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Evaluation and Assessment of Essays in Higher Education: Practices, Challenges, and Insights


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Abstract

Essay assessment is a central practice in higher education widely used to evaluate critical thinking, analytical writing, and subject-matter competence. Despite its importance, persistent concerns remain regarding grading consistency, standardization, and the substantial time investment required. While rubrics are commonly advocated as tools to improve reliability, instructors' actual practices, challenges, and perceptions surrounding essay evaluation have not been thoroughly examined, particularly in varied institutional contexts. The main aim of this study is to investigate college instructors' practices, challenges, and attitudes toward essay assessment. Specifically, it explores how rubrics are employed and the extent to which instructors perceive essays as effective measures of higher-order learning outcomes. The study involved 52 college instructors who completed a validated questionnaire designed to capture their assessment practices and perspectives. Data were collected via a structured survey instrument and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied to identify patterns in usage, perceived utility, and encountered difficulties. The analysis revealed that most instructors value essays as effective tools for assessing critical thinking and subject proficiency and report frequent use in their teaching. However, significant challenges persist, including inconsistent grading, lack of standardization, and heavy time demands. Although rubrics are commonly used, they do not fully resolve issues of reliability. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.813) and validity (coefficient = 0.901), supporting the robustness of the findings. These results suggest that while essay assessment remains a vital component of higher education evaluation, systemic support is needed to address its practical limitations. The study contributes to assessment literature by highlighting the gap between perceived value and implementation challenges. Findings underscore the need for targeted professional development and institutional policies to enhance the quality, fairness, and efficiency of essay-based evaluation. (примљено: 27. августа 2025; прихваћено: 11. новембра 2025)

1. Introduction

In education, assessment is the process of recording, evaluating, and characterizing students' knowledge and abilities (Brookhart, 2013). There are numerous applications of assessment, including assisting educators in lesson planning, determining the needs of students, and evaluating the effectiveness of programs. It is crucial for developing new teaching strategies and enhancing students' learning outcomes.

A range of assessments are used by teachers to assist in teaching and learning. First of all, formative assessments are conducted during classes so that teachers can adjust their teaching methods as necessary and students can receive continuous feedback that improves their understanding (William/Leahy, 2015). Second, to gauge students' learning, summative assessments are administered at the conclusion of a unit or academic year (Stiggins et al., 2015). Third, portfolio assessments entail gathering samples of students' work over time to demonstrate their growth and academic success (Shepard, 2000). Giving teachers and students insightful feedback on what they have learned and how well they have learned it is the primary objective of all these tests.

On the other hand, evaluation is the process of determining the usefulness, value, or effectiveness of instructional strategies, programs, or frameworks. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines it as "the act or technique of assessing something". Evaluation, according to Scriven (1991), is "the systematic collection and analysis of information to determine the merit, worth, or value of something" in the context of education. "Why does it work?" is a question that a good evaluation should be able to address. "Who does it work best for?", "Does it work?", and "How can we make it better?" are additional important questions, according to Donaldson and Christie (2006). These guiding questions help educators evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, curricula, and instructional strategies.

In education, evaluation is essential because it helps teachers and administrators determine which teaching strategies are working best, which ones need to be improved, and which students might need more help (Hattie/Timperley, 2007). It guarantees that students receive top-notch instruction tailored to their individual learning requirements.

Although assessment and evaluation have different functions, they are frequently used interchangeably in educational contexts. Evaluation involves making well-informed decisions about individuals, initiatives, or organizations using the information acquired through assessment. While evaluation focuses on programs and systems, students are the main focus of assessment (Gronlund, 2004).

Determining the goal of the assessment and the data to be gathered, creating criteria for assessing learning outcomes, choosing suitable test takers, and tracking the outcomes over time are typical steps in the assessment process. The objectives and context of the evaluation determine the precise methodology to be used (Nitko/Brookhart, 2011).

Transparent, equitable, and successful assessment techniques are becoming increasingly important as demands for accountability and reform in higher

education rise (Jaschik/Lederman, 2020). However, there are still differing views on assessment: some think it can enhance instruction and learning, while others see it as a formality intended to appease outside parties (Ariovich et al., 2019). These discussions highlight the need to set up sound, empirically supported essay evaluation practices that can uphold academic standards and promote student development.

This study investigates the attitudes and practices of university instructors regarding the evaluation and assessment of essays, with an emphasis on using rubrics as a tool to improve fairness, clarity, and efficiency in grading. By analyzing quantitative survey data from 52 educators, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about best practices and persistent challenges in essay assessment in higher education.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Value and complexity of essay assessment

It is commonly acknowledged that essays are useful tools for evaluating higher-order cognitive abilities such as argumentation, synthesis, and analysis (Struyven et al., 2005). They are especially appropriate for fields that value critical engagement and unique insight because of their open-ended nature, which permits the demonstration of individual thought processes and creativity (Kouicem, 2018). Nevertheless, the same characteristics that make essays valuable also make evaluating them more difficult. Different writing styles, content organization, and argument structures must be interpreted by teachers, which could result in subjectivity and inconsistencies in grading (Gronlund/Linn, 1990; Worthen et al., 1993).

A thorough analysis of essay introduction strategies emphasizes how crucial audience, context, and disciplinary norms are in influencing writing and evaluation procedures. For example, scientific writing typically favors a direct approach, whereas essays in the humanities tend to use the funnel technique (Kouicem, 2018). Due to this diversity, assessment instruments must be adaptable and sensitive to context.

1.1.2. Challenges in assessment: consistency, fairness, and workload

Achieving accurate and equitable student performance measurement is one of the major challenges in higher education assessment (Singer-Freeman/Robinson, 2020). According to research, teachers frequently find it difficult to grade essays consistently, particularly in large classes or when the assessment criteria are unclear (Jonsson/Svingby, 2007). The educational value of essay assignments may be compromised as a result of students feeling more anxious and unfairly treated (Sambell et al., 1997).

Furthermore, the workload related to essay evaluation is a recurring issue. According to teachers, grading essays takes a lot of time and calls for careful reading, tailored feedback, and the use of sophisticated judgment (Jonsson/Svingby, 2007).

Institutional demands for consistent reporting and prompt grading exacerbate these difficulties.

1.1.3. Rubrics as a solution: benefits and limitations

A commonly accepted method for resolving the difficulties associated with essay evaluation is the use of rubrics. Rubrics are structured scoring guides that specify performance levels and criteria. They are used to standardize grading, make expectations clear, and expedite feedback (Andrade, 2005; Jonsson/Svingby, 2007; NC State University, 2019). According to empirical research, rubrics can increase impartiality, lessen bias in grading, and increase student transparency. By offering a reference framework, rubrics also help teachers grade assignments more quickly and effectively while guaranteeing that feedback is pertinent and useful.

Nevertheless, rubrics do have certain drawbacks. According to Jonsson and Svingby (2007), their efficacy is contingent upon their careful design, alignment with learning objectives, and appropriate student communication. Rubrics alone do not automatically improve assessment skills; students require specific instruction and practice to internalize criteria and standards, according to studies on student self-assessment using rubrics (University of the Western Cape, 2021). Additionally, according to Reddy and Andrade (2010), some educators worry that rubrics may limit professional judgment or oversimplify difficult writing assignments.

1.1.4. Teacher attitudes and assessment literacy

The significance of teachers' assessment literacy and self-efficacy in putting efficient essay evaluation procedures into practice is highlighted by recent research (Looney et al., 2018; Mohammadkhah et al., 2022). Teachers' willingness to embrace novel approaches is greatly influenced by their opinions regarding the merits, viability, and equity of different assessment techniques, such as peer and self-assessment (Mohammadkhah et al., 2022). Teachers continue to rely on traditional summative assessment methods and show reluctance to adopt student-centered assessment models in many contexts (Wu et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021).

1.1.5. The Algerian context

Essay evaluation is a key component of language and humanities curricula in Algeria, as it is in many other higher education systems. To improve quality and accountability, educators are increasingly urged to use rubrics and other standardized assessment instruments. However, continuing professional development and institutional support are necessary for the shift from traditional to rubric-based assessment.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

With an emphasis on the use of rubrics, this study used a quantitative descriptive research design to examine university instructors' attitudes and practices about

essay evaluation and assessment. In order to give a thorough overview of current assessment procedures in the context of higher education in Algeria, the descriptive approach was selected.

2.2. Participants

The target population consisted of instructors teaching English at the university level. In total, 52 educators took part in the study. A variety of disciplines were represented among the participants, including literature, linguistics, didactics, and civilization. Respondents' teaching experience varied widely, from those with decades of experience to those in the early stages of their career. Participants had to have taught English at the university level within the previous three years in order to meet the inclusion requirements. All participants provided their informed consent after being assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

2.3. Instrument

2.3.1. Questionnaire development

A structured questionnaire created especially for this study was used to gather data. To ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability, the questionnaire was refined through a pilot test with a small group of university teachers. The questionnaire was developed based on a review of the literature on essay assessment and rubric use. The pilot test feedback led to minor changes to the order and wording of the questions.

2.3.2. Structure and content

There were 19 items in the final survey, which were split into two primary sections:

Section 1: Background information

Professional and demographic information, such as specialization, years of teaching experience, and subjects taught during the previous three years, were gathered in this section.

Section 2: Attitudes and practices in essay evaluation and rubric use

This section contained statements designed to measure opinions about rubrics, self-reported practices, and attitudes toward essay evaluation. The majority of the items evaluated frequency or agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented strong disagreement and 5 represented strong agreement. In order to capture complex viewpoints, the questionnaire had both closed-ended and a few open-ended response options.

2.4. Data collection procedure

To encourage widespread participation and convenience, the survey was conducted online via Google Forms. Institutional email lists were used to send an invitation that included the goal of the study, assurances of confidentiality, and a link to the survey. There were no incentives offered, and participation was entirely

voluntary. Data were collected over a two-week period during the spring semester of 2025.

2.4.1. Data preparation and quality control

After data collection was finished, responses were downloaded and checked for completeness. IBM SPSS Statistics was used to enter and analyze the data. Outliers and missing values were examined, and the first SPSS output table confirmed a high response rate and little missing, displaying the number and percentage of missing and non-missing values for each item.

2.5. Reliability and validity

Cronbach's alpha, computed for the 19-item scale, was used to evaluate the instrument's reliability. High internal consistency was indicated by the resultant value of 0.813. Strong construct validity and the accuracy of the questionnaire's measurement of the intended constructs were indicated by a validity coefficient of 0.901, calculated as the square root of the reliability coefficient.

2.6. Data analysis

Using IBM SPSS Statistics, a thorough set of descriptive statistical analyses was carried out to compile the main findings and participant characteristics. Frequencies and percentages were computed for categorical variables, such as teaching experience and specialization, and their distributions were displayed using bar and pie charts. Measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variability (standard deviation, variance) were calculated for Likert-scale items that assessed attitudes and behaviors in order to find prevailing patterns. Additionally, SPSS's reliability analysis module was used to verify the validity and reliability of the instrument. Taken together, these analyses offer a thorough picture of the instructor demographics and viewpoints regarding the use of rubrics in evaluating academic essays.

2.7. Ethical considerations

The study complied with the ethical guidelines for studies with instructors, educators, and professionals. All participants gave their informed consent, participation was entirely voluntary, and data were anonymized to maintain confidentiality. The appropriate institutional authorities at Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University examined and approved the study protocol.

3. Results

3.1. Data quality and completeness

All responses ($N = 52$) were checked for completeness prior to analysis. Nearly all participants gave complete answers to all 19 questionnaire items, and the first table of the SPSS output displayed very little missing data. The robustness and representativeness of the dataset are supported by this high response rate.

3.2. Reliability and validity of the instrument

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.813	19

Table 1. Reliability and validity statistics for the questionnaire

Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of the 19-item questionnaire, and the result was 0.813. This suggests that the scale measures the constructs of essay assessment and rubric use with reliability, as evidenced by the high degree of internal consistency among the items. The instrument's construct validity and suitability for the target population were further supported by a validity coefficient of 0.901, computed as the square root of the reliability coefficient.

3.3. Demographic profile of respondents

3.3.1. Specialty distribution

What is your specialty?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Linguistics	18	34.6	34.6	34.6
	Didactics	16	30.8	30.8	65.4
	Civilization	3	5.8	5.8	71.2
	Literature	7	13.5	13.5	84.6
	Literature and Civilization	2	3.8	3.8	88.5
	Other	6	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Respondents by specialty

According to the survey results, the majority of participating university EFL instructors – more than 65% of the sample – specialize in linguistics (34.6%) and didactics (30.8%). According to this focus, the majority of teachers have solid backgrounds in pedagogy and language structure, both of which are essential for successful EFL instruction. Lower percentages of participants reported expertise in literature, civilization, and interdisciplinary fields, suggesting some diversity, but also highlighting a definite emphasis on language and instructional strategies. This variety enhances the applicability of the findings to different higher education English teaching contexts.

3.3.2. Teaching experience

Fewer respondents had less than five years or more than fifteen years of experience teaching at a university, while the majority reported having five to fifteen years of experience. This range indicates that the sample encompassed both novice and seasoned teachers, offering a broad perspective on essay evaluation procedures. Respondents’ teaching experience also varies, but it mostly falls into the mid-career range: 34.6% have one to five years, 38.5% have five to ten years, and 26.9% have more than ten years of experience. A good balance between relatively new and experienced teachers is reflected in this distribution, which may help the teaching community incorporate both new ideas and well-established knowledge.

How long have you been teaching EFL to university students?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1–5 years	18	34.6	34.6	34.6
	5–10 years	20	38.5	38.5	73.1
	More than 10 years	14	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Teaching experience at university level

3.3.3. Range and diversity of subjects taught

With an average of 7.5 subjects taught over the previous three years, the instructors report teaching a wide range of subject areas. Oral Expression, Linguistics, Research Methodology, and Written Expression are the most commonly taught subjects. These subjects together highlight a thorough approach to language instruction that incorporates academic research competencies, along with both receptive and productive skills. Numerous “Other” subject areas (19.2%) are present, which emphasizes how adaptable teachers are in meeting a range of curriculum requirements. Since teachers must modify evaluation criteria for various subject areas and skill levels, this range of teaching responsibilities may have an impact on their opinions regarding assessment procedures and the usefulness of rubrics.

What subject areas have you been teaching over the past 3 years?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Civilization	1	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Literature	3	5.8	5.8	7.7
	Linguistics	7	13.5	13.5	21.2
	Psychology	1	1.9	1.9	23.1
	Didactics	4	7.7	7.7	30.8
	Grammar	3	5.8	5.8	36.5
	Oral Expression	8	15.4	15.4	51.9
	Written Expression	6	11.5	11.5	63.5
	Phonetics	1	1.9	1.9	65.4
	Reading	1	1.9	1.9	67.3
	Research Methodology	7	13.5	13.5	80.8
	Other	10	19.2	19.2	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Distribution of teaching subjects over a three-year period

Respondents said they had taught a range of subjects, such as literature, linguistics, academic writing, and civilization courses, over the previous three years. Given that subject-specific essay assessment procedures may vary, this range of teaching experience is pertinent.

3.3.4. Attitudes and practices in essay assessment

Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledge academic essays as an important component of university-level English instruction, with 80.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. This consensus reflects the central role of essay writing in fostering critical thinking, argumentation, and language development among EFL students. Moreover, most instructors find the task of evaluating academic essays manageable, with 90.4% indicating agreement or strong agreement. This suggests that, despite the potentially subjective nature of essay grading, instructors possess confidence and competence in their evaluative abilities, possibly supported by established assessment frameworks or professional experience.

I believe academic essays are an important component of university-level English instruction.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	10	19.2	19.2	19.2
	Agree	28	53.8	53.8	73.1
	Strongly agree	14	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Attitudes toward academic essays

Instructors strongly agree that academic essays are crucial to teaching English at the university level. Interestingly, 80.7% of respondents said they “agree” (53.8%) or “strongly agree” (26.9%) with the statement, demonstrating that the majority of respondents think essays are an important teaching tool. According to this strong positive skew, essays are valued for their capacity to foster fundamental academic abilities such as formal writing proficiency, structured argumentation, and critical thinking. This almost unanimous support is further supported by the lack of respondents stating that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. The overall results clearly position the academic essay as a foundational and non-negotiable component of the English curriculum according to these educators, even though a significant minority (19.2%) was “neutral,” possibly reflecting nuanced views on their implementation or relative importance among other teaching methods.

I find evaluating academic essays to be a manageable task.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	5	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Agree	29	55.8	55.8	65.4
	Strongly agree	18	34.6	34.6	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 6. Evaluation manageability

According to the data, a significant majority of teachers believe that assessing academic essays is a manageable task. 90.4% of respondents said they “agree” (55.8%) or “strongly agree” (34.6%) with the statement. This extremely high degree of agreement shows that teachers feel prepared and confident in their ability to carry out this crucial responsibility, even in the face of the known difficulties associated with grading writing, such as its subjective aspects and time-consuming nature. The small percentage of respondents (9.6%) who chose the “neutral” stance might be an

indication of those who think the task is only feasible in specific situations, such as with more simplified rubrics or smaller class sizes. The total lack of disagreement indicates that, despite the process's potential demands, this group of professionals does not typically view it as an overwhelming burden.

3.3.5. Rubric use: frequency, provision, and perceived benefits

The use of rubrics for grading essays appears well established, with nearly 70% of instructors employing them regularly. Respondents believe rubrics save time during grading and help clarify students' strengths and weaknesses, with over 90% agreeing on these points. Such findings align with the recognized benefits of rubrics in increasing grading efficiency and transparency.

I regularly use evaluation rubrics when grading essays.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	16	30.8	30.8	30.8
	Agree	29	55.8	55.8	86.5
	Strongly agree	7	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 7. Frequency of rubric use in essay assessment

However, less than half of the instructors consistently provide rubrics to students before assignments, as indicated by a majority of neutral responses on this practice. This gap suggests an area for improvement, given that sharing rubrics upfront can enhance the students' understanding of expectations and promote self-regulated learning. Additionally, the belief that rubrics improve student performance when provided before exams is strong (90.4% agreement), further underscoring the pedagogical value of rubric transparency.

I provide rubrics to students before assignments or exams.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Neutral	29	55.8	55.8	57.7
	Agree	22	42.3	42.3	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 8. Rubric provision to students before exams

The high mean scores for items on the value of essays and rubrics indicate strong agreement among teachers that essay assessment is essential for evaluating higher-order skills and that rubrics are effective tools for clarifying grading criteria and improving feedback quality.

I believe providing the rubric before an exam helps students improve their performance.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	5	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Agree	33	63.5	63.5	73.1
	Strongly agree	14	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 9. Beliefs regarding pre-exam rubric efficacy

There is a resounding consensus regarding the importance of giving students rubrics before tests and their effectiveness in raising student performance. 90.4% of the 52 respondents who were polled said they agreed with the statement, with 63.5% claiming they “agree” and 26.9% “strongly agree.” This suggests that the great majority of people not only support the practice, but strongly endorse it. Notably, none of the respondents chose to “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” A tiny minority of respondents (9.6%) reported a “neutral” stance, indicating uncertainty or a lack of strong opinion. The findings clearly imply that giving students access to assessment rubrics ahead of time is generally accepted as a useful teaching tactic for raising student achievement.

I find that rubrics save me time when grading.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	5	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Agree	33	63.5	63.5	73.1
	Strongly agree	14	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Rubrics as a time-saving tool

Educators have a strong and unwavering agreement about the efficiency gains that rubrics offer, indicating that their perceived advantages go beyond student learning and into the real world of instructor workload. The statement that “rubrics save them time when grading” is overwhelmingly supported by 90.4% of the 52

respondents, with 63.5% agreeing and 26.9% strongly agreeing. According to this, rubrics are widely regarded as a tool that simplifies the assessment process by offering a clear, consistent framework for evaluation, which minimizes deliberation and speeds up feedback. They are not perceived as an administrative burden. Notably, the distribution of responses is the same as that for the student performance question, indicating that respondents strongly associate these two benefits and establishing rubrics as the ultimate win-win approach in teaching. A tiny minority (9.6%) expresses no opinion, which might be a reflection of situations in which the time required to develop a rubric may outweigh the time saved by using it. The fact that there was absolutely no disagreement at all supports the finding that the group as a whole believes that rubrics are a time-saving tool.

3.3.6. Perceptions of rubric fairness and challenges in use

While many instructors view rubrics as tools that facilitate fair and objective grading, a notable portion remains neutral or uncertain on this matter. Approximately 57.7% of respondents neither agree nor disagree that rubrics help teachers grade more fairly, and a combined 5.7% disagree or strongly disagree. This ambivalence may stem from variability in rubric design, application, or familiarity, highlighting a potential need for enhanced rubric training or refinement to ensure consistent and equitable use. Furthermore, a significant majority (nearly 80%) acknowledge occasional confusion when using rubrics during grading. This admission points to challenges in rubric clarity or complexity, emphasizing the importance of well-constructed rubrics with explicit criteria and performance levels to mitigate ambiguity and enhance usability.

Rubrics help me grade more fairly and objectively.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	1.9
	Disagree	2	3.8	3.8	5.8
	Neutral	30	57.7	57.7	63.5
	Agree	19	36.5	36.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 11. Fairness and objectivity in the use of rubrics

3.3.7. Rubrics as tools for feedback and cognitive organization

Respondents strongly endorse the use of rubrics for delivering constructive feedback, with over 90% agreeing that rubrics facilitate meaningful commentary on student work. Similarly, most instructors find rubrics helpful in organizing their thoughts during evaluation, which may contribute to more systematic and comprehensive grading. The clarity rubrics provide in identifying student strengths

and weaknesses is also widely recognized, suggesting that rubrics play a critical role not only in summative assessment, but also in formative guidance that supports learner development.

I use rubrics to deliver constructive feedback to students.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	5	9.6	9.6	9.6
	Agree	35	67.3	67.3	76.9
	Strongly agree	12	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 12. Perceived utility of rubrics for constructive feedback

A total of 90.4% of respondents agreed that rubrics are a useful tool for providing constructive criticism, indicating broad agreement among educators. This majority is divided between those who strongly agree (23.1%) and those who agree (67.3%), showing that although the practice is generally supported, a smaller percentage is especially enthusiastic about its efficacy for feedback. The high degree of agreement indicates that rubrics are valued for their ability to organize and convey to students thorough, criterion-based feedback, rather than just for their effectiveness in grading or their ability to establish clear expectations. These results support the idea that rubrics are an essential tool for formative evaluation, allowing teachers to give clear, unbiased, and useful feedback that can direct students’ progress.

Rubrics help me organize my thoughts during evaluation.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	11	21.2	21.2	21.2
	Agree	34	65.4	65.4	86.5
	Strongly agree	7	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 13. Educator perspectives on rubrics for cognitive organization during grading

The majority of respondents agreed that rubrics help them organize their thoughts during the evaluation process. However, compared to earlier benefits such as time savings or student assistance, this consensus is noticeably weaker, as it is composed mainly of those who agree (65.4%) rather than strongly agree (13.5%). This implies that, even though rubrics are commonly acknowledged as a useful framework for organization, their ability to structure a grader’s own thought

process may be a major side benefit rather than the main reason for using them. A significant minority of respondents may not rely on or experience this specific advantage, possibly as a result of pre-existing grading mechanisms or the kinds of assessments they employ, as evidenced by the existence of a larger neutral group (21.2%) which comprises more than twice as many respondents as those in earlier questions. Though this benefit is less widely recognized than the external benefits of rubrics for students and grading efficiency, the results generally show that rubrics serve an important internal function for the majority of educators by offering a structured mental model for assessment.

3.3.8. Rubric use and encouragement of student self-assessment

In contrast to other teaching methods, there is a more moderate endorsement of the use of rubrics for student self-assessment, even though the majority of instructors report encouraging their use. Overall, 69.2% of respondents said they “agree” (57.7%) or “strongly agree” (11.5%) with the statement. This suggests that a significant majority of educators find this metacognitive approach useful, most likely due to its capacity to demythologize grading standards and encourage student ownership of their education. Nevertheless, the remarkably sizable “neutral” group, which comprises 30.8% of respondents, indicates a great deal of hesitancy or ambivalence. This significant minority might suggest that some teachers have not fully embraced this practice, possibly because they have misgivings about its efficacy, are worried about the time commitment needed to train students, or think that self-assessment is best supported in other ways. There is potential for increased conviction and development among the teaching staff in this area, as further evidenced by the comparatively low percentage of respondents indicating strong agreement.

I encourage students to use rubrics for self-assessment.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	16	30.8	30.8	30.8
	Agree	30	57.7	57.7	88.5
	Strongly agree	6	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 14. Educator promotion of rubric use for student self-assessment

This discrepancy demonstrates that, although instructors greatly value rubrics for their own grading effectiveness and feedback delivery, encouraging students to use them as a metacognitive tool is less common or possibly more difficult. The findings point to a possible area for professional development that focuses on methods for enabling students to use rubrics for their own learning and self-assessment.

3.3.9. Consistency of rubric use and impact on teaching

Finally, instructors report consistent rubric use beyond final exams, reflecting the integration of rubrics into ongoing teaching and evaluation processes rather than solely summative assessment. The strong agreement that rubrics have helped improve the teaching of writing reinforces their value as pedagogical tools that align instruction, assessment, and feedback. This finding highlights the dual function of rubrics in supporting evaluative fairness and enhancing instructional quality.

I use rubrics consistently, not just for final exams.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	10	19.2	19.2	19.2
	Agree	30	57.7	57.7	76.9
	Strongly agree	12	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Table 15. Consistency of rubric use across assessment types

A significant majority of teachers use rubrics as a unified and consistent tool for assessment outside of the constrained context of final exams. The fact that 80.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this practice suggests that rubrics are widely used for a range of course evaluation purposes. Although consistent use is common, this consensus is more characterized by agreement (57.7%) than by strong conviction (23.1%), indicating that it may be motivated more by general best practices or practical necessity than by fervent advocacy. The existence of a significant neutral group (19.2%) suggests that some teachers may employ rubrics more sparingly or may implement them more widely throughout their curriculum. Overall, these findings support the notion that rubrics are widely accepted as a flexible and essential part of continuous evaluation and feedback, rather than as a single, high-stakes assessment tool.

4. Discussion

The current study provides insightful information about the specializations, teaching backgrounds, and attitudes and practices of university-level EFL instructors with regard to evaluating academic essays and using rubrics. Language structure and pedagogical knowledge are fundamental to EFL instruction, as evidenced by the respondents' preponderance of linguistics and didactics specialists. This emphasis probably boosts teachers' self-assurance in handling essay assessments and making good use of rubrics. Furthermore, the wide range of subjects that the respondents taught, such as linguistics, research methodology, and oral and written expression, showcases the varied teaching duties that these educators carry out, which may have an impact on their evaluation strategies and receptivity to structured resources like rubrics.

According to the analysis, the majority of college instructors acknowledge the importance of essays as instruments for evaluating students' written communication, critical thinking, and synthesis skills. This is consistent with the literature, which emphasizes the value of essays in promoting critical thinking and in-depth learning. The majority of respondents say they use rubrics frequently, and the mean scores for items pertaining to feedback quality and rubric clarity are noticeably high. According to these results, rubrics are generally thought to be useful for outlining grading standards, promoting impartial and consistent assessment, and giving students useful feedback. The high degree of agreement about how easy it is to evaluate essays indicates that most teachers believe they are qualified to do so, perhaps thanks to their extensive teaching background and familiarity with academic requirements.

However, the data also show enduring difficulties. According to a considerable percentage of educators, creating rubrics is time-consuming, which is consistent with worries expressed in the literature regarding the workload related to essay evaluation. Rubrics can simplify grading once they are in place, but their initial creation and modification for particular assignments require a lot of work and assessment literacy. This could help to explain the moderate variation in answers regarding how frequently rubrics are used and how useful people think they are.

The results highlight how crucial uniformity and openness are to essay evaluation. Given the long-standing concerns about subjectivity and fairness in essay evaluation, teachers' agreement on the advantages of rubrics for improving grading consistency is especially noteworthy. By giving teachers and students' clear criteria and performance levels, the use of analytical rubrics, which are promoted in best-practice literature, seems to alleviate some of these difficulties.

However, the study also identifies areas that require improvement. Perhaps as a result of inadequate training, lack of institutional support, or concerns about losing their professional judgment and flexibility, some teachers are still reluctant to fully adopt rubric-based assessment. These obstacles show that the shift from conventional, all-encompassing evaluation to rubric-based methods is continuous and might call for specialized training.

Within this community, rubrics stand out as a commonly used and generally respected tool. Rubrics have many uses in the assessment process, as evidenced by the broad consensus that they reduce grading time, highlight students' strengths and weaknesses, and encourage constructive criticism. Nonetheless, the less frequent practice of providing rubrics to students prior to assignments points to a pedagogical improvement area. Encouraging teachers to proactively share rubrics could enhance student outcomes because of the advantages of transparent rubrics in directing student efforts and promoting self-regulation.

However, the moderate support for promoting student self-assessment indicates that this formative aspect of rubric use is still not being fully utilized. In line with current educational objectives, extending the use of rubrics to incorporate self-assessment techniques can foster learner autonomy and metacognitive abilities.

Furthermore, an integrated assessment culture that encourages ongoing learning and teaching improvement is reflected in the regular application of rubrics outside of final exams and the conviction that they have enhanced writing instruction. These results support the use of rubrics as a catalyst for instructional improvement as well as an evaluative tool.

The findings carry a number of implications. Prioritizing continuous professional development centered on rubric design, adaptation, and efficient feedback techniques should be the first priority for universities. Teachers who receive this kind of training can get past early obstacles and fully utilize rubrics for formative and summative evaluation. Second, in order to lessen individual workload and promote uniformity in assessment standards, institutional policies should support the sharing of rubric templates and exemplars among departments. Third, students can further improve transparency, engagement, and learning outcomes by participating in the assessment process through peer and self-assessment using rubrics.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that university EFL instructors have a generally positive attitude toward using rubrics, pointing out opportunities to improve student engagement, transparency, and clarity. In the end, strengthening assessment procedures and improving teaching and learning in EFL contexts can be achieved by addressing these issues with focused training and institutional support.

By offering empirical data from a representative sample of university instructors, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research on the evaluation and assessment of essays in higher education. The results demonstrate that essays are still a popular way to evaluate difficult learning objectives and that rubrics are generally accepted as useful instruments for improving the consistency, fairness, and clarity of grading. However, workload, standardization, and assessment literacy issues still persist.

Universities should support innovations that involve teachers and students in the assessment process, invest in professional development, and cultivate a collaborative culture around the use of rubrics in order to advance essay assessment practices. By tackling these issues, higher education institutions can guarantee that essay evaluation supports significant student learning and development in addition to upholding academic standards.

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Sažetak

PREGLEDANJE I OCENJIVANJE ESEJA U VISOKOM OBRAZOVANJU: PRAKSE, IZAZOVI I UVIDI

Ovo istraživanje bavi se savremenom praksom, izazovima i zapažanjima nastavnika kada je u pitanju ocenjivanje eseja u visokom obrazovanju. Osnovni cilj rada je da objasni kako nastavnici u visokom obrazovanju koriste eseje kako bi procenili napredak svojih studenata, a naročito složenije misaone veštine poput kritičke analize, argumentacije i poznavanja određene oblasti, kao i da ispita kakav je uticaj matrica za ocenjivanje na kvalitet ocenjivanja. Autori su pokušali da analiziraju raskorak koji postoji između činjenice da je esej široko rasprostranjen metod za procenu stečenog znanja i praktičnih poteškoća koje narušavaju pouzdanost, pravičnost i efikasnost njihovog ocenjivanja. Rad se bavi pedagoškim značajem ocenjivanja eseja, pošto se samo kroz esej može prikazati dubina, ali i složenost razumevanja naučenog, koja prevazilazi puko pamćenje činjenica. Rad se takođe bavi široko rasprostranjenom primenom matrica kao alata za standardizovanje ocenjivanja i povećanje transparentnosti, uz isticanje pozitivnih nastavničkih stavova prema eseju kao značajnom i autentičnom instrumentu za

procenjivanje znanja. Osim toga, autori se bave praktičnim izazovima sa kojima se nastavnici susreću, poput nedoslednog ocenjivanja tokom trajanja kursa ili u zavisnosti od toga ko esej ocenjuje, nepostojanja zvaničnih uputstava po pitanju neophodnih matrica, kao i vremenskog opterećenja koje ocenjivanje eseja podrazumeva. Svi ovi argumenti doprinose detaljnom razumevanju pitanja zašto je ocenjivanje eseja u isto vreme i veoma visoko vrednovano, ali i uzrok problema u akademskom okruženju. Autori su upotrebili kvantitativni metod, koristeći validirani upitnik kako bi sakupili podatke od 52 nastavnika u visokom obrazovanju koji se bave različitim disciplinama. Instrument je pokazao visoku unutrašnju pouzdanost (*Cronbach alpha* koeficijent = 0,813) i validnost (koeficijent = 0,901). Podaci su analizirani softverskim programom za statistiku IBM SPSS, uz primenu deskriptivnih i inferencijalnih statističkih metoda kako bi se identifikovali obrasci prilikom ocenjivanja, uočena efikasnost, ali i barijere sa kojima su se ocenjivači susretali. Iz istraživanja se zaključuje sledeće: iako većina nastavnika smatra da je esej značajan alat za ocenjivanje usvajanja složenijih znanja i kažu da ga često koriste na svojim kursevima, oni se suočavaju sa brojnim izazovima kada je u pitanju ocenjivanje. Rezultati ukazuju na to da doslednost u ocenjivanju i vreme koje ocenjivanje eseja oduzima i dalje negativno utiču na efikasnost ovog vida provere znanja, čak i uz primenu matrica za ocenjivanje. Autori smatraju da su ciljano obučavanje predavača, jasna politika unutar institucija i korišćenje istih propisanih matrica od suštinskog značaja kako bi se unapredili kvalitet i pravičnost prilikom ocenjivanja. Ovaj rad donosi vredan empirijski uvid u ocenjivanje eseja na visokom nivou obrazovanja. Njegov najveći doprinos predstavlja dokumentovanje raskoraka koji postoji između pozitivnih mišljenja nastavnika u vezi sa značajem eseja i sistemskih ograničenja sa kojima se oni suočavaju. Ipak, treba napomenuti da relativno mali, nerandomizovani uzorak kandidata u radu ograničava generalizaciju zaključaka. Ukratko, ovo istraživanje nam pokazuje kako se ocenjivanje eseja može unaprediti da bi doprinosilo kako boljem usvajanju znanja od strane studenata, tako i većoj efikasnosti nastavnika.

Ključne reči:

ocenjivanje eseja, matrice za ocenjivanje, visoko obrazovanje, ocenjivanje pisanja u nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika, nastavničke prakse ocenjivanja, pouzdanost ocenjivanja, pismenost u oblasti ocenjivanja

Appendix

Appendix A. Teacher's Questionnaire

Dear Professors,

This questionnaire is part of a study that aimed at exploring teachers' attitudes and practices regarding academic essay evaluation and assessment, and the use of rubrics. You are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Please, note that your responses are dealt with confidentially and used only for research purposes.

Please respond to each statement by selecting the answer that best reflects your opinion.

Thank you for your cooperation and your precious time devoted to answering this questionnaire.

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your specialty?

- ☐ Linguistics
- ☐ Didactics
- ☐ Civilization
- ☐ Literature
- ☐ Literature and Civilization
- ☐ Other:

2. How long have you been teaching EFL to university students?

- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ 5–10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

3. What subject areas have you been teaching over the past 3 years?

- ☐ Civilization
- ☐ Literature
- ☐ Linguistics
- ☐ Psychology
- ☐ Didactics
- ☐ Grammar
- ☐ Oral Expression
- ☐ Written Expression
- ☐ Phonetics
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Research Methodology
- ☐ Other:

Section 2: Attitudes and Practices in Essay Evaluation and Rubric Use

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement (choose one option per statement):

No	Phrases	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I believe academic essays are an important component of university-level English instruction.					
2	I find evaluating academic essays to be a manageable task.					
3	I regularly use evaluation rubrics when grading essays.					
4	I provide rubrics to students before assignments or exams.					
5	I believe providing the rubric before an exam helps students improve their performance.					
6	I find that rubrics save me time when grading.					
7	Rubrics help me grade more fairly and objectively.					
8	I use rubrics to deliver constructive feedback to students.					

9	Rubrics help me organize my thoughts during evaluation.					
10	Rubrics clarify students' strengths and weaknesses.					
11	A good rubric should include clear criteria and performance levels.					
12	Sometimes, using a rubric confuses me during grading.					
13	I believe my colleagues use rubrics effectively.					
14	I encourage students to use rubrics for self-assessment.					
15	I use rubrics consistently, not just for final exams.					
16	Rubrics have helped me improve my teaching of writing.					

Open-Ended Question (Optional):
Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding essay evaluation or rubric use?