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# The Effect of Rubric-Based Assessment on University EFL Students' Writing Performance: A Mixed-Methods Study at Sebha University, Libya

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## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of rubric-based assessment on EFL students' writing performance at Sebha University and explores instructors' perceptions of its effectiveness. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, utilizing a quasi-experimental design and a descriptive survey. To ensure greater scoring objectivity, inter-rater reliability was calculated. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' writing quality after the intervention, with a substantial effect size. Furthermore, teachers expressed positive attitudes toward the use of rubrics, highlighting their role in enhancing grading transparency and fairness. Despite these benefits, the study was limited by a small sample size and the absence of a control group, as well as time demands associated with rubric implementation and training. The study recommends integrating rubric-based assessment into higher education to enhance assessment practices and support students' self-regulation skills.

**Keywords:** Rubric-Based Assessment, Writing Performance, English Language. English Language Students

# أثر استخدام نموذج التقييم (الروبرك) على الأداء الكتابي لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية: دراسة تجريبية في جامعة سبها، ليبيا

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**الملخص:**

تقصّت هذه الدراسة أثر استخدام نموذج التقييم "الروبريك" على أداء الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة سبها، وتستكشف آراء المحاضرين حول فاعليته. واعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً مختلطاً، حيث استخدمت تصميماً شبه تجريبي واستبانة وصفية، مع حساب معامل الثبات بين المصححين لضمان موضوعية التقييم. أظهرت النتائج تحسناً جوهرياً ذا دلالة إحصائية في جودة كتابة الطلاب بعد استخدام الروبريك، مع وجود حجم أثر ملموس. كما

أظهر المعلمون مواقف إيجابية تجاه هذه الأداة، مؤكدين دوره في تعزيز شفافية وعدالة التقييم. ورغم هذه النتائج، واجهت الدراسة عوائق تمثلت في صغر حجم العينة وغياب المجموعة الضابطة، إضافة إلى المتطلبات الزمنية المرتبطة بتطبيق الروبريك والتدريب عليه. وتوصي الدراسة بدمج الروبريك في التعليم العالي لتوحيد معايير التقييم ودعم التنظيم الذاتي لدى الطلاب.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نموذج التقييم (الروبرك)، الأداء الكتابي، اللغة الإنجليزية. طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية

# 1. Introduction

Writing is a complex productive skill essential for academic success in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. However, students at Sebha University consistently face difficulties in mastering essay writing, often due to ambiguous evaluation criteria and impressionistic feedback. Traditional assessment methods in this context are frequently criticized for their subjectivity, which hinders students' ability to identify specific linguistic and structural weaknesses (Hyland, 2019).

## 1.1 Problem Statement

EFL students at Sebha University often experience difficulties in writing English essays due to unclear evaluation criteria and limited structured feedback. Traditional assessment methods may lead to subjective grading and do not always provide students with specific guidance for improvement. Therefore, there is a need to examine whether the use of rubric-based assessment can improve students' writing performance and enhance the effectiveness of evaluation practices.

## 1.2 Rationale for Rubric-Based Assessment

The selection of an analytic rubric as the primary intervention tool is justified by its dual role as both an evaluative and a scaffolding mechanism. Unlike holistic grading, which provides a single overall score, an analytic rubric offers significant pedagogical advantages by establishing concrete benchmarks for content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. This structure effectively minimizes the "halo effect" and impressionistic grading, thereby reducing subjectivity in assessment. Furthermore, it serves as a source of formative feedback by providing students with essential "feed-forward" information, which allows them to identify the specific gap between their current performance and the desired academic standard. Ultimately, when provided prior to the writing task, the rubric functions as a cognitive map that promotes self-regulation, empowering students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own writing process independently (Andrade, 2021).

## 1.3 research Context: Why Sebha University?

Sebha University represents a critical yet under-researched context in Libya. Classroom observations and instructional experience within the Department of English Language suggest that many EFL students experience persistent difficulties in achieving coherence and grammatical accuracy in academic writing tasks. Examining

this context helps address an important research gap in southern Libya and provides evidence-based insights that may contribute to improving local educational practices and assessment development.

### 1.4. Research Questions & Hypotheses

**Research Questions:**

**1**. To what extent does rubric-based assessment affect the writing performance of EFL students at Sebha University?

**2**. How do EFL instructors perceive the utility and fairness of rubrics in evaluating writing?

**Hypotheses:**

**H1:** There is a statistically significant improvement in students' writing scores post-intervention ($p < 0.05$).

**H2:** EFL teachers perceive rubrics as a significantly more reliable and fairer tool for grading compared to traditional methods.

### 1.5 Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

a- Investigate the effect of rubric-based assessment on improving EFL students' writing performance.
b- Measure the difference between students' pre-test and post-test writing scores.
c- Explore teachers' perceptions of using rubrics in writing assessment.
d- Determine the effectiveness of rubrics in providing clear and structured evaluation criteria.

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to improving writing assessment practices in EFL contexts. It provides insights for teachers on the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in enhancing students' writing skills. Additionally, it offers practical implications for curriculum designers and educators at Sebha University and similar institutions by promoting more objective, transparent, and effective assessment methods. The study also contributes to the existing literature on language assessment and EFL writing development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Concept and Types of Rubrics

Rubrics are structured assessment tools designed to articulate explicit criteria and performance levels for evaluating students' work. They play a dual role as both instructional and evaluative instruments by clarifying expectations and supporting learning outcomes (Andrade, 2019; Brookhart, 2018).

Beyond their evaluative function, rubrics contribute to shaping students' understanding of quality writing by making abstract criteria more concrete and accessible. This clarity is particularly important in EFL contexts, where learners often struggle to interpret implicit expectations in writing tasks.

Rubrics are typically categorized into holistic and analytic types. Holistic rubrics provide a single overall score based on general performance, while analytic rubrics assess multiple dimensions of writing separately, such as content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. Brookhart (2013) emphasizes that well-designed rubrics improve transparency in grading and provide students with clear expectations that enhance learning and performance.

Although holistic rubrics are efficient and time-saving, they have been criticized for their limited diagnostic value. In contrast, analytic rubrics offer detailed, criterion-specific feedback, which enhances both teaching and learning processes. Empirical studies suggest that analytic rubrics are effective in improving EFL writing performance due to their ability to provide clear criteria and detailed feedback that support students' learning and revision processes (Brookhart, 2018). This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study, which adopts an analytic rubric to provide structured and detailed feedback aligned with writing components.

### 2.2 Impact of Rubrics on Writing Performance

A substantial body of research has demonstrated the positive impact of rubric-based assessment on students' writing performance. Rubrics help learners understand task requirements more clearly, enabling them to produce more organized, coherent, and linguistically accurate texts (Andrade, 2021; Panadero et al., 2023).

Importantly, rubrics function not only as assessment tools but also as cognitive scaffolds that guide students throughout the writing process. By making expectations explicit, they support planning, drafting, and revising stages of writing. This aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the role of structured guidance in knowledge construction.

However, some studies suggest that the effectiveness of rubrics may depend on how they are implemented. For example, overly complex rubrics may overwhelm students, while poorly explained criteria may reduce their instructional value. Despite these concerns, the majority of empirical evidence supports the conclusion that rubric use leads to measurable improvements in writing performance.

Zhang and Hyland (2022) further argue that rubrics enhance students' metacognitive awareness by encouraging them to reflect on their writing processes. This increased awareness contributes to higher-quality writing and greater learner autonomy.

The findings of the present study, which reveal a significant improvement in post-test scores, are consistent with this body of research, reinforcing the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in EFL contexts.

### 2.3 Rubrics and Formative Feedback

One of the most significant contributions of rubrics lies in their role in enhancing formative feedback. Traditional feedback practices often rely on general comments that may lack clarity and specificity, limiting their usefulness for students.

In contrast, rubric-based feedback is structured, criterion-referenced, and aligned with clearly defined performance standards. Carless and Boud (2018) argue that effective feedback practices enhance students' feedback literacy, enabling them to understand, interpret, and use feedback for learning improvement. This allows students to identify specific areas for improvement and take actionable steps to enhance their writing.

Research by Bearman and Ajjawi (2019) highlights that rubric facilitate self-assessment and peer assessment, both of which are key components of formative learning. Similarly, Panadero et al. (2023) emphasize that rubrics support self-regulated learning by enabling students to monitor their progress and adjust their strategies accordingly.

From a theoretical perspective, rubric-based feedback aligns with formative assessment principles, which emphasize continuous feedback, learner engagement, and improvement over time. This is particularly relevant in EFL writing, where ongoing feedback is essential for developing language proficiency.

### 2.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Rubric Use

Teachers' perceptions are a critical factor in the successful implementation of rubric-based assessment. A considerable body of research indicates that teachers generally perceive rubrics as effective tools for improving assessment quality.

Rubrics are widely recognized for enhancing fairness, consistency, and transparency in grading. By providing clear criteria, they reduce subjectivity and help ensure that all students are evaluated according to the same standards (Brookhart, 2018; Panadero & Jonsson, 2020).

Moreover, rubrics facilitate communication between teachers and students by clearly outlining expectations. This can lead to improved student satisfaction and reduced disputes over grades.

Despite these advantages, some challenges have been identified. Teachers often report that designing and implementing rubrics requires additional time and effort. Furthermore, effective use of rubrics may require professional training to ensure consistency and accuracy in scoring (Jonsson & Svingby, 2020).

The findings of the current study, which indicate generally positive teacher perceptions alongside concerns about time and training, are consistent with previous research.

### 2.5 Rubrics in Higher Education and EFL Contexts

In higher education, rubric-based assessment has gained increasing attention as institutions seek to enhance the quality and accountability of assessment practices. Rubrics align with modern educational approaches that emphasize student-centered learning, transparency, and continuous feedback (Fraga Viñas, 2022).

In EFL contexts, the importance of rubrics is even more pronounced. Writing in a foreign language involves complex cognitive and linguistic processes, making it essential to provide learners with clear guidance and structured support.

Rubrics help bridge the gap between teaching and assessment by aligning instructional objectives with evaluation criteria. They also contribute to increased student motivation by making expectations explicit and achievable.

However, the effectiveness of rubrics may vary depending on contextual factors such as class size, teacher experience, and institutional support. Therefore, examining rubric use in specific contexts, such as Libyan universities, is essential for understanding its practical impact.

### 2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two main theoretical perspectives:

**Constructivist Learning Theory**

Constructivism emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and guidance. Rubrics serve as scaffolding tools that support students in understanding and applying writing criteria.

**Formative Assessment Theory**

Formative assessment focuses on continuous feedback and improvement. Rubrics align with this approach by providing ongoing, structured feedback that supports learning rather than merely evaluating performance.

These theoretical perspectives support the use of rubric-based assessment as both an instructional and evaluative strategy in EFL writing.

### 2.7 Research Gap

Despite the extensive research on rubric-based assessment, several important gaps remain.

First, there is a lack of empirical research in the Libyan higher education context, particularly at Sebha University. Most studies have been conducted in different cultural and educational settings, which may limit the applicability of their findings.

Second, previous research often focuses on either students' performance or teachers' perceptions, with limited integration of both perspectives in a single study. A mixed-methods approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of rubric effectiveness.

Third, there is limited use of quasi-experimental pretest–posttest designs to measure changes in writing performance over time within the same group of learners.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by combining quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the impact of rubric-based assessment on EFL students' writing performance and teachers' perceptions in the Libyan context.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component consisted of a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, while the qualitative component involved descriptive interpretation of teachers' perceptions regarding rubric-based assessment. A quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was utilized for quantitative data. While this design lacks a control group due to administrative constraints and the ethical necessity of providing all students with equal instructional tools, validity was maintained by using equivalent writing prompts and a rigorous inter-rater reliability protocol.

### 3.2 Participants

The participants consisted of 50 EFL undergraduate students enrolled in the fourth semester at the English Language Department, University of Sebha. The students were selected using convenience sampling based on course availability.

In addition, 10 EFL instructors from the same department participated in the study by completing a questionnaire designed to explore their perceptions of rubric-based assessment in writing evaluation.

### 3.3 Instruments

#### 3.3.1. Writing Tests

Two writing tests were used:

a- Pre-test (baseline): to measure students' initial writing ability before the intervention.
b- Post-test (post-intervention): to measure improvement after using rubric-based assessment.

Both tests required students to write essays under similar conditions to ensure consistency.

**3.3.2. Analytic Writing Rubric:** An analytic writing rubric adopted from Andrade was used during the intervention phase. A 20-point scale covering Content, Organization, Grammar, and Vocabulary (See Appendix A).

**3.3.3. Teachers' Questionnaire**: A 10-item Likert scale (1-5) focusing on clarity, fairness, and practicality (See Appendix B).

## 3.4 Validity and Reliability

### Validity

To ensure content validity, the instruments (writing tests, rubric, and questionnaire) were reviewed by three experts in EFL teaching and assessment at Sebha University. Their feedback was used to improve clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the assessment tools.

### Inter-rater Reliability

To mitigate subjectivity, all essays were independently rated by two senior lecturers using the same analytic rubric. The inter-rater reliability, measured via Pearson Correlation, was r = 0.88, indicating high consistency and agreement.

## 3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The current study employed a mixed research design using a one-group pre-test/post-test approach to investigate the effect of rubric-based assessment on EFL students' writing performance at Sebha University. In the pre-test phase, fifty undergraduate EFL students were asked to write an essay within 45 minutes without receiving any writing guidelines, instructions, or assessment criteria.

Following the pretest, an intervention was introduced in which students were provided with an analytic writing rubric adapted from Heidi Andrade, which included key criteria for evaluating essay writing such as content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. The rubric was clearly explained to the students and used as a guiding tool during the writing process.

In the post-test phase, the same group of students was required to write another essay within the same time limit, using the rubric as a reference for planning and improving their writing performance.

In addition, a structured questionnaire was administered to English language teachers at Sebha University to explore their perceptions of rubric-based assessment in evaluating students' writing. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items focusing on teachers' views regarding the effectiveness, clarity, fairness, and practicality of using rubrics in writing assessment. Participants responded to the statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The aim of the questionnaire was to gain insight into teachers' experiences and attitudes toward the use of rubrics as an assessment tool in EFL writing instruction. In addition to the quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses, descriptive qualitative interpretation was used to provide deeper insights into teachers' attitudes and experiences regarding the use of rubric-based assessment in EFL writing instruction**.**

## 3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize the data. Additionally, a paired samples t-test was conducted to examine differences between pre-test and post-test scores. Statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.05$, which is commonly used in educational research (Field, 2020).

The data collected from the instructors' questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and mean scores. A total of 10 instructors participated in the study. Their responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Furthermore, qualitative descriptive analysis was employed to interpret teachers' responses and provide deeper understanding of their perceptions toward the effectiveness and practicality of rubric-based assessment.

## 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Inter-Rater Reliability Results

Before conducting the main statistical analysis, an inter-rater reliability test was performed to ensure the objectivity of the writing scores. Two independent raters evaluated a sample of 50 essays using the same analytic rubric. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient revealed a high degree of agreement between the two raters ($r = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that the scoring process was consistent and reliable.

### 4.2 Impact of Rubrics on Writing Performance

To answer the first research question regarding the extent to which rubric-based assessment affects writing performance, descriptive statistics and a paired samples t-test were calculated.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores (N = 50)**

| Test | Mean score (out of 100) | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | Improvement |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-test | 64.72 | 6.48 | 52 | 78 | - |
| Post-test | 78.36 | 5.91 | 66 | 90 | 21.07% |

As shown in Table 1, there was a noticeable increase in the students' mean scores after the intervention, with an overall improvement of 21.07%. To determine if this difference was statistically significant, a paired samples t-test was conducted.

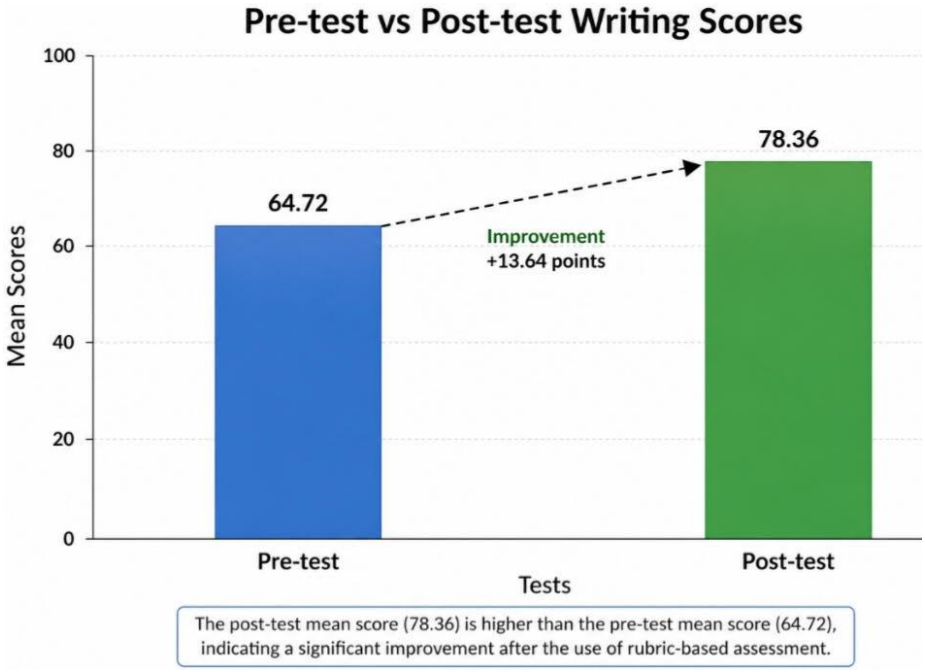



**Figure (1) Comparison between Pre-test and Post-test Writing Scores**

Figure 1 illustrates the comparison between pre-test and post-test writing scores. The mean score increased from 64.72 (pre-test) to 78.36 (post-test), resulting in a mean gain of 13.64 points. This improvement represents an increase of approximately 21.07%, indicating a substantial enhancement in students' writing performance after the rubric-based intervention. The noticeable difference between the two means confirms the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in improving students' writing quality.

**Table 2: Paired Samples t-Test Results (N=50)**

| Comparison | Mean Difference | t-value | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Cohen's d |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-test vs post-test | **13.64** | **9.84** | **49** | **0.001** | **1.38** |

The results of the paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t(49) = 9.84$, $p < 0.001$). The

Null hypothesis (H0) is therefore rejected. Furthermore, Cohen's d was calculated at 1.38, signifying a large effect size, which demonstrates that rubric intervention had a substantial practical impact on students' writing quality.

### 4.3 Effect Size

The effect size was calculated using Cohen's d, revealing a large effect size ($d = 1.38$), which indicates that the improvement in writing performance was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. This finding is substantially higher than the average effect size reported in a recent meta-analysis by Camargo Salamanca (2024), which synthesized 41 quasi-experimental studies on rubric

effectiveness (Hedges' g = 0.47). The stronger effect in the present study may be attributed to the use of an analytic rubric combined with explicit instruction and inter-rater reliability procedures, factors that Camargo Salamanca identified as potential moderators of rubric effectiveness.

### 4.4 Teachers' Perceptions (Descriptive Analysis of Questionnaire Data)

To address the sec

including mean scores and percentages, to identify teachers' views regarding the clarity, fairness, practicality, and effectiveness of rubric implementation. The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Summary of Teachers' Responses (N = 10)**

| Item | Statement summary | Mean | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Improves assessment clarity | 4.52 | 90% |
| 2 | Ensures fairness in grading | 4.55 | 91% |
| 3 | Rubrics improve feedback quality | 4.38 | 88% |
| 4 | Saves time | 3.90 | 78% |
| 5 | Easy to use | 4.10 | 82% |
| 6 | Improves instruction | 4.47 | 89% |
| 7 | Increases consistency | 4.45 | 89% |
| 8 | Requires formal training | 4.20 | 84% |
| 9 | Overall satisfaction | 4.48 | 90% |
| 10 | Supports students' self-regulation in writing | 4.32 | 86% |

The findings in Ta

(90%) and overall satisfaction (90%), suggesting that rubrics play an important role in standardizing assessment practices and enhancing instructional effectiveness. High levels of agreement were also reported for improving instruction (89%), increasing consistency (89%), and improving feedback quality (88%). In addition, instructors agreed that rubric-based assessment supports students' self-regulation in writing (86%) and may require formal training for effective implementation (84%). However, the lowest agreement was recorded for saving time (78%), indicating that while rubrics are valued for their educational benefits, their practical application may still involve time-related challenges in classroom settings.

#### 4.4.1 Qualitative Interpretation of Teachers' Perceptions

The qualitative interpretation of teachers' responses revealed three major themes regarding the use of rubric-based assessment in EFL writing evaluation.

First, most instructors emphasized that rubrics improved transparency in the assessment process by clearly clarifying grading expectations for students. Several participants reported that students became more aware of writing requirements and demonstrated greater responsibility during revision tasks. This indicates that rubric use helped students better understand performance criteria and encouraged more purposeful engagement with writing activities.

Second, instructors reported that rubric-based assessment enhanced consistency in scoring across different raters. They noted that the use of clearly defined analytic criteria reduced subjective judgment and promoted fairness in grading. This improvement in scoring consistency was considered important for ensuring more objective and standardized evaluation practices within the department.

Third, despite these advantages, some instructors expressed concerns about the time required for developing and applying rubrics. They also highlighted the need for formal training to ensure effective implementation and consistent use of rubrics in writing assessment. These concerns suggest that while rubrics are pedagogically beneficial, their successful application depends on adequate institutional support and teacher preparation.

Overall, the qualitative findings align with the quantitative results of the questionnaire, indicating that instructors generally perceive rubric-based assessment positively. They view it as a tool that enhances transparency, fairness, and consistency in assessment, while also recognizing practical challenges related to time and training requirements.

### 4.5 Summary of Findings

The findings of the questionnaire indicate that EFL instructors hold highly positive perceptions toward the use of rubric-based assessment in writing evaluation. The majority of teachers expressed strong agreement that rubrics enhance several important aspects of the assessment process.

Specifically, the highest level of agreement was reported for ensuring fairness in grading (91%), followed by improving assessment clarity (90%) and overall satisfaction with rubric use (90%). In addition, 89% of participants agreed that rubrics improve instruction and increase consistency in evaluation, while 88% reported that rubrics enhance the quality of feedback provided to students. Furthermore, 86% agreed that rubric-based assessment supports students' self-regulation in writing.

Although most responses were positive, some variation was observed regarding practical implementation. While 84% of instructors agreed that effective rubric use requires formal training, only 78% indicated that rubrics save time in assessment, suggesting that time efficiency remains a practical concern.

Overall, the results demonstrate that rubrics are widely perceived as effective, reliable, and beneficial tools in EFL writing assessment. These findings support the integration of rubric-based assessment in higher education contexts and reinforce its role in improving both teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

## 5. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of rubric-based assessment on EFL students' writing performance and to explore teachers' perceptions of its use in the context of Sebha University. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' post-test scores compared to their pre-test performance, indicating that rubric-based assessment had a substantial positive impact on writing development.

One possible explanation for this improvement is that rubrics provide explicit and transparent criteria, which help students better understand what is expected of them. This aligns with previous research suggesting that clarity of expectations is a key factor in improving writing quality (Andrade, 2021; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). In line with these findings, Bin Dahmash (2025) recently demonstrated that analytic rubrics provide both short-term benefits—such as clarifying task requirements and identifying strengths and weaknesses—and long-term advantages, including improved self-efficacy and writing competence among EFL university students. When students are aware of assessment standards, they are more likely to plan, organize, and revise their writing effectively.

Furthermore, the use of an analytic rubric in this study may have contributed significantly to the observed improvement. Unlike holistic scoring, analytic rubrics break down writing into specific components such as content, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. This detailed structure enables students to focus on individual aspects of writing, leading to more targeted improvements. This finding is consistent with research indicating that analytic rubrics improve EFL writing performance by providing clear criteria and detailed feedback that support learning and revision processes (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

Another important factor is the role of rubrics in supporting self-regulated learning. By using the rubric as a guide, students were able to monitor their own performance and identify areas for improvement. This process likely enhanced their metacognitive awareness and encouraged more active engagement with the writing task. These results support the findings of Panadero et al. (2023), who emphasized that rubrics promote self-regulation and reflective learning.

The large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.38) observed in this study further indicates that the impact of rubric-based assessment is not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful. This suggests that rubrics can serve as powerful instructional tools when integrated effectively into classroom practice. Similar conclusions were reported by Graham (2019), who highlighted the importance of structured guidance in improving writing instruction.

In addition to student performance, the findings related to teachers' perceptions revealed generally positive attitudes toward rubric use. Teachers reported that rubrics improve fairness, consistency, and clarity in assessment, which supports previous research (Brookhart, 2018; Jonsson & Svingby, 2020). By reducing subjectivity, rubrics allow for more reliable and transparent evaluation practices.

However, despite these positive perceptions, some teachers expressed concerns regarding the time required to design and implement rubrics effectively. This finding reflects a commonly reported challenge in the literature (Jonsson & Svingby, 2020). It suggests that while rubrics are beneficial, their successful implementation may depend on institutional support and teacher training.

It is also important to interpret the findings of this study in light of its research design. The use of a one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental design allows for the measurement of improvement over time; however, the absence of a control group limits the ability to attribute all observed changes solely to the intervention. Other factors, such as increased familiarity with the writing task or general language development, may have contributed to the improvement. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Despite this limitation, the study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in a relatively under-researched context. The findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the use of rubrics as both instructional and evaluative tools in EFL writing.

Overall, the results suggest that rubric-based assessment enhances students' writing performance by providing structured guidance, promoting self-regulation, and improving the quality of feedback. At the same time, successful implementation requires attention to practical challenges such as time and training.

## 6. Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of rubric-based assessment on EFL students' writing performance at Sebha University, Libya, and explored teachers' perceptions of its use in writing evaluation. The findings demonstrated that rubric-based assessment significantly improved students' writing performance, as evidenced by higher post-test scores compared to pre-test results.

The improvement observed in students' performance can be attributed to the structured nature of rubrics, which provide clear performance criteria and reduce ambiguity in writing tasks. This supports the argument made by Andrade (2021) and Brookhart (2018), who emphasize that rubrics enhance learning by making expectations explicit and supporting self-regulated learning processes.

Moreover, the use of analytic rubrics in this study appears to have played a crucial role in improving specific dimensions of writing, including organization, content development, grammar, and vocabulary. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that analytic rubrics are particularly effective in EFL contexts because

they provide detailed feedback on individual writing components (Brookhart, 2013; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Panadero et al., 2023).

In addition, the large effect size obtained in this study supports the claim that rubric-based assessment has not only statistical significance but also practical educational value. This is consistent with Panadero et al. (2023), who argue that rubrics contribute meaningfully to learning outcomes by promoting reflection and self-assessment.

Regarding teachers' perceptions, the results indicated generally positive attitudes toward rubric use, particularly in terms of improving fairness, consistency, and transparency in assessment practices. These findings are in line with Brookhart (2018) and Reddy and Andrade (2010), who highlight that rubric enhance reliability and reduce subjectivity in grading.

However, as noted in the literature, the effectiveness of rubrics depends on their proper design and implementation, as well as adequate teacher training (Jonsson & Svingby, 2020). This suggests that institutional support is essential to maximize the benefits of rubric-based assessment.

Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that rubric-based assessment is an effective instructional and evaluative tool for improving EFL writing performance in higher education contexts. It also contributes to the limited body of research in the Libyan context by demonstrating the practical value of rubrics in enhancing both student learning outcomes and assessment practices.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 1. Integration of Rubrics in Writing Courses

EFL instructors are encouraged to integrate rubric-based assessment into writing courses to enhance students' understanding of expectations and improve writing performance.

### 2. Teacher Training Programs

Institutions should provide training workshops for instructors on how to design and effectively use rubrics, as some teachers indicated that rubric development may require additional skills and experience.

### 3. Use of Rubrics for Formative Assessment

Rubrics should be used not only for grading but also as tools for formative assessment, allowing students to engage in self-assessment and improve their writing through feedback and revision.

### 4. Standardization of Assessment Practices

Departments are encouraged to adopt standardized rubrics to ensure consistency and fairness in writing assessment across different instructors and courses.

**5. Encouraging Student Engagement with Rubrics**

Students should be actively involved in using rubrics during the writing process to enhance their awareness of assessment criteria and promote independent learning.

**6. Further Research**

Future studies are recommended to:

a- Investigate the long-term impact of rubric use on writing development.
b- Explore rubric effectiveness across different proficiency levels.
c- Examine the role of digital rubrics in online learning environments.

## 8. Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable findings of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged:

First, the study was conducted on a relatively small sample size consisting of 50 students and 10 instructors from the English Department at the University of Sebha. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or institutions.

Second, the participants were limited to fourth-semester EFL students, which means that the results may not be applicable to students at different proficiency levels, such as beginners or advanced learners.

Third, the duration of the experimental treatment was relatively short-term, as students completed a single writing task. Therefore, the study does not capture the long-term effects of rubric-based assessment on writing development.

Fourth, the study relied on a single essay prompt, which may not fully represent students' overall writing ability across different genres or tasks.

Fifth, although efforts were made to ensure scoring consistency, the evaluation of writing may still involve some degree of subjectivity, as it depends on human judgment.

Sixth, the study used a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test / post-test design without a control group, which may limit the ability to fully attribute the observed improvement solely to the intervention.

Finally, the teachers' questionnaire was based on self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal bias or individual perceptions rather than actual classroom practices.

## 9. Appendices

### 9.1 Appendix A: The Analytic Rubric (Sample Criteria)

a. **Content (5 pts):** Thesis clarity, relevance, and supporting details.
b. **Organization (5 pts):** Logical progression and transitions.
c. **Grammar (5 pts):** Accuracy and sentence variety.
d. **Vocabulary (5 pts):** Precision and academic tone.

### 9.2 Appendix B: Teacher Questionnaire Items

a. Rubrics make writing assessment criteria clearer for students.
b. Rubrics improve fairness in grading students' writing.
c. Rubrics reduce subjectivity in marking writing tasks.
d. Rubrics improve the quality of feedback given to students.
e. Rubrics increase consistency among different teachers when grading.
f. Rubrics help improve students' writing performance.
g. Rubrics support students' self-regulation in writing tasks.
h. Rubrics require additional time to design.
i. Teachers need formal training to use rubrics effectively.
j. Overall, I am satisfied with using rubrics in writing assessment.

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