Grading Rubrics and Teachers' Effectiveness in the Assessment of Learners in the Lower Secondary Curriculum in Bushenyi-Ishaka Municipality

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessment in Lower Secondary Curriculum in Bushenyi-Ishaka Municipality in Bushenyi District. Using a descriptive survey design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 124 students, 26 teachers, 4 headteachers, and 4 directors of studies through questionnaires and interviews. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. The study established a statistically significant positive relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessment; students' responses showed a strong correlation ($r = 0.654$, $p = 0.000$), while teachers' responses indicated a moderate correlation ($r = 0.544$, $p = 0.004$). The study concluded that consistent use of grading rubrics enhances fairness, transparency, and teachers' effectiveness in assessment. It therefore recommended continuous teacher training, collaboration to standardize rubric use, and sensitization of students on rubric application. Further research should examine the impact of grading rubrics on students' academic performance and motivation in the Lower Secondary Curriculum, since this study focused on teachers' effectiveness in assessment through the use of grading rubrics.

Keywords: Grading Rubrics, Teachers' Effectiveness, Assessment of Learners, Lower Secondary Curriculum.

Introduction

Globally, the integration of grading rubrics and effective assessment strategies has become a focal point in educational discourse, particularly in secondary education. Research indicates that the use of formative assessment rubrics enhances students' understanding of

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expectations and promotes active learning. For instance, a study by Andrade and Du (2015) found that rubrics not only clarify instructional goals but also support self-regulated learning among students.

In Asia, recent studies have highlighted the positive impact of grading rubrics on student learning outcomes. A study conducted in Kuwait demonstrated that the use of rubrics in writing assessments provided students with clear expectations and constructive feedback, leading to improved writing skills (Sanger & Gleason, 2020). Similarly, research in Indonesia found that implementing rubrics in peer assessments enhanced students' understanding of biological concepts and increased the accuracy of self-evaluations (Rachmatullah & Ha, 2019).

In Europe, there has been a concerted effort to reform assessment practices to make them more inclusive and supportive of student learning. The European Education Area's working group on Pathways to School Success emphasized the importance of formative assessment and the use of diverse tools, such as rubrics, to provide effective feedback and address individual learner needs (European Education Area, 2023).

In Africa, educational systems have increasingly acknowledged the importance of competency-based curricula and the role of assessment in achieving educational goals. A study conducted in Rwanda highlighted that formative assessment rubrics supported secondary school students' progressive learning in organic chemistry, with 87.8% of participants reporting enhanced critical thinking through rubric use (Nsabayezu et al., 2022). Similarly, in Kenya, the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) introduced formative assessment rubrics as a key component to support individualized learning and provide feedback, despite challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited resources (Atak, 2021).

Within East Africa, countries have been reforming their educational frameworks to incorporate effective assessment practices. In Rwanda, the adoption of formative assessment rubrics has improved students' understanding and motivation in science education (Nsabayezu et al., 2022). In Kenya, the CBC emphasizes formative assessments, including rubrics, to enhance teaching and learning, although challenges such as time constraints and limited resources persist (Atak, 2021).

The successful implementation of Uganda's Lower Secondary Curriculum (LSC), introduced in 2020, requires teachers to adopt competency-based assessment methods,

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including the effective use of grading rubrics. Grading rubrics serve as structured tools that outline performance criteria, improve consistency in assessment, and provide students with clear expectations (Brookhart, 2013; Andrade, 2019). Despite these benefits, the integration and effective use of grading rubrics remain limited in many Ugandan secondary schools. According to the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB, 2023), only 45% of secondary school teachers in Uganda consistently use grading rubrics in their assessments, and 58% lack adequate training in competency-based assessment techniques (UNEB, 2021).

In Bushenyi-Ishaka Municipality, these national challenges are reflected at the local level. Tumusiime, Kabonesa, and Mbabazi (2022) reported that only 38% of teachers in the area utilize grading rubrics regularly, with private schools showing slightly better adoption than public ones. Teachers cited limited training, lack of standardized rubric templates, large class sizes, and time constraints as major barriers.

The limited integration of rubrics also contributes to inconsistencies and subjectivity in grading, leading to unclear or delayed feedback for students, which undermines learning outcomes and instructional quality (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie, 2009). While grading rubrics are intended to enhance teacher effectiveness in assessment, their impact remains questionable where implementation is inconsistent or unsupported. Therefore, this study seeks to establish the relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessing learners in the Lower Secondary Curriculum.

Purpose

To examine the relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessment in Lower Secondary Curriculum in Bushenyi-Ishaka Municipality in Bushenyi District.

Literature Review

According to Oduor and Nyanga (2022), rubrics play a critical role in teaching practice within Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Rubrics help teachers shift from norm-referenced to standards-based assessment, aligning evaluations with predetermined outcomes. By providing clear guidelines, rubrics enable students to understand the specific requirements of assignments, focus their efforts more effectively, and engage in self-assessment. For

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teachers, rubrics offer a framework that ensures uniformity in evaluating student work, thereby reducing subjectivity and potential biases in grading.

Mwangi and Muthoni (2023) emphasized the role of rubrics in effective competency-based assessment. The use of rubrics has been shown to improve teacher consistency, reduce subjectivity, and support formative feedback. Teachers who use rubrics regularly are better able to identify learner strengths and weaknesses, enhancing their diagnostic capability. The analysis concluded that while rubrics effectively guide students toward higher performance standards, the magnitude of their impact can vary based on factors such as educational level and implementation context. For instance, younger students might require more extensive interventions to benefit fully from rubric use, whereas older students may experience positive effects with shorter implementations.

A comprehensive meta-analysis by Panadero et al. (2023) examined the impact of rubric use on students' academic performance, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. The study revealed that rubrics have a positive and moderate effect on academic performance, with an effect size of 0.57. Additionally, rubrics were found to enhance self-regulation strategies and self-efficacy, albeit to a lesser extent. The study also highlighted that the design specifics of rubrics, such as the number of criteria or performance levels, did not significantly influence their effectiveness, suggesting that the mere presence of clear guidelines is a critical factor in enhancing student outcomes.

In a separate meta-analysis, Camargo Salamanca et al. (2024) explored the effects of scoring rubrics on self-efficacy and self-regulation among K-16 students. The findings indicated a statistically significant moderate to large positive effect on self-efficacy (Hedges' g = 0.39) and a large effect on self-regulation (Hedges' g = 1.00). These results underscore the role of rubrics in fostering students' confidence in their abilities and their capacity to manage and direct their own learning processes.

In Zambia, Malama and Musonda (2023) investigated the impact of using assessment rubrics on pupils' academic performance in senior secondary mathematics. The research revealed that the experimental group, which utilized rubrics, achieved a mean score of 59.8%, compared to 34.1% in the control group. This significant improvement was attributed to the clarity and structure provided by rubrics, which helped students understand learning targets and engage in self-assessment. The study concluded that rubrics not only enhance academic

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performance but also promote a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts by encouraging students to critically evaluate their work and identify areas for improvement.

Similarly, Mphande and Kaluba (2023) focused on the assessment of pupils' conceptual understanding of algebra and demonstrated that the use of assessment rubrics led to higher mean achievement scores in the experimental group compared to the control group. The study concluded that rubrics not only facilitate effective assessment and grading but also clarify learning objectives, thereby enhancing student performance. The structured guidance provided by rubrics was seen to promote active learning and improve collaboration between students and instructors.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain comprehensive data on the use of grading rubrics and their effectiveness in assessing students in the Lower Secondary Curriculum.

Target Population: The target population comprised 328 participants, including teachers, Ordinary Level students, directors of studies, and head teachers from two private and two government-aided schools within Bushenyi-Ishaka Municipality. Schools were selected to ensure a balanced representation of assessment practices. Teachers were included as key informants on grading, students as primary recipients of assessment, and administrators to provide institutional perspectives.

Sample and Sampling Techniques: From the target population, a sample of 181 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Stratified random sampling was applied to teachers and students, while purposive sampling was used to select directors of studies and head teachers.

Data Collection Instruments: Data were collected using structured questionnaires for teachers and students, covering demographics, rubric use, and teacher effectiveness. Sections B and C employed a five-point Likert scale, supplemented by a few open-ended questions. For directors of studies and head teachers, an interview guide with open-ended items captured insights on assessment policies, challenges, and recommendations.

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Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Pearson correlation was applied to examine the relationship between rubric use and teacher effectiveness. Qualitative data from interviews and rubric content analysis were thematically analyzed to identify patterns, perceptions, and challenges in assessment practices.

Results

Table 1: Response Rate of Participants

Respondent category	Sample size	Study participants	Response rate
Students (questionnaires)	145	124	85.5
Teachers (questionnaires)	28	26	92.9
Headteachers (interview guide)	04	04	100
Directors of Studies (interview guide)	04	04	100
Total	**181**	**158**	**87.3**

The study achieved a high overall response rate of 87.3%, with all participant categories meeting or exceeding recommended thresholds for representativeness and reliability.

Table 2: Teacher Effectiveness in using Grading Rubrics

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
The grading rubrics used in assessment are well-structured and easy to follow.	2(7.7%)	5 (19.2%)	4 (15.4%)	14 (53.8%)	1(3.8%)	3.27	1.079
The rubrics clearly define performance expectations for students.	2(7.7%)	2(7.7%)	7 (26.9%)	11 (42.3%)	4 (15.4%)	3.50	1.105
The grading rubrics are aligned with the learning objectives of the curriculum.	3 (11.5%)	3 (11.5%)	5 (19.2%)	8 (30.8%)	7 (26.9%)	3.50	1.334
Teachers consistently use grading rubrics when assessing student work.	1(3.8%)	7 (26.9%)	3 (11.5%)	13 (50.0%)	2(7.7%)	3.31	1.087
The rubrics provide clear guidelines that reduce subjectivity in marking.	1(3.8%)	5 (19.2%)	7 (26.9%)	9 (34.6%)	4 (15.4%)	3.38	1.098
The use of grading rubrics improves the fairness and transparency of assessments.	3 (11.5%)	4 (15.4%)	3 (11.5%)	9 (34.6%)	7 (26.9%)	3.50	1.364
Averages						**3.41**	**1.178**

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Teachers generally held moderately positive perceptions of grading rubrics, with 57.6% finding them well-structured and easy to follow, 57.7% agreeing they clearly define performance expectations, and 61.5% affirming their fairness and transparency (average mean = 3.41). However, 26.9%–30.7% of teachers reported challenges with rubric clarity, implementation consistency, and reducing subjectivity in grading, indicating areas where professional development could strengthen rubric use and standardize assessment practices.

From qualitative responses, when teachers were asked, "What challenges do you face in using grading rubrics for assessment?" several themes emerged, including time consumption, lack of training, and rubric complexity. At School W, Teacher 1 noted, *"They take no much time,"* while Teacher 11 highlighted difficulties in fairness and accuracy, stating, *"Allocation of scores of certain items is by weighted scores, which are hard to get. This makes standard assessment of learners difficult."* Teacher 3 emphasized misalignment with learner needs, commenting, *"Difficult to deliver and get alignment with the needs of the learners."* Teacher 4 cited multiple challenges, including resources and training gaps: *"Time-consuming. Lack of enough assessment tools. Lack of sufficient training for teachers."* Similarly, Teacher 5 observed, *"Subjectivity in interpretation. Time wasted in developing and using it."* Other teachers identified contextual barriers, such as learner mobility *"Changing of learners from one school to another"*—and bias within rubric design: *"It generalizes categories of learners, thus favoring some at the expense of others."*

In qualitative analysis, during interviews with headteachers and directors of studies, the following responses were obtained;

When the participants were asked, "How are grading rubrics currently being used in the assessment of learners in your school? What are the common types of rubrics used?", varied but concrete responses emerged across schools, revealing common practices and shared gaps. At school W, the Headteacher asserted, *"Teachers who write items submit them to the D.O.S office together with the scoring grids. Types: Descriptive grading rubrics with clear performance levels and descriptors."* Similarly, the Director of Studies confirmed departmental consultation before assessments, stating, *"Teachers set individual items for end of term assessment but must score them after consultations from other department members."* This highlights efforts towards uniformity but also hints at informal, department-level management of rubrics.

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Table 3: Teachers' Use of Grading Rubrics

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers provide timely and constructive feedback based on grading rubrics.	0 (0.0%)	2 (7.7%)	13 (50.0%)	9 (34.6%)	2 (7.7%)	3.42	0.758
Teachers have sufficient training in using grading rubrics for student assessment.	5 (19.2%)	7 (26.9%)	8 (30.8%)	3 (11.5%)	3 (11.5%)	2.69	1.258
The assessment methods used by teachers align with the curriculum requirements.	3 (11.5%)	2 (7.7%)	7 (26.9%)	12 (46.2%)	2 (7.7%)	3.31	1.123
Teachers incorporate various assessment techniques beyond grading rubrics.	0 (0.0%)	5 (19.2%)	13 (50.0%)	5 (19.2%)	3 (11.5%)	3.23	0.908
Students understand how grading rubrics are used to evaluate their performance.	6 (23.1%)	6 (23.1%)	6 (23.1%)	8 (30.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2.62	1.169
Teachers engage students in the assessment process using rubrics.	4 (15.4%)	6 (23.1%)	5 (19.2%)	11 (42.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2.88	1.143
Averages						**3.03**	**1.060**

The findings indicate that teachers hold a moderate perception of grading rubrics, with strengths in curriculum alignment (53.9% agreement) and providing feedback (42.3% agreement), but notable gaps exist in training (46.1% disagreed they were adequately trained), use of diverse assessment methods, student understanding (46.2% disagreed that students understand rubrics), and student involvement in assessments. High neutrality rates across

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several items suggest inconsistency or uncertainty in rubric implementation, highlighting the need for targeted professional development to improve teachers' skills and enhance student engagement in rubric-based assessment practices (overall mean = 3.03, SD = 1.060).

From qualitative data, when asked, "What strategies do you think can improve teachers' effectiveness in assessing students?" teachers consistently emphasized the need for training, reduced class sizes, resources, and motivation. At School W, Teacher 1 proposed straightforwardly, *"Teachers being trained what to do."* Another teacher added, *"Reducing the teacher-to-student ratio in classes to ensure effective mentoring and efficient learning for all levels of learners."* Professional development remained a key focus, with another stating, *"Teachers should be given refresher and on-the-job trainings to ensure that they are well aware of the current learners' needs so as to be effective."* Additional suggestions included resources and timely assessments: *"Intensifying the training sessions of teachers. Issuing of more assessment tools in the form of textbooks."* Teacher 6 further recommended, *"Apply different methods of assessment. Give quick and timely feedback to the learners,"* and *"Motivating teachers by increasing their pay, especially arts teachers."* Finally, the emphasis on assessment training was echoed: *"By training them more about assessment."*

During interviews with headteachers and directors of studies, when asked, "In your opinion, how effective are teachers in utilizing grading rubrics for assessing student performance? What factors influence their effectiveness?" responses consistently highlighted varying levels of teacher effectiveness and influencing factors such as time, training, and experience. At School W, the Headteacher observed, *"Not all teachers use them effectively; some base their assessment on past experiences. Having fewer learners to assess would increase effectiveness."* The Director of Studies echoed similar sentiments, adding, *"Not very effective; competences are mostly measured using different parameters other than the rubrics. Factors: Timing of assessment, e.g., B.O.T is more effective because of adequate time than E.O.T, where everyone is exhausted and rushing to go home for holidays."*

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Table 4: Correlation Coefficient Between the Use of Grading Rubrics and Teachers' Effectiveness in Assessment

		Grading Rubrics	Teachers' effectiveness
Grading Rubrics	Pearson Correlation	1	0.544**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.004
	N	26	26
Teachers' effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.544**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	
	N	26	26

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessment ($r = 0.544$, $p = 0.004$). This indicates that increased use of rubrics is associated with more structured, consistent, and fair assessments, enhancing clarity, reducing subjectivity, and supporting both teachers' effectiveness and students' understanding of evaluation criteria.

Discussion

The Pearson correlation analysis of both students' and teachers' responses revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessment, with $r = 0.654$ ($p = 0.000$) for students and $r = 0.544$ ($p = 0.004$) for teachers. These findings suggest that increased use of grading rubrics enhances the consistency, transparency, and curriculum alignment of teachers' assessment practices, leading to improved student outcomes and greater confidence in the assessment process. The strength of these correlations demonstrates that grading rubrics play a crucial role in guiding how teachers assess learners, reinforcing the importance of integrating rubrics into everyday classroom practice to support fairness and clarity in evaluation.

These results align with Oduor and Nyanga (2022), who observed that grading rubrics shift teachers away from norm-referenced approaches toward objective, standards-based assessments, thereby enhancing consistency, fairness, and uniformity in evaluating student work. Similarly, Mwangi and Muthoni (2023) found that teachers who consistently use rubrics demonstrate improved diagnostic capabilities, provide more effective formative feedback, and better align assessments with learning objectives and curriculum expectations.

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Qualitative findings from students highlighted persistent challenges, including lack of understanding of rubrics, unclear guidelines, and limited alignment with students' learning approaches, which hinder the intended benefits of rubrics in promoting fairness and transparency. Students reported issues such as poor clarity, misalignment with taught content, and insufficient explanation from teachers. These concerns echo Panadero et al. (2023) and Camargo Salamanca et al. (2024), who emphasized that rubric effectiveness depends on clarity, alignment with learning objectives, and support for student self-assessment, self-regulation, and ownership of learning.

Teachers also highlighted the importance of collaboration, training, and clearer alignment of rubrics with learning outcomes to improve assessment effectiveness. These observations mirror Malama and Musonda (2023), who found that rubrics enhance clarity, support accurate and fair evaluation, and promote consistency across teachers and schools. Teachers suggested that collaborative efforts, regular professional development workshops, and engagement with examination bodies such as UNEB could improve the quality and clarity of rubrics for both teachers and learners.

School leaders, including headteachers and directors of studies, confirmed the role of rubrics in promoting consistency, fairness, and transparency in assessment practices. Their perspectives align with Ahmed and Riaz (2024), who highlighted rubrics' potential to standardize assessment, reduce bias, and foster accountability in grading. Leaders noted that rubrics help harmonize teachers' assessment approaches, ensure fairness across subjects, and clearly communicate performance expectations to students. However, gaps remain, including inconsistent usage, limited teacher understanding, and insufficient training opportunities, highlighting the need for sustained professional development and systemic support to fully realize the benefits of grading rubrics in improving assessment effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study revealed a significant positive relationship between the use of grading rubrics and teachers' effectiveness in assessment in the Lower Secondary Curriculum in Bushenyi-Ishaka Municipality. Correlation results confirmed that increased use of grading rubrics enhances teachers' assessment effectiveness. Teachers who consistently used rubrics conducted assessments that were more structured, fair, and aligned with curriculum objectives. These findings indicate that grading rubrics strengthen teachers' assessment practices and promote transparency, consistency, and fairness in grading.

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Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and curriculum developers standardize the use of grading rubrics across all schools to ensure uniformity and clarity in assessment. Schools should adopt clear policies mandating the consistent application of rubrics in all subjects.

It is further recommended that teachers receive regular training on the development, interpretation, and application of various types of rubrics, including descriptive, analytic, holistic, and evaluation grids (RACE). Departmental teams should collaboratively design and review rubrics to promote shared understanding and reduce bias.

To improve teachers' effectiveness in assessment within the Lower Secondary Curriculum, the Ministry of Education and Sports, together with curriculum developers and school administrators, should implement targeted and continuous professional development. Teachers need hands-on training in rubric development, application, and interpretation aligned with Uganda's curriculum.

Schools should promote student-centered assessment practices by engaging learners in the evaluation process and clarifying the use of rubrics. Efforts should also be made to reduce class sizes, increase teacher motivation through financial and professional incentives, and allocate adequate time for meaningful assessment. Institutions should invest in capacity-building workshops and monitoring mechanisms to ensure adherence to assessment standards.

Schools and education authorities should strengthen teachers' capacity through regular training on the effective use of grading rubrics aligned with curriculum goals. Teachers should collaborate through departmental meetings to develop clear, relevant rubrics and share best practices.

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