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The Malaysian English Language Teaching Association✉ Naima Al-husban n_husban@aou.edu.jo
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4745-7345>

The Effectiveness of Rubrics on Enhancing EFL Students' Writing Proficiency: An Experimental Study

Naima Al-husban
Arab Open University,
Jordan

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of explicit rubrics utilization on improving the writing skills of students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Although rubrics play a significant role in English language assessment, their systematic integration into teaching processes to enhance writing skills remains underexplored in many EFL contexts. This study addresses the need for experimental evidence on whether rubrics, as instructional tools, can lead to significant improvements in the writing competencies of EFL students compared with traditional, non-rubric based instruction. A quasi-experimental pre/post-test was employed with thirty-two students. The participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group, which received writing instruction through the use of rubrics, or a control group, which received writing instruction through traditional approaches. The impact of rubrics was assessed through the analysis of writing samples, error analysis, and a comparison of the number of mistakes made by the control and experimental groups. Furthermore, some participants from the experimental group were interviewed to identify their perceptions of the rubrics. The quantitative findings showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group and made significantly fewer grammatical and lexical errors when compared to the control group. Interview data revealed that students perceived rubrics as beneficial due to their role in enhancing clarity, self-assessment, and overall writing development. These findings underline the pedagogical value of applying rubrics beyond mere assessment tools. They advocate for the intentional integration of rubrics into teaching and assessment processes, and for the development and design of rubrics that achieve writing-focused outcomes which should be integrated into EFL teachers' professional development programs.

KEYWORDS: Authentic assessment, EFL secondary students, rubrics, writing skills

INTRODUCTION

Writing constitutes the fourth essential communication skill, representing the productive and interactive dimensions of language. Accomplishing proficiency in writing requires substantial commitment from both teachers and learners. It reflects the knowledge acquired through the other three skills: listening, speaking, and reading. Articulating thoughts effectively in writing demands a thorough foundation in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, complemented by the integration of personal insights. Moreover, writing is not simply a process of copying others' ideas; it is a skill that cultivated through critical reflection and sustained practice to foster continuous improvement (Alamri & Adawi, 2021).

It is acknowledged that writing skills development is difficult especially in situations where English is regarded as a foreign language rather than an official or native language. English is hardly ever used outside of the classroom in these contexts. Keller et al., (2023) highlights the challenges inherent in developing EFL learners writing skills. These challenges encompass a variety of linguistic and cognitive skills, including sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and rhetorical components, such as, organization, paragraph coherence, and sentence cohesion. In contrast to rule-based structures, writing is a productive, non-linear language skill that requires proficiency in different areas. As a result, it is critical that educators fully address and teach these complex processes. Writing instruction methods that prioritized a product-oriented approach have proven inadequate for fostering academic proficiency, creativity, or authenticity (Al-husban 2018).

The inadequate level of writing proficiency observed among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, including those in Jordan, can be partially ascribed to the prevailing teaching practices and assessment methods. Traditional writing instruction strategies that prioritize the final product have been identified as contributing factors to EFL students' deficiencies in writing skills, as highlighted by Huwari and Al-Khasawneh (2013), Keller et al., (2023), Ibnian (2017), and Almahameed and Alajalein (2021) in their respective studies. However, another key and often neglected issue is how to assess writing compositions. It could be inferred that there is no apparent policy of assessing students' writing compositions, and grades varied according to the raters (Chao, 2008).

Moreover, most students particularly in EFL contexts find writing is one of the most challenging skills due to the limited opportunities of practicing writing or the traditional methods of teaching like adopting the product-oriented approach (Al-husban, 2018). This situation is no longer different in Jordan, EFL students have dissatisfactory level of writing skills because of lack of writing mechanics, teachers using ineffective strategies of teaching writing, and most important lack of materials, and lacking a clear assessment instrument and marking schemes

Similarly, students usually find themselves encountered with writing assignments, for example, essays or reports, without appropriate guidance or instruction on how to write them efficiently. They did not receive clear directives regarding which aspects to focus on and the specific criteria that teachers will use to assess their work. Yen (2018) demonstrated this issue, highlighting that writing instruction is often insufficient, leaving learners without apparent guidance on the expectations and criteria necessary for successfully completing the task. As a result, the suboptimal writing performance of secondary students can be attributed to traditional teaching methods of writing skills (Wong et al., 2022), as well as the lack of guidance during both instruction and assessment. When students receive their corrected writing assignments, they often cannot identify the criteria for

correction, understand how their work was evaluated, or grasp what teachers expect them to write. Consequently, students feel frustrated and discouraged from developing their skills, ultimately leading to a low level of writing performance. This situation indicates that students struggle with writing due to an unsystematic approach to teaching the subject.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the use of rubrics on developing EFL students' writing skills, decreasing the number of mistakes, and exploring students' opinion of the efficacy of using rubrics.

Research Questions and hypothesis

The current study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Do rubrics have any effect on the improvement of students' writing skills? To answer this question the null hypothesis was formulated as follow: there are no statistically significant differences in the mean scores of EFL students' writing proficiency between the experimental and control groups at ($\alpha = 0.5$).
2. Does the implementation of rubrics lead to differences in the number of mistakes made by students in the experimental group compared to the control group?
3. What is the opinion of EFL secondary students regarding the utilization of rubrics during their writing practice?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the secondary stage of education, learners often benefit from clear and explicit guidelines that outline the expectations placed upon them (Mat & Par, 2024). It is crucial for teachers to provide focused and concise guidance, avoiding overly general or complex instructions, as this may lead to confusion among students regarding how to effectively complete the task. In such cases, students may resort to seeking assistance from others to write on their behalf or may produce written work that does not adhere to the required criteria. In both cases, the development of the students' writing skills is hindered.

Additionally, the reliability of grading written assignments can be compromised due to a lack of consensus among teachers regarding the specific characteristics that should be present or absent in each writing composition. Teachers may evaluate written work inconsistently in the absence of a clear rubric or a set of evaluation criteria, resulting in disparities in grading outcomes (Bolívar, 2020). Therefore, the lack of uniformity in grading practices undermines the reliability of assessment procedures.

In light of the current situation, the integration of rubrics holds prominent importance as a viable approach that provides guidance relating to expected student performance and furnish constructive feedback, thereby enhancing learner autonomy, self-assessment, and clearly defined expectations regarding written work (Phuong et al., 2023). This point has been emphasised by Ramsha and Anwar (2023), asserting that ESL teachers think that giving students feedback on their writing assignments can assist them to enhance their performance, and students themselves value their teachers' feedback and prefer to receive it in a written form rather than in a verbal one.

Cheng and Chan (2019) have illuminated the effectiveness of rubrics as evaluative tools in assessing students' writing. Rubrics provide explicit criteria against which teachers can distinguish and evaluate

their students' writing performance. Moreover, rubrics serve as vital tools for enhancing students' learning experiences by offering a comprehensive understanding of task objectives, requirements, and effective performance strategies (Cockett & Jackson, 2018).

Rubrics are generally employed in the assessment of written assignments, offering students opportunities for self-assessment, reflection, and peer review. They are typically presented in a table format, encompassing quality descriptions from different perspectives, along with a rating scale for each description. Yen (2018) describes rubrics as scoring tools that outline the criteria for a specific task and illustrate various levels of quality for each criterion, ranging from excellent to poor. Moreover, Mahmoudi and Bugra (2020) pointed that rubrics act as frameworks for grading assessments or activities. Rubrics can be created in a general or analytical format. They articulate the expectations for writing and outline the different levels of performance quality that students display. This definition indicates that rubrics have been grounded in several educational theories, for instance, constructivism theory and formative assessment theory. These theories postulate that learners actively and continuously build knowledge in their minds. Rubrics support this process by providing clear criteria and feedback that guide students in creating their knowledge and meeting their learning outcomes and fostering self-directed learning on the part of student (English et al., 2022).

Significance of Rubrics

Rubrics can be viewed as a strategic roadmap, predefining the key areas to be explored in students' writing assignments. By employing rubrics, both students and teachers gain a clear understanding of the specific elements to focus on during the writing and scoring processes. According to Jackson (2017), employing rubrics as an assessment tool has become popular recently in all fields of sciences including education because it promotes objectivity, consistency, and reliability particularly in the evaluation of written assignments. Rubrics clarify the expected qualities of students' work, ensuring students comprehend learning outcomes and standards of success. To illustrate, rubrics help teachers manage instruction and assessment, and they scaffold student to learn and succeed. In addition to that, Mahmoudi and Bugra (2020) underline that rubrics serve a dual purpose: they are assessment tools that make scoring reliable and consistent, and they function as instructional aids, guiding teachers in emphasizing key areas during writing instruction and supporting students' cognitive skills and learning.

Limitations of Rubrics

Conversely, some perspectives dispute the rubrics are not essential for students' success. As described by Nidhomil and Saputro (2017) and Ling (2025), rubrics may stifle students' intellectual potentials. Students might feel unduly pressured to complete the assignment based on the standards of the rubric instead of taking the initiative to explore their learning. In addition to that, creating rubrics demands considerable time and efforts, both in designing and ensuring that the students are familiar with the expectations, and associated performance standards. Likewise, Porath (2010) denounced rubrics because of the potentials for subjectivity in language utilized while describing the performance levels. It can be inferred that the forementioned limitations of rubrics can be mitigated through the implementation of analytic rubrics supported by exemplars.

Another challenge facing the employment of rubrics is the perception that they stifle creativity. Writing is linked to the expression of uniqueness, the generation of original ideas, and word choices. These criteria are difficult to standardize, clearly define, or predict. Consequently, rubrics may restrict students' proficiencies to specific predetermined levels. In response to this concern, Sundeen (2014) argues that teachers should avoid formulaic rubrics, and teachers should learn how to design rubrics

that support students' creative writing and not relying on ready-made rubrics. While this debate remains ongoing, it is obvious that rubric employment is meaningful and facilitate learning how to write, what to write, and the language level should be employed by learners.

Status of Rubric Employment in the National Context

It is noteworthy that the rubric scale is one of the most effective assessment tools of observation, which in turn act as an essential assessment strategy within the field of authentic evaluation. According to Villarroel et al., (2018), authentic assessment is a powerful approach for assessing 21st century students' competencies and skills in the context of global educational reforms. This approach requires students to demonstrate their profound understanding, higher-order thinking abilities, and problem-solving skills. This global perspective has been adopted in Jordan since 2003, as part of an education reform initiative aimed at enhancing knowledge Economy. Authentic assessment was integrated into the teaching and learning process, with the aim of transforming from assessment of learning to assessment for learning.

However, teachers have not employed this approach of assessment; they are more familiar with designing traditional exams to assess students' achievement. Despite the tremendous importance of using authentic assessment, particularly rubrics, teachers have not been quite aware of the benefits of this approach for their students. Consequently, some teachers may employ rubrics inconsistently, while others, exhibiting negative attitudes, rarely utilize it. According to Al-Zoubi (2019), the degree of using authentic assessment among teachers is mediocre, and the percent of using rubrics was low. Likewise, Al-Basheer et al., (2015) stated that while teachers are familiar with authentic assessment, particularly rubrics, they tend to rely predominantly on written test. This preference for tests could be attributed to teachers' familiarity with traditional assessment methods. Conversely, the underutilization of rubrics could be due to the limited professional development program of how to design and implement rubrics while teaching and assessment or perceived difficulties in rubric application.

Although EFL teachers are familiar with rubrics, they may not present them effectively to students. According to Sundeen (2014), teachers often neglect to adequately explain rubrics when utilizing them in writing instruction, potentially hindering students' understanding of expectations. This oversight prevents rubrics from serving as both instructional and evaluative tools. As stated by Rakedzon and Baram-Tsabari (2017), effective rubric instruction allows students to seek clarification of criteria, fostering confidence in their writing and ensuring their understanding of assessment standards.

Related Studies about the Effectiveness of Rubrics

The assessment of foreign language writing has dramatically shifted from holistic scoring toward analytical measures to reinforce reliability and instructional values. While the broader literature confirms that rubrics generally enhance assessment consistency, research targeting EFL writing reveals a complex landscape.

The essential argument for adoption of rubric lies in the standards of assessment, for example, Keller et al., (2023) conducted a study to determine the effect of designing rubrics on developing EFL students' writing emails in English language, the authors analysed the linguistic quality of students' texts and comparing this analysis to the rubrics-based scores; to examine its face validity. Results displayed high reliability and validity of the rubrics. This point manifested that using rubrics reduces subjectivity during grading writing. This finding aligns with Goodwin and Kirkpatrick (2023), who highlighted

that robust rubrics ensure consistency and equitable writing assessment, concurrently offering explicit guidance for students' writing tasks.

Beyond grading consistency, rubrics function as a transparent feedback tool. Dahmash (2024) investigated the effect of using rubrics on students' writing assignments and their perspectives about them. The study found that using rubrics developed students' writing skills by serving as a benchmark for their own writing and clarified students' writing strengths and weaknesses. Likewise, Alghizzi and Alshahrani (2024) found that students using ILETS rubrics outperformed other groups using wholistic grading assessment. This distinction suggests that students benefit from explicit guidelines aligned with evaluated expectations regarding ideas development, structures, vocabulary, and content appropriateness. However, these studies provided limited insights into whether performance improvements stem from enhanced understanding of standards, increased metacognitive awareness, or more targeted reviewed practices.

A prominent domain in recent literature focuses on rubrics' capacity to enhance learners' autonomy and metacognitive development. Tarigan et al., (2025) investigated the impact of analytic rubric implementation on writing alongside peer and self- assessment. The study demonstrated that not only improved writing proficiency but also heightened writing awareness and confidence. These results indicate that incorporating analytical rubrics into peer and self-assessment activities resulted in clear improvements in EFL learners' writing proficiency, coherence, and accuracy. This aligns with Bui and Vuong (2022) explored the effectiveness of rubric implementation in enhancing students' writing skills. The study involved thirty seventh-grade students, and guiding rubrics were used as the primary research tool, along with a writing pre-test and post-test. Analysis of the data from the pre-test and post-test demonstrated a significant improvement in students' performance after the implementation of rubrics.

Furthermore, rubrics appear to scaffold specific cognitive processes; MuhammedZein (2024) and Mat and Par (2022), found that participants developed their communicative writing skills using rubrics. The experimental group produced a smaller number of errors, the students' satisfaction with self-assessment, peer, and collaborative assessment that elevated their writing abilities. This result advocates that students' perception of the validation of rubrics to upgrade communicative writing skills. Students were noticed to produce high-quality work, with fewer discrepancies, because of the excellent investment of the rubrics. Rubrics also serve as navigational aids, allowing students to internalize expectations and identify strengths and weaknesses (Dahmash, 2024; Mahmoudi and Bugra, 2020).

Recent articles emphasize the shift of rubrics from mere teacher grading tools to instruments enhancing learning autonomy. Phuong et al., (2023) investigated the effect of using assessment rubrics on EFL students' essay writing skills in Vietnamese context in peer assessment and self- assessment, the author provided students with the analytical rubric to evaluate their own writing performance before submitting their work. The study found that using rubric contributed positively on students' writing both as a peer assessment tool and self-assessment tool, rubrics were most effective when employed for self-assessment. This manifested that the process of mapping students' writing against criteria in advance fosters deep learning and metacognitive skills of students in how to deal with their writing tasks. This notion is supported by Zhang and Zhang (2024), who found that students who constructed rubrics demonstrated higher engagement and hold positive perceptions for the rubrics, and it was noticed that students used the writing rubrics to a high-level during writing papers and peer feedback sessions, and they perceived that rubrics were understandable, useful, and they benefited from it while

writing. Goodwin and Kirkpatrick (2023) investigated the effect of using rubric in business writing courses at university. It found that robust rubric may help ensure that grading is consistent and fair, and that it was highly useful as a guide for students when writing the assignments, and assisted students in crafting the essay. A proportion of students suggested that additional feedback beyond the rubric was desirable. Writing instructors generally supported the value of rubrics, especially for clarifying assignment requirements for students. This study, therefore, contributes to the body of literature demonstrating the value of rubrics in writing classes.

In a similar vein, Trinh (2020) explored the impact of rubric usage on students' writing performance. The findings indicated that students became aware of rubrics, enabling them to self-assess their writing, understand what and how to write, produce high-quality work, and achieve higher grades. The study also revealed significant differences in writing scores between students who used rubrics and those who did not. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that students are familiar with their responsibility and can identify the strengths and weaknesses in their writing.

These findings highlight the positive effects of incorporating rubrics into the teaching of writing for EFL students. It is suggested that teachers should consider the utilization of rubrics as a valuable tool in their instruction, as it can enhance students' writing abilities and contribute to their overall learning outcomes. However, this optimistic consensus is not universal, and a critical part of research warns against viewing rubrics as a panacea. Sadler (2014) and Dahmash (2025) highlighted challenges associated with students' understanding of rubric language, performance levels, and their ability to effectively utilize rubrics in writing because language used in rubrics, as teachers and students may interpret rubric terms differently, viewing them as vague and ambiguous. Turgut and Kayaoğlu (2015) and Ling (2025) highlighted the challenges associated with using rubrics, such as, simply providing rubrics to students and expecting them to write according to the given standards does not guarantee writing success, despite having clear criteria descriptors. Students often required additional explanation, examples, and guidance from teachers to effectively incorporate rubric standards into their writing.

Research presents mixed findings regarding the effectiveness of rubric use in writing instruction. While some studies highlight the positive impact on students' writing grades and overall performance, others emphasize the necessity for supplementary support and clarification to fully realize the potential benefits of rubrics for enhancing writing outcomes.

Collectively, the review of literature revealed that rubrics as an evolving from statistic assessment forms dynamic instructional strategies that can foster autonomy, objectivity, and accuracy (Trinh, 2020). Yet, mixed findings concerning student interpretation and the necessity of feedback show a gap in understanding how these tools are utilized particularly in the secondary stage which is less represented than university contexts. Thus, the present study aims to address these gaps by investigating the effectiveness of rubrics on the development of writing skills among EFL secondary students and exploring students' perceptions of these tools, this research seeks to clarify not only the effectiveness of rubrics within EFL contexts but also the nuanced approaches students engage with them as a pedagogical tool.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of employing rubrics on the teaching and assessment of writing skills among participants during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The independent variable of this study was the utilization of rubrics, while the dependent variable was the proficiency of EFL students' writing skills. To substantiate the findings of the experiment, error analysis was conducted to identify the effect of rubric implementation in reducing the number of mistakes made by students, as compared to those in the control group which was taught writing using product-oriented approach, that is, providing students with writing model and students imitate it while writing (Wu, 2024). Additionally, the study sought to investigate the opinions of participants in the experimental group to ascertain their perceptions and attitudes toward the use of rubrics during writing practice.

Participants of the Study

The participants in this study comprised thirty-two female eleven- grade students (aged 17 years old) from a public secondary school in Amman, Jordan. This school was chosen for its accessibility to the author and its typicality within the Jordanian secondary education system in which English as a foreign language instruction adheres to the national curriculum. To establish equivalent groups, the students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=16) or the control group (n=16). Their prior language proficiency was considered through random distribution and a review of their academic performance in the preceding year, ensuring no significant pre-existing differences in the writing proficiency between the two groups before the intervention. To mitigate teacher related variables, both groups were instructed by the same EFL teacher who possessed six years of teaching experience.

Research tools

Rubrics

The rubric used in this study was created based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature and the researcher's experience as an EFL teacher, mainly based on the work of Brookhart (2012) and Andrade (2000) (Appendix 1). The rubric encompassed various writing standards, including ideas and content, word choice, structure organization, grammar, and mechanics. Each standard was assigned a maximum of five points, and the rubric delineated five levels of expected performance: Exceptional (5), Proficient (4), Developing (3), Emerging (2), and beginning (1). The researcher provided clear descriptions for each level to ensure that students understood how to write and which areas to focus on, thus facilitating the evaluation of students' writing products.

To establish the validity of the rubric, a panel of experts in TEFL and measurement and evaluation critically reviewed it, all their comments and rewordings have been taken into consideration. Additionally, the reliability of the writing rubric was assessed by administering them to a pilot sample of 10 EFL students, distinct from the main study sample. The rubric was administered using a test - retest technique over a two- week interval. Internal consistency was calculated using the Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.81. This value indicated an acceptable level of reliability for the purposes of this study.

Conversely, the control group was assigned the same writing task but without explicit assessment criteria or performance expectations. This approach prioritized linguistic form and imitation of provided model. Thus, students' motivation centered on grade attainment rather than the development

of writing proficiency. Furthermore, assessment was limited to holistic assessment, which largely disregarded specific writing standards.

Error analysis

Error analysis was conducted based on the criteria outlined in the rubric, namely, ideas and content, word choice, structure organization, grammar, and mechanics. This analysis aimed to identify and analyse any errors or mistakes made by the students in both the experimental and control groups. It was ensured that only errors related to the rubric criteria were taken into consideration when determining whether the use of the rubric reduced the frequency of mistakes and errors among students in both groups. Errors unrelated to the rubric criteria were not included in the analysis. This approach allowed for a focused assessment of the impact of the rubric on minimizing errors and enhancing writing proficiency among the students.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted utilizing a semi-structured approach with an interview protocol prepared in Arabic. The protocol was designed to allow interviewees to articulate freely their thoughts and experiences encompassing personal or demographic information, as well as their opinions, satisfaction levels, and suggestions regarding the use of rubrics. The interviews aimed to collect qualitative data on the benefits and advantages of rubric implementation. Prior to conducting the interviews, seven participants from the experimental group were selected via convenience sampling, informed consent was obtained, ensuring voluntary participation and full disclosure of the study's nature. To adhere to ethical standards, participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous, and it was emphasized that their responses would solely represent their own experience and beliefs regarding the use of rubrics. To validate the accuracy of the interviewees' responses, their ideas were restated verbally, allowing them the opportunity to agree or disagree with the researcher's understanding.

Following the interviews, the responses were translated into English. Subsequently, a process of coding was employed to identify recurring themes within the data, facilitating the interpretation and analysis of the collected information. The data obtained from the experimental group's experiences, specifically their exposure to teaching and assessment processes based on rubrics, were utilized for analysis and evaluation.

Trial procedures

To address the research questions, the researcher implemented a quasi-experimental design involving two randomly assigned groups of 11th-grade students. The experiment took place from October 2022 to January 2023. All students in both groups were given a writing assignment on the topic of homesickness. The experimental group received instruction and assessment based on the rubric, whereas the control group followed a traditional approach to writing by adopting a product orient approach, that is, the teachers provide students with a model to be imitated without explaining the writing grading standards. Two independent raters evaluated the students' writing separately to ensure consistency in the level of writing. The inter-rater agreement coefficient was 0.94, indicating good agreement and reliability.

The researcher developed a rubric specifically for the writing assignment and provided training to the EFL teacher on how to integrate the rubric into the teaching process. The teacher guided the students in generating profound ideas, avoiding run-on sentences, adhering to grammatical rules, punctuation usage, and spelling, and emphasized words with common spelling mistakes. The EFL teacher

presented the writing assignment to both groups, utilizing the rubric for the experimental group and employing the traditional teaching method for the control group. The two raters assessed the writing submissions from both groups, and an inter-rater agreement coefficient of 0.92 was computed, indicating satisfactory agreement and reliability. Error analysis was conducted on the posttest to examine the impact of rubric implementation on students' error rates. The analysis focused on identifying errors and mistakes made by students in both the experimental and control groups, specifically those aligned with the rubric standards used in the intervention.

Seven interviews were conducted with participants from the experimental group to gather their opinions on the use of rubrics. The interview questions aimed to explore whether they used the rubrics while writing the assignment, how they perceived the rubric's assistance in organizing the writing task, and their satisfaction with the grading process via rubrics. These procedures were implemented to investigate the effects of rubric utilization on students' writing performance and to gain insights into students' perspectives on the use of rubrics in the writing process.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

First null hypothesis

To test the first hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences in the mean scores of EFL students' writing proficiency between the experimental and the control groups at ($\alpha = 0.05$) due to the use of rubrics and the traditional teaching and assessing of writing. A statistical test was implemented using statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 28). To verify the hypothesis, the means and standard deviations of EFL students' writing achievement were computed, and Independent Samples T - Test was used to check the impact of rubrics on EFL students' writing achievement. Table 1 below shows the means and standards deviations of students' writing achievement.

Table 1

Means and standard deviation for the experimental and control groups on writing achievement

Group	Prior Achievement of Students as Pre-test			Post-test of WA		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	16	12	2.32	12	20	1.69
Control	16	12.5	1.89	12	14	2.60
Total	32			32		

As shown in Table 1, the means of the experimental and control groups in the previous assessment in writing were not significantly different from each other. On contrast, after manipulation, the mean of the experimental group was 20, and the standard deviation was 1.69, and the mean of the control group was 14 and the standard deviation was 2.60. This disclosed that the mean of the experimental group on the post-test was evidently different from that of the control group on the post- assessment.

To examine if the means differences between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant, Independent Samples T - Test was computed. The results are delivered in table 2 below.

Table 2

Independent Samples T - Test for the differences in writing achievement between the experimental and control groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower Upper
test	Equal variances assumed	2.508	.124	-7.325-	30	.000	-5.68750-	.77644	-7.27321- -4.10179-
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.325-	25.746	.000	-5.68750-	.77644	-7.28427- -4.09073-

* Significant level at $\alpha = 0.05$

Table (2) reveals that there were statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in terms of the EFL students' performance in writing skill at ($\alpha = 0.05$), as the (F) value was (2.508) with a statistically significant level of (0.000), which is significant at ($\alpha = 0.05$). In order to determine the favor of differences between the experimental and control group, adjusted means for both the experimental and control groups in the post test were calculated as shown in table (3).

Table 3

Adjusted means and standard deviations for both the experimental and control groups in the post- test

Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Experimental	20	0.29	19.12	19.15
Control	14	0.29	13.17	13.16

As Table (3) shows, the adjusted mean of the experimental group in the post-test was (20) out of (25) and it is higher than the adjusted means of the control group in the post-test which was (14) out of (25). Thus, the null hypothesis "there are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the mean scores of the performance of EFL students in writing skills between the experimental group and the control group attributed to the use of rubrics and the conventional ones" was rejected. Instead, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, which refers to existing statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) to the effectiveness of the use of rubrics on the performance of EFL students in writing skills in favor of the experimental group.

These findings underscore the importance of integrating rubrics into writing instruction and assessment practices to facilitate the achievement of desired learning outcomes in complex writing skill. They also emphasize the potential of rubrics for EFL teachers to create effective and equitable writing instruction and assessment processes. The results highlight that, like any other tool, rubrics can be highly effective when employed appropriately and integrated effectively into the teaching and learning process.

These findings align with previous research that has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of rubrics on the development of students' writing skills. Studies conducted by Keller et al., (2023), Goodwin and Kirkpatrick (2023), Cheng and Chan (2019), Trinh (2020), Mahmoudi and Bugra (2020), Dahmash (2024), Alghizzi and Al-shahrani (2024), Tarigan et al., (2025), MuhammedZein (2024), Mat and Par (2022) and Bui and Vuong (2022) have reported similar results, showing that the use of rubrics

leads to improved performance in writing among experimental groups compared to control groups. These studies have documented clear advancements in various aspects of writing, including ideas, organization, vocabulary choice, and grammar. Additionally, these studies align with this study by ensuring consistency in grading writing using rubrics, as students benefit from the rubric that works as a benchmark for participants while writing.

Furthermore, the findings of this study align with the recommendations provided by Sadler (2014), Dahmash (2025), Ling (2025), and Turgut and Kayaoglu (2015), who identified the lack of progress in students' performance when they struggled to understand the language used in the rubric's performance levels and how to effectively utilize them to derive the intended benefits. To ensure the effectiveness of rubrics, it is crucial to integrate them comprehensively throughout the entire teaching and learning process. This study, along with previous research, highlights the importance of embedding rubrics at each stage of instruction with thorough guidance and examples of how to follow each standard of the rubric.

To enhance students' understanding and utilization of rubrics, teachers should provide explicit examples for each expected performance level. These examples serve as benchmarks for students to aspire towards and enable them to identify areas for improvement. By offering guidance and exemplification, students can better comprehend the standards outlined in the rubric and make informed decisions that enhance their writing performance.

By addressing the limitations highlighted by Sadler (2014) and Turgut and Kayaoglu (2015), this study underscores the significance of incorporating rubrics effectively into the teaching and learning process. It emphasizes the need for teachers to scaffold students' learning by providing them with the necessary support, clarification, and exemplars to internalize and apply the rubric standards effectively. Through these strategies, students can attain the desired levels of proficiency in writing and avoid common mistakes that hinder their performance growth.

Question Two

Does the implementation of rubrics lead to differences in the number of errors or mistakes made by students in the experimental group compared to the control group?

To analyze the content of the participants' writing assignments, a thorough content analysis was conducted for both the experimental and control groups. This analysis sought to identify and assess the errors or mistakes made by the students in relation to the rubric's criteria. The procedures undertaken to obtain these results were as follows:

- i. Familiarization with the Rubric: Students in the experimental group were introduced to the rubric and its corresponding standards. This involved providing them with thorough explanations and guidelines on aligning their writing with the rubric's specified expectations. This process required more than ten weeks of continuous engagement, which involved regular writing exercises, explicit instruction on writing techniques, and guidance on how to apply the rubric's standards effectively.
- ii. Writing Composition on Homesickness: Students in both the experimental and control groups were assigned a writing task that focused on expressing their experience with homesickness. They were instructed to apply the writing strategies and techniques learned throughout the study period.

- iii. Identification of mistakes and errors: The collected writing assignments from both groups were carefully examined to identify mistakes and errors. These errors were specifically analysed in relation to the rubric's criteria, including ideas and content, word choice, structure, grammar, and mechanics. Mistakes related to these aspects were noted and recorded for further analysis.
- iv. Comparison between Groups: A comparative analysis was conducted to examine the impact of using the rubric as an instructional and evaluative tool on the quality of students' writing. The identified mistakes and errors were compared between the experimental and control groups to determine any significant differences in the writing performance resulting from the use of the rubric.

By employing these procedures, this study assessed the effectiveness of the rubric as an instructional and evaluative assessment tool for promoting quality writing among students. The content analysis provided valuable insights into the impact of utilizing the rubric throughout the teaching and learning process, shedding light on the potential benefits and improvements achieved through its implementation. Results of the error analysis has been illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

The Frequencies and Percentage of Mistakes Made by Students in Both Groups in Light of the Rubrics after the Ten Week Interval

No	Standard (type of error or mistake)	Post- test			
		Experimental Group		Control Group	
		Frequencies	Percentage	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Content and ideas	7	%7	14	%15
2.	Word choice	5	%6	14	%15
3.	Structure organization	3	3%	10	%11
4.	Grammar	5	%5	15	%16
5.	Mechanics	4	%4	18	%18
Total		24	25%	70	%75

Table 4 Shows that students made mistakes related to all five standards, but with significant differences between the two groups. In other words, the overall number of mistakes made by students in the experimental group was 24 out of 94, whereas students in the control group made 70 mistakes out of 94. This reveals that drawing students' attention to certain issues while writing contributes to leveraging students' level of writing; for instance, while teaching writing, the teacher taught students the importance of stating a title in the experimental group, as it is part of the requirements of idea and content standards, while students in the control group were provided with a model with a title but there was no rubric that reminded students every now and then with the requirements of the rubric.

It was noticed that 6 out of 16 in the control group wrote a title for their writing composition, whereas 10 out of 16 in the experimental group wrote a title. Concerning the second standard, 11 of 16 in the experimental group used adjectives and adverbs to modify nouns accurately. For example, a student in the experimental group defined homesickness, as "Homesickness is a critical problem in universities at present. It is as the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home" and it is clear that the students took into consideration the mechanics like punctuation marks, capitalization, and no spelling mistakes, whereas another student in the control group wrote "*Missing your parents is one of the hardest thing to go through, so better take care of your family and not lose them.*" It is obvious that this statement lacks many of the writing requirements like coherence, grammar,

word choice, and mechanics because students have a model that students can imitate while writing without explaining what to do and how to do it. The researcher checked students' work using the rubric. Another example from a different student in the experimental group showed how standards in the rubric have been taken into account "It usually occurs when we are sad about being away from our family, siblings, or any environment in which we felt comforted and from which we have been separated." It is evident that the grammar, mechanics, and content and ideas standards were met, whereas another student in the control group wrote, "First to influence negatively on you like you will be worry on them. I will try to entertain on myself like playing games, football and that won't be enough because you will miss them." The students attempted to use capitalization appropriately, and punctuation as in Arabic, the comma; however, other standards have not been taken into consideration, such as, grammar, inconsistent ideas, misuse of vocabulary, and mechanics. In addition, it was observed that the majority of students in the experimental groups attempted to structure their writing using paragraphs that commenced with a clear statement, followed by supporting ideas and examples. Conversely, students in the control group did not demonstrate any attention to paragraphing, and their written products consisted of a single paragraph.

These findings corroborate those of Dahmash (2024), Alghizzi and Al-shahrani (2024), Tarigan et al. (2025), and MuhammadZein (2024). The use of rubrics facilitated participants' writing proficiency, awareness, and confidence. Consequently, the frequency of writing mistakes declined significantly, as rubrics proved instrumental in identifying specific strengths and weaknesses, deep learning, and autonomy. These findings contradict those of Andrade (2001), Turgut and Kayaoglu (2015), and Ling (2025), who discovered that translating knowledge into written form with minimal errors and mistakes is challenging. Although the use of rubrics heightened students' awareness of the criteria expected by teachers, the limited duration of the treatment hindered the transfer of learning. To master writing skills, students require models for each performance level to familiarize themselves with and strive to achieve the highest level of proficiency. This highlights the importance of investigating EFL students' perceptions of the use of rubrics, especially in the experimental group, to infer that the variety in the writing between the two groups is due to the use of rubrics or other factors.

It is worth mentioning that there were several mistakes in the products of both groups unrelated to the standards in the rubric, so it could be indirect evidence of the significance of rubric in improving the quality of writing of students in the experimental group. These mistakes, observed in the products of participants from both groups, included a lack of a clear audience, an inconsistent point of view across writing products, and word derivation errors, such as using nouns instead of adjectives, such as, fruit instead of fruitful, or depress instead of depressive.

Question Three

What is the opinion of EFL secondary students regarding the utilization of rubrics during their writing practice?

Seven participants in the experimental group were interviewed to gather additional insights and support the findings related to the first and second research questions. During the interviews, the students were asked a specific question: "Did you use the rubrics while writing the assignment?" Interestingly, all interviewees reported that they had not used rubrics prior to this semester. They mentioned that in the past, some teachers had provided them with tables or documents containing complex information, but they struggled to comprehend their content.

Secondly, the participants were asked about their opinions regarding the usefulness of rubrics in organizing writing assignments. Among the seven students interviewed, six expressed positive views towards the benefits of using rubrics. One student commented, *"With the rubric, I am aware of the specific aspects I need to focus on while writing."* Another student highlighted, *"The rubric provides guidance on organizing my writing, including grammar usage, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization."* Another interviewee shared, *"Initially, the rubrics seemed challenging as I was unsure how to achieve higher performance levels."*

However, my teacher's explanations on progressing from our current level to the desired levels in the rubrics were immensely helpful." Another student mentioned, *"The rubric encouraged me to ask questions about writing. For example, my teacher guided me on using appropriate tenses, organizing the structure, and considering semantic elements for the writing task about homesickness."* Yet another interviewee stated, *"At first, I found the rubric overwhelming with its extensive information, but my teacher made it engaging and accessible by providing examples for each criterion. This helped me understand what to do and how to improve my writing quality. I believe my writing skills have developed significantly over the past few months."*

Overall, the majority of participants recognized the value of rubrics in guiding their writing process, promoting self-assessment, and facilitating improvement. However, it should be noted that one student found the use of rubrics initially stressful due to the perceived complexity, but with the teacher's assistance and provision of examples, the student found it easier and more interesting. This student acknowledged the positive impact of rubrics on their writing development during the study.

Thirdly, the interviewees expressed overall satisfaction with the grading process using the rubric. One student mentioned, *"After understanding each criterion and the performance levels associated with them, with the guidance of my teacher, I can anticipate my grade before receiving it."* Another interviewee stated, *"I feel confident when submitting my writing because I know what the teacher will focus on and how they will assess my work."*

These findings suggest that the students in the experimental group had positive attitudes towards the use of rubrics as both an instructional strategy and an assessment tool. The rubrics helped them understand what was expected in their writing and how to meet those expectations, as teachers transparently shared their thoughts process during instruction. Additionally, the interview results indicated that students felt more confident in their ability to produce well-written work with fewer errors. They were also aware of the criteria that teachers considered when grading their assignments. This increased awareness of the grading process may mitigate writing anxiety, thereby enabling students to leverage their creative and autonomous writing abilities.

Furthermore, the positive opinions of using rubrics were found to enhance students' metacognitive skills, as they became more thoughtful in monitoring their own work and engaging in self-assessment based on the rubric's criteria. These results align with previous studies, indicating that participants view rubrics as essential guidelines for achieving high- quality writing (Alghizzi and Al-shahrani,2024; Clabough and Clabough, 2016; Mat and Par, 2024; MuhammadZein, 2024; Zhang and Zhang, 2025). Furthermore, these studies confirm that the rubric use fosters a desire for learning, resulting in enhanced self-assessment, confidence, writing awareness, and learners autonomy.

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the use of rubrics holds a significant value and benefits for both EFL teachers and students. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate rubrics into pre-service and in-service training programs for teachers, with a specific emphasis on cultivating positive attitudes towards rubric implementation in instructional and assessment practices. By doing so, teachers can effectively utilize rubrics in the classroom and encourage students to approach various tasks, such as writing assignments, with a focus on meeting the criteria outlined in rubrics.

Employing rubrics in the teaching and learning process has the potential to enhance students' critical thinking, cognitive skills, and metacognitive abilities. By providing clear expectations and standards, rubrics promote a deeper understanding of task requirements and enable students to take ownership of their learning. Students can become more self-directed and autonomous learners as they strive to meet the criteria set in the rubric. This, in turn, fosters the development of overall learning autonomy.

Therefore, it is recommended that teacher training programs incorporate comprehensive instruction on the effective use of rubrics, highlighting their benefits and demonstrating practical strategies for integrating rubrics into classroom practices. By equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills, rubrics can be implemented in a manner that enhances student learning and promotes the development of critical, cognitive, and metacognitive abilities.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Previous studies emphasized on a specific perspective of the current study's issues, such as, examining performance outcomes, exploring students' perceptions, or using rubric as a traditional way of assessment. To bridge this gap, current study investigated the impact of rubrics as both instructional and evaluative tools on enhancing students' writing skills, reducing the number of their writing mistakes, and understanding their opinions of using rubrics. This reveals the study's comprehensive exploration of learners' writing performance, skills, and attitudes toward the tool. Moreover, this study demonstrated the effectiveness of rubrics in progressing students' writing, decreasing their writing mistakes and errors, and fostering satisfaction with the use of rubric, providing that students received sufficient explanation and clarification from teachers regarding its application, utilization during writing. This suggests that increased student engagement in the teaching and learning process whether through the use of rubrics or participation in designing rubrics, is associated with a more positive attitude towards learning from the rubrics and the development of autonomous learning skills.

This study notably underscores the pedagogical importance of integrating the use of rubrics in the planning, instruction, and assessment phases, particularly while teaching writing skills, and this approach could be extended to teaching other English language skills to enhance students' learning outcomes. The current study stipulates the importance of rubric feasibility because its quality use as an instructional and evaluative tool by EFL teachers could contribute to enhancing students' cognitive skills and self-regulated learning. Furthermore, future research should prioritize involving teachers and students in designing rubrics, ensuring they fully aware of the criteria of the rubrics and their performance levels. This awareness will enable them to produce high-quality writing assignments, achieve better grades, understand teachers' expectations, and determine their own strengths and weaknesses. To that end, EFL teachers should be qualified and trained in this regard, and should have positive attitudes towards designing and using them. This is particularly salient given that many EFL teachers in Jordan and worldwide perceive that designing rubrics is time-consuming, and students often struggle with them because of the challenging language. In addition, there is a need to reform

curricula and textbooks to systematically integrate this tool, fostering a culture of standard-based learning.

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Appendix 1

Writing rubric: how to assess a writing assignment based on the work of Brookhart (2012) and Andrade (2000)

Criteria	Exceptional (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Emerging (2)	Beginning (1)
Ideas	Demonstrates exceptional depth and complexity of ideas; ideas are cohesive and work as a unified whole.	Ideas are well-supported and logical, though minor areas for improvement exist.	Main ideas are loosely supported; some connections to the main points are unclear.	Insufficient, vague, or irrelevant support; lacks logical connections.	Clear absence of support or organization; main points are not addressed.
Word Choice	Uses precise, vivid, and varied vocabulary appropriate to the audience and purpose.	Uses effective vocabulary with occasional lapses in precision or variation.	Vocabulary is generally appropriate but lacks variety or depth; some imprecise word choices.	Limited word choice; inappropriate or repetitive language diminishes effectiveness.	Poor word choice; frequent inappropriate, repetitive, or unclear vocabulary undermines writing.
Structure & Organization	Writing is logically structured with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion; ideas flow seamlessly.	Organization is clear, with minor lapses in the logical progression of ideas.	Organization is evident but inconsistent; transitions may be awkward or unclear.	Lacks clear organization; ideas are presented in a disjointed or confusing manner.	No discernible structure; ideas are scattered or incoherent.
Grammar	Writing is free from grammatical errors, demonstrating advanced	Contains minor grammatical errors that do not detract from readability or meaning.	Some grammatical errors are evident and occasionally	Frequent grammatical errors significantly hinder	Pervasive grammatical errors make the writing difficult to understand.

Criteria	Exceptional (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Emerging (2)	Beginning (1)
Mechanics	proficiency in language use. Perfect adherence to conventions of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.	Minor mechanical errors that do not impede comprehension.	disrupt clarity or meaning. Some errors in mechanics are evident and may occasionally affect understanding.	readability and meaning. Frequent errors in mechanics disrupt the flow and clarity of writing.	Consistent and severe mechanical errors obscure meaning and readability.