3.5426	0.58

Note: UER = Understanding and Exposure to Rubrics, ERWP = Effects of Rubrics on Writing Performance, AMUR= Attitudes and Motivation toward Using Rubrics

The results indicate that all four constructs including Rubrics, Understanding and Exposure to Rubrics (UER), Effects of Rubrics on Writing Performance (ERWP), and Attitudes and Motivation toward Using Rubrics (AMUR) demonstrate statistically significant differences from the test value, as evidenced by p-values of 0.000 ($p < .001$) across all variables. The mean scores range from 3.54 to 4.38, suggesting that participants generally reported perceptions above the midpoint of a five-point Likert scale. Among the constructs, ERWP yielded the highest mean ($M = 4.38, SD = 0.48$) and the largest t-value ($t = 14.787$), indicating a strong perceived positive impact of rubrics on writing performance. Similarly, UER ($M = 4.26, SD = 0.63, t = 10.353$) and Rubrics ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.47, t = 11.854$) reflect high levels of understanding, exposure, and overall favorable evaluation, with relatively low dispersion in responses. In contrast, AMUR reported the lowest mean ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.58, t = 4.880$), suggesting comparatively moderate attitudes and motivation toward using rubrics, although still significantly positive. Overall, the low standard deviations across variables indicate relative homogeneity in participants' responses, and the findings collectively suggest that while rubrics are perceived as effective and well-understood, motivational and attitudinal aspects may require further enhancement.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that TESOL graduate students hold positive perceptions regarding the use of rubrics in writing. The descriptive statistics demonstrated relatively high mean scores across all constructs, ranging from 3.54 to 4.38, indicating that participants' responses were consistently above the midpoint of the scale. Among the variables, the effects of rubrics on writing performance (ERWP) yielded the highest mean score, suggesting that students strongly believe rubrics enhance the quality of their writing. Similarly, understanding and exposure to rubrics (UER) and overall evaluation of rubrics also showed high levels of agreement, reflecting familiarity and acceptance of rubric use. However, attitudes and motivation toward using rubrics (AMUR) received comparatively lower scores, indicating that while students recognize the usefulness of rubrics, their motivational impact may not be equally strong. In general, these results highlight the pedagogical value of rubrics as effective tools for improving writing performance, clarifying expectations, and learning outcomes.

The results of this study are largely consistent with previous research on the effectiveness of rubrics in educational settings. For instance, the strong positive impact of rubrics on writing performance aligns with the findings of Sanger and Gleason (2020), who emphasized that rubrics enhance student achievement and provide meaningful feedback. Similarly, Brookhart (2013) argued that rubrics contribute to more consistent and efficient assessment practices, which supports the high agreement levels observed in this study. Furthermore, the findings are in line with Jonsson and Svingby (2007), who highlighted the role of rubrics in promoting learning through feedback and self-assessment. Panadero and Jonsson (2013) also found that rubrics improve self-regulation and student engagement, which is partially reflected in the current study's results. However, the relatively lower scores related to motivation contrast with some studies, such as Ling (2025) and Andrade (2005), which suggest that poorly designed rubrics or overuse may negatively affect student motivation and autonomy.

The similarities between the present findings and previous studies can be explained by the theoretical foundation of constructivism, particularly Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Rubrics function as



scaffolding tools that guide students through the writing process by providing clear criteria and structured support, which naturally leads to improved performance and understanding. Additionally, the use of rubrics as both formative and summative assessment tools may enhance feedback quality and promote self-assessment, which explains the strong agreement with earlier research. On the other hand, the relatively lower scores in motivation and attitudes may be explained by contextual factors such as the design of the rubrics, the level of student engagement in their development, and their prior experience with rubric-based assessment. In some cases, if rubrics are given a lot to students and overused by them, students' creativity may become limited and their intrinsic may be reduced. Moreover, the specific TESOL context and the limited exposure to student-centered learning approaches in Afghanistan, may influence how students perceive and respond to rubrics.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small ($N = 27$) and without randomization because of the absence of female students which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Second, the research was conducted within a single institution (Kabul Education University), which may not fully represent other TESOL contexts or educational settings. Third, the study did not examine another potentially influential variable, instructors' perspectives, which may affect the effectiveness of rubrics. Finally, the study primarily used quantitative methods, which may not capture deeper insights into students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to rubric use.

Based on these findings, some recommendations can be made for practice and future research. Educators should integrate rubrics not only as assessment tools but also as instructional and formative tools to enhance students' engagement, motivation, and self-regulated learning. Future research should consider larger and more diverse samples across multiple institutions to enhance generalizability. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences. Future research can be conducted to explore the long-term effects of rubric use on students' writing development, autonomy, and critical thinking skills in EFL contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the role of using rubrics in TESOL graduate program students' writing performance, as well as their understanding, attitudes, and motivation toward their use. The findings revealed that students generally hold positive views about rubrics, particularly in terms of their effectiveness in improving writing performance and clarifying assessment criteria. The high mean scores across most constructs indicate that rubrics are well-understood and widely accepted as useful instructional and assessment tools. However, the comparatively lower scores related to motivation suggest that while rubrics are beneficial, their influence on students' affective engagement may be somewhat limited.

The study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing the pedagogical value of rubrics in language learning contexts. It confirms that rubrics not only enhance writing quality but also support transparency, consistency, and structured feedback in assessment. These findings highlight the importance of integrating rubrics into teaching practices, particularly in TESOL settings where clear guidance and feedback are essential for developing writing skills. At the same time, the results suggest that educators should pay careful attention to how rubrics are designed and implemented to ensure they do not restrict creativity or reduce students' intrinsic motivation.

In conclusion, rubrics can be considered effective tools for improving students' writing performance and supporting learning processes when used appropriately. However, their full potential can only be realized if they are thoughtfully designed, clearly explained, and actively integrated into classroom practices.

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