STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON RUBRIC USAGE IN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

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Abstract: The qualitative study was designed to investigate the opinions of first year students towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation. The study was carried out at Samste College of Education. Through cluster random sampling, 2 sections of students were selected out of 4 sections of first year students. Each section had 30 students. Students' reflective journals were used to collect the data. The intervention instruments like rubrics and lesson plans were validated by using Item Objective Congruence (IOC).The qualitative data collected from students' reflective journals were analyzed using coding system. The coding system included 3 levels of analysis: open, axial, and selective coding. In case of open coding, data obtained from the student reflective journals were systematically organized. When the data were identified and categorized, axial coding was used. Selective coding was used to categorize the data and interpret the themes. The analysis of the data showed that rubrics 1) encouraged independent learning among the students 2) informed teacher expectations to students 3) provided consistent and objective assessment 4) provided guidance while students were learning 5) helped in the goal setting and planning in Educational Assessment and Evaluation 6) provided feedback 7) motivated them to learn 8) encouraged self-assessment and peer assessment 9) reduced anxiety: all of which may directly or indirectly enhanced student's academic performance. Therefore the findings showed that students have positive opinion towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation.

Keywords: Educational Assessment and Evaluation, Rubrics, Reflective Journal, Grounded theory

Introduction

Rubrics are scoring tools that explicitly represent the performance expectation of an assignment or a piece of work. Rubrics divides the assigned works into component parts and provides clear description of characteristics of work associated with each component, at varying levels of mastery (Wolf and steven, 2007). Rubrics are tools to assist student as they engage in the self-regulated learning process. Rubrics has emerged as formative assessment model for teaching and learning (McMillan, 2013). Reddy, Du and Mycek (2010) also found out thatrubrics aren't just for grading. They can be used as teaching tools as well. The rubrics are increasingly gaining recognition as a valuable tool in teaching and learning in higher education (Bharuthram, 2015). Used widely in the USA at school level, they are increasingly being accepted in higher education as well.

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Rubric facilitates or empowers learner autonomous study-skills which lead to lifelong learning. The rubrics also encourages independent learning where learner is responsible for his/her own learning. This can be another skill for the survival in 21st century where knowledge is abundant. Rubrics improve the students' quality of work through self-assessment and feedbacks. Rubrics also guide, monitor, facilitate and scaffold students while they are learning.

According to the Wheel of the Academic Law of Royal University of Bhutan (2015) under the Assessment Regulation 3.4. All assessed work should have associated marking criteria and marking scheme. This indicates that the lecturers should use rubrics to assess and facilitate student's learning.However Utha (2015) found out thatthe assessment at higher educational level in the country takes place through questioning, class test, homework, project work and examination. Lecturers hardly use rubrics in teaching and learning. Even though they use, they generally keep assessment criteria to themselves without articulating what counts when they give grades, creating inconsistent assessment of student performance across the module. More over rubrics were used only for assessment purposes. Therefore the study was designed to investigate first year students' opinions towards the rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation. Educational Assessment and Evaluation is an educational module offered in the Bhutanese education colleges. It is all about the assessment of child and effective learning

Research objective

The main objective of the study isto investigate the opinion of students towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation.

Research question

What are the opinion of students towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation?

Population and sample of the study

The population of the study comprised of 120 students from 4 sections of first year students studying at Samste College of Education. Each section has 30 students and consists of mixed gender and mixed ability students. The cluster random sampling was used to select 2 sections out of 4 sections of first year students.

Research instruments

The qualitative data was collected from the students based on their reflective journals (three times over the study period). The two types of rubrics were analytical and holistic rubrics which were designed and used in the lesson to investigate the opinions of students towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation. The analytical and holistic rubrics has numerous advantages comparing to other types of rubrics. Therefore analytical and holistic rubrics were selected for the study. The rubrics for the Educational Assessment and Evaluation concept or knowledge is analytical since it has level of performance for each criteriaalong with description while the rubrics for the bookkeeping is holistic as it provides the wholesome view of the expected outcome.

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The rubrics were developed based on the objectives of Unit 2 of Educational Assessment and Evaluation course book and could be applied to all the topics under Unit 2.The researcher introduced rubrics to students and then taught how to use rubrics to learn Educational Assessment concepts. Researcher provided students with rubrics along with the topic. Students learned the given topic using rubrics. Rubrics hasdescription of expected outcome of the given topic. Rubric guided the students step by step to the expected learning outcomes. Teacher facilitated, monitored and scaffolded when students were learning the given topic using rubrics. Teacher made sure that all the resources like the internet, textbooks, journals, etc were available for the students.

The students were asked to write a reflective journal on the rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation. The students wrote reflective journal for three times in the 2nd ,3rd and the 4th week. Students were asked to write about their opinion towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation. The guidelines on how to write reflective journal were provided beforehand and the researcher taught the students on how to write a good reflective journal using the guidelines. The main aim of reflective journal in the study was to investigate student's opinion towards rubric usage in Educational Assessment and Evaluation. The rubrics were validated by experts(two senior lecturers form SCE) using Item Objective Congruence (IOC).

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the students' journal were analyzed by using the coding system (open, axial and selective) based on Grounded Theory of Corbin and Strauss (2008). In open coding, the data obtained from the journal were systematically organized. The data were identified and categorized in axial coding and finally in selective coding, data collected from students were categorized and interpreted. The overall data were interpreted in nine core themes:

1) Encouraged independent learning
2) Informed teachers' expectation
3) Consistent and objective assessment
4) Provided guidance
5) Helped in goal setting and planning
6) Provided feedback
7) Motivated to learn
8) Encouraged self-assessment and peer assessment
9) Reduced anxiety

I. Encouraged Independent Learning

The students in their reflective journal mentioned that rubrics encouraged independent learning where the learner was responsible for his/her own learning. Here it means learners tried to learn on their own and construct the meaning with the help of criteria explicitly listed in rubrics. A student acquired knowledge by his or her efforts and developed the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation.

"Rubrics has detailed description of the characteristics for each level of performance, so with the help of rubric, we can learn ourselves" (EILSRJ5)

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"It helped me to develop and gather lot of information without the help of teacher and it encourages self-assessment". (EILSRJ7).

"Learning using rubric is one of the best way to learn without depending on others". (EILSRJ23)

"Rubric helped us to learn independently". (EILSRJ8)

Instructional rubrics facilitated learner autonomous study-skill among the students which subsequently lead to lifelong learning. Rubrics helped students to be autonomous by being able to judge their own work. Majority of students acknowledged that the rubric encouraged them to be independent learner, self-initiate work and regulate their own learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that rubrics encouraged independent learning in the learners.

II. Informed teacher's expectations

Students felt that they better understand teacher expectation when rubrics were provided to them. Students stated that understanding the expectation of teacher, format of the task and the resources necessary to complete it were all important in doing high quality work.

"Instructional rubric was helpful in general. We are able to carry out the task with the expectation of teacher's desire." UTESRJ6

"Rubric helped me to fulfill the teacher's expectation and as a result I managed to score high marks in the given task".UTESRJ24

Rubrics were used by students as guidelines to work towards teacher's expectation. The criteria and performance-level descriptions in rubrics helped students to understand what the desired performance is and what it look like. Majority of students acknowledged that rubrics informed them about the teachers' expectation.

III. Consistent and objective assessment

Students also revealed that rubrics allowed the assessment to be more objective and consistent. They also emphasized that rubric-referenced grading as fair and transparent. Students saw rubrics as a valuable grading tool because rubrics helped them to attain better grades. Rubrics comprehended and justified the grade to the students. That's why students were liberated from the perception of traditional biased grading.

"Well-defined grading criteria made everything clear and understandable." (COASRJ15).

"Rubrics made grading transparent instead of traditional unsteady grading system". (COASRJ18)

"Rubric strengthened the quality and standard of assessment. It made assessment and evaluation fair and provided justice." (COASRJ27)

IV. Provided Guidance

The entries in student's journal described rubrics as a 'guide to learn'. This is because rubric monitored student's progress and provided them direction. When rubrics were given to students with the task description, they helped students monitor and assess their progress as they work toward clearly indicated goals.

"Rubrics have helped me by providing guidance on what specific expectation my Lecturer has for the specific task". (PGSRJ12)

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"Rubrics guided me while I am learning Educational Assessment and Evaluation concepts". (PGSRJ14)

"Rubric was helpful in learning Educational Assessment and Evaluation concepts as it provides clear information of what to do."(PGSRJ25)

"It acted as a guide and provided direction in which area should be focused." (PGSRJ27)

V. Helped in Goal setting and planning

The students showed high interest in using the rubrics and they seemed to be aiming for the highest level in the rubric. This showed that rubrics helped them in goal-setting and planning which were crucial metacognitive strategies that supports students' learning.

Students also revealed that the integration of the rubrics in Educational Assessment and Evaluation course served them in planning and shaping instruction by breaking the Educational Assessment and Evaluation concepts into different components and directing students towards manageable learning targets.

"Rubric supported good thinking". (HGPSRJ30)

"I used rubric to allocate time and resources in the planning and completion of my task."(HGPSRJ27)

"Rubric helped me in planning to achieve goal that was set in the beginning of class with the help of rubrics."(HGPSJJ19)

"We use that as a guideline to help us plan out the given task". (HGPSRH26)

VI. Provided feedback

Students also stated that rubrics were an effective tool to provide focused feedback. The feedback enabled them to learn meaningfully and effectively. Rubrics also assisted them in overcoming their shortcoming in learning through meaningful feedback.

"We received necessary feedbacks on our task from our tutor". (PFSRJ29)

"Rubric helped me to receive feedback from our tutor. Feedback helped us to learn more". (PFSRJ13)

"We received feedback both from our tutor and from our friends. The feedbacks were provided based on rubric". (PFSRJ18)

VII. Motivated to Learn

Students also reflected in the journal that involving them in development of criteria and rubrics motivated them to learn. This is because they were clear with criteria to success. The positive feedback that they received from tutor also motivated them. The motivation encouraged the students to engage themselves in exploring information with enthusiasm.

"When we are clear with the skill we need to master, we gain confidence and solve the problem easily". (MLSRJ19)

"Learning with rubrics was helpful in general. We were able to do the given task with the expectation of teacher desire. It made me confident in learning Educational Assessment and evaluation."(MLSRJ9)

"Positive feedback provided using rubric were motivating".MLSRJ4

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VIII. Encouraged self-assessment and peer assessment

Based on student's reflective journal, it was also found that rubric can be used for self-assessment and peer assessment of students where they evaluate their own work and compare with others work, and earn better grades. This led to the development the personal habit of self-assessment amongst the students and encouraged peer assessment.

"Rubrics helped us in self-assessment and peer assessment. Peer assessment was a good way to look at others work, assess them and compare to our work in order to learn from our friends. Self-assessment was very helpful as it allowed me to spot the mistakes in my own work and rate myself." (ESPSRJ21).

"Rubrics not only helped us to learn but it also helped us to do self-assessment." (ESPSRJ6)

"Rubric helped us to reflect, analyze and improve our work." (ESPSRJ28)

"Learning using rubric is very effective way of learning. Since there are categories given in rubric, we could easily assess our work and rate ourselves."ESPSRJ30

IX. Reduced Anxiety

Since rubric helped students to focus their effort on producing high quality work and getting better grades, they felt less anxious in learning Educational Assessment and Evaluation concepts.

"Rubric focused us in fulfilling goal and objective of the task." (RASRJ12)

"I enjoyed learning with rubric as it gave me clear direction". (RASRJ21)

"I was never worried about the procedure. Rubric contained everything. Teacher should use rubric for all the types". (RASRJ27)

Based on student's reflective journal, the researcher concluded that the opinion of students towards the rubric usage were rubric 1) encouraged independent learning 2) informed teacher's expectation 3)

Consistent and objective assessment 4) provided guidance 5) helped in goal setting and planning 6) provided feedback 7) motivated to learn 8) encouraged self-assessment and peer assessment and 9) reduced anxiety.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the student's reflective journal, Students revealed that rubrics made teachers' expectation explicit. They liked the fact that rubrics let them know "what is expected," and contrast it with "guessing game" they felt they had do when teacher did not provide rubric. This matched with the findings of Qasim (2015) and Maxwell (2010) that rubrics informed students about teachers' expectation. This helped students to focus more attention to primary content and reduce effort to add unnecessary material in their task (Uddin, 2014). As in Andrade and Du (2005) found in their study, they also expressed that rubrics gave them insight into teacher's expectations. Therefore, the student's knowledge about the teacher's expectations helped them develop self-regulation skills to identify their strengths and weaknesses and perform better (Qasim, 2015).

Students in the experimental group emphasized that rubric-referenced grading as objective, consistent, fair and transparent. This finding was very much consistent with findings of Bloxham, Boyd, and Orr (2011) findings which

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shared the same thing. Jonsson (2014) also identified that rubrics made assessment tasks more transparent for students and provided them with the tools to unlock secret by involving them in the assessment process. However it contradicted with the finding of Andrade and Du (2005) where they did not see the impact as being primarily "Better, fair grades" (p. 5), but instead quicker and more responsive grading.

Students also described rubrics as a guide to learn. This was in line with what Shepherd and Mullane (2008) asserted that students learn to monitor their own progress and made improvement in a timely order using rubrics as a guide. Rubrics also guided instructional design and delivery (Jonsson and Svingby, 2007; Reddy and Andrade, 2010; Steven and Levi, 2013; Wolf and Stevens, 2007). McGatha and Darcy (2010) found that rubrics could be designed to formulate standards for levels of achievement and can be used to guide and improve performance. This supports students' opinion on rubrics as a guide to learn.

Students uniformly endorsed in their journal that integration of the rubrics in Educational Assessment and Evaluation course served them in planning and shaping instruction by breaking the Educational Assessment and Evaluation concepts into different components and directing students towards manageable learning targets. This findings reflected the key aspects of self-regulatory behaviors such as goal setting, planning, self-assessment and revision (Zimmerman, 2000). This finding also validated the cyclic process of formative assessment described by Black and Wiliam (1998), which requires that students are able to recognize the goal, consider evidence about the position of their work in relation to that goal and have an understanding of a way to close the gap between the two (Andrade and Du, 2005). Students mentioned in their journal that rubric were an aid to them in both planning and completion of the task.

Students mentioned in their journal that rubrics provided more informative feedback about their strengths and areas in need of improvement. Similar findings was also reflected in the study by Helvoort (2010) that rubrics encouraged meaningful feedback. Al-jarf (2011) also found that rubric helped in analyzing students work and provide beneficial feedback to students that will lead to higher quality work. They routinely commented in their journal that rubric provided immediate and positive feedback which helped them to perform better. Panadero and Jonsson (2013) also concluded that another manner for the use of rubrics to contribute to student learning was by aiding the feedback process, which has been deemed useful by teachers and students alike in their study. Gunlock (2014) concluded that students were more self-motivated and engaged in their learning if they were provided with meaningful feedback from instructional tool like rubrics.

Students stated that rubric encouraged self-assessment and peer assessment. With the help of criteria listed in rubric, they were able to assess their own performance and improve their quality of work. This supports the findings of Andrade, Ying and Xiaolei(2008) which claimed that student's self-assessment

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using rubric leads to improvement in their performance. Similar finding was also highlighted by Lovorn and Rezaei (2011); Steven and Levi (2013) in their studies that rubrics provided students with a self-assessment and peer feedback tool.Garc?a-Ros et al. (2012) also found that rubrics were the most appropriate tools for self-and peer assessment in universities. Smit et al. (2017) also observed a direct effect of the rubric on student's self-assessment.He and Canty (2012) confirmed that rubric referenced self-assessment enhanced student's performance in anatomy class.

Students also shared that rubric reduced anxiety. This was due to the fact that they do not know exactly where to put emphasis, what to look for, how much emphasis they should give on different elements of task. When they knew what they had to include and what they did not have to include and how much emphasis they had to put on different elements, they felt a sort of relief and they could produce their best product as much as possible. Besides, it also gave them a sense of independence, a sense of autonomy, when they know what they have to do and why (Uddin, 2014). This supports Reynolds-Keefer (2010) findings where rubrics lowered student's anxiety level because of increased communication between teacher and students.

Occasionally 1 or 2 students expressed dissatisfaction with rubrics saying that rubrics created a restrictive environment with little room for interpretation. However, majority of students experienced an incredible impact of rubrics in their performance. In time, they were so much motivated that overwhelming numbers of students showed great deal of enthusiasm in the hope that rubrics must be included in all the courses in university. This is because of the positive emotions that they experienced during treatment using rubrics facilitated the meta-cognitive process in them and improved their performance.

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