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From Assessment to Learning: The Role of Rubrics in University Liberal Arts Education

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Abstract

This conceptual paper examines how rubric can be used in liberal arts education in universities. Rubrics are placed as evaluation resources connected to self-reflection, learning, and formative feedback. Studies show that rubrics define the expectations, shape the student performance, and create reflection, thus supporting assessment validity and reliability, as well as student autonomy. Analytic and holistic rubrics are contrasted by reliability, specificity, and practicality, and the issues of the simplification of complex competencies, lack of creativity, and contextual and cultural sensitivity in diverse classrooms are highlighted. The paper integrates the previous literature on the use of rubrics in higher education speaking and writing classes, showing the high efficiency of rubrics to enhance inter-rater reliability, self- and peer-assessment, and correspondence of communication outcomes with course goals. The paper also looks at the changing ways of using digital and AI-driven rubric tools and their possible efficiency, and addresses the risks of inconsistencies, biases, and the loss of educational values with no human moderation. Standardization and individuality in measuring expressive skills are discussed in terms of ethical concerns. The paper proposes that rubrics could be used as metacognitive tools and close the gap between evaluation and teaching when constructed along with the learners and utilized throughout the learning process. The paper concludes with the recommendation of a balanced, human-focused, and culturally sensitive rubric design with special reference to technological developments and interdisciplinary liberal arts education.

Keywords: Rubrics, Formative Assessment, Evaluation, Liberal Arts Education

1. Introduction

Communication competence is one of the most commonly accepted 21st-century skills in higher education that guarantee academic achievement, professional preparation, and social interaction (Alias and Osman, 2015; Brookhart, 2013) ^[2, 8]. Liberal arts programs in universities have made oral and written communication the most important result of interdisciplinary education. Nevertheless, the evaluation of such competencies is still a problem because communicative performance is a multidimensional and subjective phenomenon (Reddy & Andrade, 2010) ^[21]. A traditional lecture-centered approach to teaching is still common in numerous educational settings, and in many cases it is unhelpful, as it makes a learner passive and inactive, but active learning theory is based on student involvement, reflection, and discussion as the key elements of effective learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Carr *et al.*, 2015) ^[7, 9]. Rubrics have become a useful instrument to close this gap with structured, transparent, and criterion-referenced principles of assessing the complex tasks, including (but not limited to) presentations, discussions, and essays. As scoring instruments that have specific evaluation criteria, levels of quality, and scoring plans (Andrade, 2000; Popham, 1997) ^[20], rubrics contribute to summative evaluation and formative learning by supporting performance, decreasing anxiety, and self-regulation (Jonsson, 2014; Wang, 2016; Zimmerman, 2002) ^[16, 29, 30].

Research has demonstrated them to be useful in enhancing grading consistency (Garcia-Ros, 2011), in inter-rater reliability (Dunbar *et al.*, 2006) [13], and in self- and peer-assessment (Cockett and Jackson, 2018; Leader and Clinton, 2018) [11, 17]. At the same time, the effects of rubric on the inhibition of creativity, simplification of the more complex features of competencies, and imposition of culturally biased criteria of expression have already been articulated (Trainor and Bal, 2014; Sadler, 2009) [23, 28]. These criticisms suggest that designing rubrics should be done in a context-sensitive manner via collaborative design to assist different learning situations (Roever & McNamara, 2006; Abbas *et al.*, 2019) [1, 22]. In addition, the possibilities of efficiency and problems of fairness, reliability, and educational integrity are introduced when digital and AI-based rubric tools are combined (Fuller and Bixby, 2024; Suhairom *et al.*, 2024) [14, 26]. It is in this backdrop that this paper will argue for the usage of the rubrics in higher education of the liberal arts, particularly the evaluation of communication skills. The paper shall identify the pedagogical potential of the rubrics by synthesizing the earlier studies and critically commenting on the ethical, cultural, and technological nature of the rubrics and their constraints, and the way forward.

2. Theoretical Framework: Active Learning Theory

Active learning is an educational methodology that emphasizes meaningful learning activities for students. Active learners are likely to reflect on what they have learned, share feedback with peers and instructors, and discuss ideas throughout the course (Carr *et al.*, 2015) [9]. Active learning theory involves learners directly participating in the learning process and reflecting on their own learning. For example, they ask instructors questions about the material, participate in discussions, and offer opinions after peers' presentations. Active learning can be applied in various ways, including classroom discussions, asking questions, and short writing exercises (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) [7]. Encouraging students to take notes during lectures and conducting classroom discussions after brief demonstrations are excellent examples of active learning that promote engagement. When students actively participate in learning interactions, they take greater responsibility for their own performance and value the subject more highly. In higher education, many instructors adopt lectures as the primary method of knowledge delivery because they are convenient, cost-effective, and allow for the transmission of content to large numbers of students at once. However, it has been found that learners often feel bored and confused 10-20 minutes into a lecture and may subsequently retain little of the content (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) [7]. Learners passively receive knowledge during lectures. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Eastern-style classrooms, where students demonstrate respect for the authoritative professor by refraining from asking questions (Haarms *et al.*, 2018). Conversely, discussion is an effective method for promoting questioning and critical thinking skills and achieving active learning. Therefore, facilitating discussion activities or promoting immediate interaction through small-group discussions in large lecture halls helps learners from an active learning perspective (Bonwell & Eison, 1991) [7].

3. Definition and Purpose of Rubrics in Assessment

A *rubric* is a scoring system that states a number of criteria about an assignment or learning outcomes and clearly describes the possible levels of achievement on a scale (e.g., inadequate to excellent, novice to expert). Practically any student assignment, such as essays, final projects, oral presentations, and theatrical performances, can be evaluated by the use of rubrics. These will be applicable when giving out assignments to the students in grading student work in a manner that will be fair and efficient, and also when evaluating the program by showing the extent to which the students are meeting the learning outcomes.

Although the term rubric has various definitions by different scholars and teachers, in most instances, a rubric is a method that stipulates what is required of an assignment by listing the requirements or importance of the assignment and identifying the quality levels of the assignment that range from excellent to poor (Andrade 2000; Arter and Chappuis 2007; Stiggins 2001) [3, 5, 6, 25]. According to Popham (1997) [20], rubrics are supposed to have three primary components such as evaluation criteria, definition of quality, and the scoring strategy. Evaluation criteria can be defined as the points that an evaluator considers when gauging the quality of the work of a student. These constitute a set of signs or guidelines that depict the procedures and materials that are deemed to be important as far as the task is concerned. Quality definitions provide detailed descriptions of the skills, proficiency, or standards a student must demonstrate to achieve a specific level of performance (e.g., inadequate, fair, good, or excellent). The scoring strategy of a rubric involves using a scale to interpret judgments about the task or the process of accomplishing the task. While rubrics are typically used by teachers to grade student assignments, they can serve as both an assessment and a learning tool when employed as formative assessment for ongoing evaluation of student work (Stiggins, 2001) [25]. When used as part of a student-centered assessment approach, rubrics have the potential to help students understand learning objectives and task assessment criteria, and to make reliable judgments about work for task improvement and revision.

Rubric-based assessment is an evaluation method that can enhance transparency, consistency, and learner autonomy. Recent research emphasizes rubrics as scoring tools and learning and feedback tools (Jonsson, 2014) [16]. Jonsson (2014) [16], investigated the use of rubrics in terms of assessment transparency. They found that rubrics helped students understand expectations and learning objectives, reduced anxiety about learning, and aided in planning, performing, and establishing self-assessment. Students actively utilized rubrics, particularly when they were clearly explained, timely, and well-integrated with the task. Well-designed rubrics support formative assessment by meeting student and teacher expectations, guiding student performance, and providing structured criterion-referenced feedback (Andrade & Brookhart, 2016; Brookhart, 2013; Panadero & Jonsson, 2020) [4, 8, 16, 18]. Recently, the importance of co-constructing assessment rubrics with students has also been emphasized. This enhances student engagement from a learner-centered education perspective,

increases the qualitative validity of assessment, and helps foster learners' self-regulation and metacognitive awareness. Furthermore, the value of rubrics is increasing because analytical rubrics break down complex tasks (e.g., writing, presentations, projects) into measurable components, enabling more detailed and constructive feedback (Andrade & Brookhart, 2016)^[4].

Rubrics can serve as a useful tool for assessing communication skills in higher education because they provide clear, systematic, and transparent criteria for both students and instructors. In communication-intensive disciplines like the humanities, education, and business, where subjective interpretation often influences assessment, rubrics help establish common standards for evaluating performance. Rubrics enhance the objectivity and consistency of scoring by breaking down complex tasks like oral presentations or class discussions into observable elements (e.g., content organization, audience engagement, vocal clarity) (Reddy & Andrade, 2010)^[21]. According to García-Ros (2011)^[15], rubrics used for oral presentation assessments demonstrated high inter-rater reliability, high agreement between instructor and peer evaluations, and proved useful as summarizing and formative tools. Rubrics enable the assessment of final products and the observation of learner performance throughout the learning process. When rubrics are provided before and after the learning process, students can better understand instructor expectations, engage in self- and peer-assessment, and improve communication outcomes—the course objectives—over time (Cockett & Jackson, 2018)^[11]. Alias & Osman (2015)^[2] emphasized that well-designed analytical rubrics, focusing on linguistic and non-linguistic delivery skills, help students prepare more effectively for oral communication tasks. Rubrics can also enhance educational efficiency by clearly linking communication outcomes to course objectives (Brookhart, 2013)^[8].

Nevertheless, it has been criticized that the mechanical application of rubrics can simplify more complex competencies and has been feared to suppress judgment in general or creativity. Also emerging is the understanding that rubrics should be culturally and situationally modified, especially in the context of multilingual or global learning, where there may be differences in the way performance standards are interpreted. Even though these issues raise these questions, under technologically sophisticated settings, digital rubrics, which have been incorporated into a learning management system (LMS), allow automated feedback, peer evaluation, and real-time monitoring of learning outcomes. This has an immense positive effect on communication and higher education assessment environments, so rubrics are a good addition to the move towards data-driven assessment.

4. Rubric Types

Analytic rubrics and holistic rubrics have different effects on learners and instructors when analyzing communication assignments at the university level. Analytic rubrics are more effective in that they provide specific feedback since they are divided into several sub-elements, and a score is given for each of them. For multifaceted tasks like presentations, discussions, and writing assignments, analytic rubrics guide learners by clarifying task expectations and promoting learning (Brookhart, 2013)^[8].

Holistic rubrics evaluate based on an overall impression of the task, allowing for faster grading. This makes them a practical alternative for large classes or time-constrained environments. However, holistic rubrics risk overlooking complex task elements, potentially compromising reliability and assessment fairness (Phelps, 2008)^[19]. Therefore, educators should strategically select between the two rubric types based on task characteristics and learning objectives.

5. Rubric Characteristics

5.1. Self-Regulated Learning

Rubrics can function as educational tools that promote students' self-regulated learning (Wang, 2016; Zimmerman, 2002)^[29, 30]. Self-regulated learning refers to a learner's ability to set their own goals, monitor their learning process, and evaluate and adjust their performance (Zimmerman, 2002)^[30]. Rubrics provide a foundation for students to clearly recognize learning objectives, monitor their own performance, and engage in reflection throughout this entire process. Wang (2016)^[29] reported that in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environment, rubrics effectively support students' self-assessment activities and positively influence self-efficacy and the use of learning strategies. This is significant because rubrics simultaneously support learners' cognitive and affective self-regulation. When rubrics are combined with peer assessment, self-assessment, or reflection tasks, students reconstruct their performance through the evaluator's perspective, thereby strengthening their metacognitive abilities. Thus, rubrics can be utilized not merely as assessment tools but as strategic mediators for self-directed learning (Wang, 2016)^[29].

5.2. Cultural Context Sensitivity of Rubrics

While rubrics can be fair assessment tools when clear evaluation criteria are provided, their application in multicultural learning environments can potentially lead to unfairness (Roever & McNamara, 2006; Trainor & Bal, 2014)^[22, 28]. This occurs because rubrics' linguistic expressions, cultural values, and evaluation criteria are often designed around the perspectives of specific cultures or instructors. For example, assessment items like “confident presentation” or “clear eye contact” in a presentation assignment may disadvantage international students from cultures with different expressive norms. Students from East Asia may view eye contact or direct expression as impolite, potentially leading to misinterpretations of their performance as lacking confidence (Trainor & Bal, 2014)^[28]. Furthermore, the evaluation terms (e.g., sophisticated argument) in the rubric can seem abstract and vague to non-native English students, making it hard to act in accordance with the requirements or misunderstand. To counter such problems, researchers point out that co-constructed rubrics should be used, and they need to be culturally oriented (Roever & McNamara, 2006)^[22]. The procedure of the joint interpretation and reconstruction of assessment criteria by the instructors and students fosters internalization and incorporation of assessment criteria and reflects the meaning of the rubric into the language and values of learners. The method will turn assessment into a form of a pedagogic conversation, a scoring system, and a platform for developing cultural literacy and educational empathy. Thus, in the

multicultural classroom, the concepts of linguistic clarity, cultural expression diversity, and collaboration with a learner-centered standard setting are crucial when rubrics are utilized.

6. The Utilization of Technology in Rubric

The issue of how AI and rubrics can be integrated to measure communication skills is a relatively recent topic in educational research, with the growing popularity of AI technology within the scope of higher education. Suhairom *et al.*'s (2024) [26], study involved 21 studies on the evaluation of communication skills and rubrics in various fields of study. The findings showed that the rubrics are useful to establish both formative and summative feedback on the basis of different types of assessment (oral, visual, and digital). The primary aspects of the study that are to be taken into consideration are the gap in research and ICT competencies, the challenge of assessing audience communication, and the need to carry out a continuous assessment. The authors particularly paid attention to the fact that digital and linguistic competencies could play a significant role in the performance in communication, and they suggested using a multi-data method in the evaluation.

Fuller and Bixby (2024) [14], focused on AI-based rubric assessment software, like ChatGPT and Claude. Findings showed that such artificial intelligence systems are effective and available yet are inconsistent and unfair. The variance in scores and feedback between different AI systems and submissions of the same written assignment was large, and the difference between the scores was as high as 33 percent. In this study, it was warned that AI will generate hallucinations, biases, and no error margin reporting that can mislead students and reduce the value of feedback in education. Fuller and Bixby (2024) [14], based their research on the assumption that AI tools should not be entrusted with high-stakes assessments without human calibration because they are not fully trustworthy.

7. Ethical Considerations of Rubrics

Because rubric is an increasingly popular trend as an assessment tool, which promises objectivity and fairness, more ethical concerns arise that the implementation of the practices of standardized assessment could be likened to favoritism and uniformity in learners. Cockett and Jackson (2018) [11] mourned that the rubrics may result in discouragement of experimental procedures or the expression of the student through the undue correction of the assessment criterion. The rubric may become something that leads one in a particular direction when creative communication or interdisciplinarity is the key element in a learning activity. In this situation, rubrics may be considered as ideological instruments that coerce the viewpoint of the instructor, which can limit the identity and the thought patterns of learners. Being an educational philosophy, the very notion of rubric reflects the clash between standardization and customization, the necessity to quantify the complex issues of learning using the aid of one scale only. As such, the application of the rubric has to be restructured in a manner that views both formal justice and situational justice (Sadler, 2009) [23].

Moreover, rubrics have the danger of making assessment a process of automating assessment, making the assessor put

more emphasis on following the preset descriptors rather than getting to know what the students intend and mean. Assessment becomes a performance and not an act of enquiry when the learners start to write to the rubric instead of trying to find their own voices. This mechanical conformity can be especially objectionable in subjects that focus on creativity, thoughtfulness, or intercultural expression; the importance of learning may be ambiguous, and innovativeness. Furthermore, the power inherent in the language of rubric may unwillingly suppress other epistemologies, favoring the normative linguistic and cultural practices in comparison with other forms of knowing and describing the knowledge. Therefore, the moral duty of teachers is the construction and use of rubrics that are flexible, dialogic, and transparent things which are not restrictive, but are explanatory, and aware that equity in education requires responsiveness to individual contexts of the learner and cannot be achieved by meeting the rigid standards of a single standardized rubric.

8. Prior Research on Rubric Use in University Liberal Arts Speaking/Writing Courses

In higher education institutions, rubrics are widely recognized as an effective tool for assessing communication skills in academic disciplines where oral presentation ability is central to learning outcomes (Andrade & Brookhart, 2016; Brookhart, 2013) [4, 8].

In the case of the study by Dunbar *et al.* (2006) [13] that dwelled on the application of analytical rubrics, the research highlighted the role of rubric-based performance measurement in public speaking in enhancing consistency of evaluation and curriculum. This study revealed that rubrics give quantifiable skills and help in the systematic recording and enhancement of student learning results by rubrics. It especially emphasized the importance of inter-rater reliability and usage in educational programs specified by objectives. According to Reddy and Andrade (2010) [21], rubrics have been elaborated as aiding grading consistency and assisting students in reflection and self-evaluation in various disciplines such as the humanities. They turned out to be particularly useful in courses that are communication-oriented in their tasks, like oral presentation. It has been found that self-assessment, peer-assessment, and instructor-assessment rubrics, when frequently encountered, enhanced student performance on tasks that involved communication, highlighting the role of rubrics in encouraging student self-reflection. According to Alias and Osman (2015) [2], there is a necessity to plan and prepare elaborate rubrics of oral presentations in the learning field that combine cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. They said that in the creation of rubrics, one should set clear and holistic standards like accuracy of the content, clarity of voice, and engagement of the audience. They could offer a rubric utilization model that would apply in humanities and interdisciplinary settings where holism in performance of communication is stressed by reaching professional consensus and reliability through the Delphi procedure.

In line with this viewpoint, Cockett and Jackson (2018) [11], examined perceptions of rubric among undergraduate students when they were enrolled in a liberal arts scheme on communication-related assessments. The research established that students usually appreciated the level of

clarity and advice offered by rubrics, especially expectations and responses. Nonetheless, others were convinced that rigorous rubrics might inhibit creativity or originality, which are also key to such disciplines as the humanities. The study conducted by Cockett and Jackson (2018)^[11] highlighted that the implementation of rubrics during the learning process and their constant use contributed significantly to the development of self-assessment skills in students and the improvement of their performance in terms of communication. In his study, Garcia-Ros (2011) assessed the reliability of rubrics in communication evaluation with a quantitative validation of scales of presentation evaluation applied in psychology courses. His results showed that rubrics can fairly, rigorously, and consistently be used to assess communication skills when a systematic application of rubrics is applied. The given research proved that properly designed rubrics, when incorporated in pedagogy, can provide an effective means of improving, evaluating, and facilitating the development of communication skills.

All in all, current research emphasizes the fact that rubrics may fulfill various roles in communication evaluation: clear grading instruments, self-regulation learning resources, and systems of equitable and consistent assessment. Nonetheless, it was also revealed that there are restrictions when it comes to applying the use of rubric in speaking competencies, namely, limiting freedom of expression or resulting in a mechanistic approach to more complicated and sophisticated activities. When designed well and coupled with pedagogical support in institutions of higher learning, a rubric can play a significant role in teaching and assessing communication in the context of the skill-based liberal arts and interdisciplinary programs.

9. Perceptions of Rubric Use Among Instructors and Learners

Several rubric studies (Abbas *et al.*, 2019; Chan & Ho, 2019; Leader & Clinton, 2018; Wang, 2016)^[1, 10, 17, 29], have addressed instructor and learner perceptions of rubric effectiveness, highlighting the educational potential and implementation challenges of rubric utilization.

Wang (2016)^[29], examined how rubrics can be used to conduct self-assessment among Chinese EFL students in universities. This qualitative research, based on reflective journals and interviews, concluded that rubrics are an essential concept in facilitating self-regulated learning in that they assist the student in goal setting, tracking the learning process, and reflecting on the performance during tasks. Rubrics were also strongly associated with the internal factors of student motivation, student understanding, rubric assessment standards, and task relevance.

The study of Leader and Clinton (2018)^[17], was carried out on the perception of rubrics among students in one of the U.S. universities. This research claims that students have used rubrics as a tool to grasp the expectations of the instructor and enhance performance. Nevertheless, certain learners have condemned rubrics because they inhibit the creative process, and they are oppressive checklists instead of thinking about learning instruments. The results reported that the implementation and use of rubric at the initial phase of assignment presentation could help optimize the learning process.

Abbas *et al.* (2019)^[1] and Chan and Ho (2019)^[10], examined teacher and student perceptions of rubrics. Abbas *et al.* (2019)^[1], were in a qualitative case study at a teacher training college in Pakistan and examined the perceptions of teachers and pre-service teachers towards rubrics in assessment. The results showed that rubrics improve the transparency of the teaching-learning objectives, promote instruction based on the students, and can be used to provide feedback in formative assessment. Abbas *et al.* (2019)^[1], promoted the design of rubrics in cooperation with students to make them active participants of the learning process, and rubric design collaboration has higher accuracy in correlation with learning goals. The research also raised the issue of the time-consuming nature of rubric development, inconsistent use of rubrics, and that of teachers in terms of their awareness or incompetence in regard to rubric development and utilization. Chan and Ho (2019)^[10] developed a qualitative study of students' and teachers' attitudes towards rubrics. Eighty-two participants participated in the study, comprising 78 nursing students and 4 instructors. Focus group interviews were carried out, which produced six themes: (1) standardization of the methods of assessment, (2) objectivity of assessment, (3) guidelines of student assignments, (4) the use of clear explanations to explain the rubric scoring, and (5) no presented score ranges. According to the research results, Chan and Ho (2019)^[10] claimed that a good rubric not only provides fair and consistent grading but also allows the assessment of the performance of students more objectively and can help improve academic standards. The research on the use of rubrics motivated teachers to make good rubrics and offered them guidance on how to prevent bad rubrics.

Summarizing the research results on the perception of instructors and learners towards the use of rubrics, it was stressed that rubrics can have a massive positive influence on student learning, provided they are incorporated into the process of learning. The effectiveness of using rubrics was influenced by the design of rubric implementation, the training of the users, and attention to the implementation. Naturally, there were also discussions of the pros and cons of rubrics, such as limiting creativity and learning because of the inconsistency in the use of rubrics. To deal with them, a partnership between students and teachers is required, as well as educational interests and institutional support to solve a range of issues. It further implied that, in being applied as a flexible assessment and learning tool, as well as in enabling learning communication between teachers and learners, rubric use has great potential to bring success to the educational process.

10. Suggestions for Using Rubrics in Higher Education

10.1. Enhancing Validity, Transparency, and Educational Feedback in Communication Assessment Using Rubrics

The marking of complex communication skills in oral and presentation-based work has become a focus element with the aid of rubrics. In various fields, this device offers a basis for analyzing the content and delivery elements of communication, which are critical in liberal education as well as in training. Alias and Osman (2015)^[2] noted that one of the 21st-century skills is communication competencies, and this idea was also confirmed by Garcia-Ros (2011), who

wrote that rubrics are useful in the assessment of the presentation of students by their peers and by teachers. Rubrics increase the transparency/validity in the expressive areas of assessment, which may be subjective. According to Cockett and Jackson (2018) ^[11], rubrics help in giving students accurate expectations and evaluations that are helpful in enhancing the results of the communication competency of learners. Furthermore, rubrics serve as an assessment guide that instructs students on how to plan and execute communication tasks, enabling them to engage in self-directed learning according to clear performance criteria (Reddy & Andrade, 2010) ^[21].

Multiple studies (Cockett & Jackson, 2018; Leader & Clinton, 2018; Wang, 2016) ^[11, 17, 29], indicate that rubric use has a positive effect on student learning outcomes and can enhance students' and instructors' awareness of expectations. While rubrics may positively influence students' learning preparation and educational reflection (Alias & Osman, 2015; Leader & Clinton, 2018) ^[2, 17], some studies suggest that the detailed criteria in rubrics can increase student anxiety, implying that rubric use does not guarantee improvements in learners' confidence or performance (Panadero & Romero, 2014).

10.2. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Rubrics

No longer an option, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is a necessity in this era of rapidly developing technology. Nevertheless, the process of assessment necessarily presupposes the aspect of validity, reliability, and transparency, which suggests that humans should still be at the core of the assessment process. The involvement of humans in evaluation has a great influence on reliability and pedagogic efficiency. According to Fuller and Bixby (2024) ^[14], although AI technologies such as ChatGPT demonstrate the opportunity to automate rubric-based assessment, they also represent a significant threat to fair evaluation because of the lack of consistency, transparency, and interpretative judgment. Artificial intelligence systems provide inaccurate results and shallow feedback, which can not only destroy trust in students but also adversely affect the learning process. Referring to the behaviorist theory and cognitive load theory, Fuller and Bixby (2024) ^[14] indicate that inconsistent feedback leads to the waste of motivation in learning, as well as overloading of cognitive load on the learner. This cognitive dissonance may be heightened, especially when the students find it difficult to analyze or correct the mistakes that were made in the AI-generated tests. Such concerns are especially acute in humanities and communication-related areas, which leaves moral and education-related concerns regarding the right of AI to have the authority to assess. Moreover, the educational facilities are challenged with the serious problem of finding a balance between the efficiency of AI and academic integrity and equity. Fuller and Bixby (2024) ^[14], in their turn, suggest a hybrid solution. This system implies making educators and learners co-author rubrics, applying AI-powered tools in the process of calibration and supervision, and providing feedback in an informal and dialogic or formative fashion instead of automating it entirely. This method may be an effective substitute that will embrace the advantages of AI and maintain the educational value and ethical accountability of human-driven evaluation.

In this way, with the introduction of artificial intelligence in the assessment field, teachers should pay critical attention to the trade-off between efficiency and reliability. Higher education institutions should prioritize human educator-led calibration, transparent feedback

10.3. Criticisms of Rubric Use

While rubrics offer the advantage of providing learners with clear assessment criteria and enhancing evaluation consistency, criticism exists that overly prescriptive assessment scales may instead limit learners' communication skills, creativity, and expressive diversity (Cockett & Jackson, 2018; García-Ros, 2011) ^[11, 15]. The comprehensive, graded standards found in rubrics can, especially in tasks involving communication, where students are expected to be free to express their original thoughts, serve instead to promote memorization or prompt students to write with their teacher in mind, and therefore not to illustrate their true skills. This is a particular problem in the humanities and in interdisciplinary areas that focus on subtle and interpretive reasoning. According to Reddy & Andrade (2010) ^[21], there is a danger of misuse of rubrics as bureaucratic instruments that substitute professional judgments on the part of the instructor and can undermine qualitative interpretive power and educational intuition of assessment. That is, despite the idea of rubrics as supplementary resources, one can easily think that they can become procedural convenience resources that stifle the judgmental capacities of the assessor themselves. There are practical issues of the field applicability of rubrics. Effective rubrics cannot be developed simply by listing things; thus, sophisticated design and procedures to guarantee reliability and validity (e.g., the Delphi method), as well as the necessary training to ensure inter-rater reliability (Alias and Osman, 2015) ^[2]. However, the processes require a lot of time, knowledge, and effort that may put a lot of pressure on the instructors and make the assessment less feasible. More so, the current development of generative AI and automated evaluation instruments is changing the very nature of rubric creation and usage. As different AI-based tools can generate rubric, analyze items, and provide feedback automatically, the use of AI is becoming over-reliant (both by instructors and by learners). This undermines the educational intention of rubric, introducing new ethical and practical concerns, as such considerations as bias and validity in AI algorithms may affect the fairness and accuracy of assessment.

11. Conclusion and Future Directions

The relevance of rubrics in the evaluation of communication competencies in higher learning institutions has been established in different studies. The rubrics may improve coherence and transparency of assessment and prove themselves as effective teaching methods of encouraging the process of self-evaluation so that learners can identify their strengths and weaknesses. These advantages, however, require a well-considered design of rubric, the experience of the evaluator, and the integration with the curriculum to occur organically. Rubrics must not transform into evaluation instruments since constant critical reflection is essential. Within the framework of liberal arts and interdisciplinary education in universities, communication competency is now

being codified as a core competency of the 21st century and is also being highlighted as an essential foundational competency in career and social interaction. Within this fact, rubric may serve as a practical and instructional construction that can evaluate and be able to support complex communication abilities in a systemic manner.

In order to better utilize rubrics in the future, there must be collaborative rubric development with the help of the learners. Studies show that in case learners are involved in the rubric development process, one may get learner-centered assessment criteria, and improvement of self-directedness, understanding assessment, and application skills (Cockett and Jackson, 2018) ^[11]. Additionally, through the incorporation of rubrics in the whole learning process as opposed to scoring tools, they can become metacognitive tools that provide reflection, planning, and feedback discussions between the instructors and learners.

The practical and ethical applicability of the rubrics will also require reconsideration of the conditions of the recent increase in the number of AI-based automated assessment tools. Although AI-compiled rubrics and automated scoring indeed have their benefits (instructors have to work less), the educational quality of rubrics can be undermined, in which case no attempts are made to make the assessment unbiased, understandable, and context-dependent. Based on this, the use of rubrics grounded in human experience and interpretive judgment will always prevail, and the use of technology must never surpass in being supportive.

Lastly, rubrics are resources that provide controlled flexibility in the communication competencies evaluation process. The future quandary is not to develop rubrics as a framework of formal evaluation, but as a device for enhancing the skills of learners and educational communication. This must be accompanied by the promotion of assessment literacy among instructors and learners and can be a viable foundation of a culture of assessment in higher learning institutions.

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