Rubric-referenced oral production assessments: perceptions on the use and actual use of rubrics in oral production assessments of high school students of St. Scholastica's College, Manila

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Abstract

Rubrics have been widely recognized by writing teachers for its efficiency in facilitating grading and its potential to be instructive. However, its use and value in oral production assessments still remain to be proven. Thus, this qualitative study was designed to explore the students' perceived uses of rubrics and their actual use of rubrics in their oral production assessments. Using focus group discussion as a main method of data collection, ten (10) students from an exclusive - girl school in Metro Manila participated in the discussion. Results showed that students recognized the ability of rubrics to make them understand teacher's expectations, reflect on their oral production performances, and justify the grades being given to them by the teacher. Despite these students' reported uses of rubrics, majority of the students still did not use the rubrics for all of these purposes as evidenced in their actual use of rubrics. This research strongly recommends the institution in study to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of rubric as a grading method for oral production assessments.

Keywords: Rubrics, Oral productions, Performance-based assessment

Background

The traditional view of assessment as a mere evaluation of learning has long been dismissed. The pivotal role of assessment before, during, and after instruction concretely shows how assessment affects instructional decisions of a teacher. Learning targets are based on the needs of the students as determined by results of pre-instruction assessments. From these learning targets, evidence of students' learning and instructional strategies are derived from. Teachers then create assessments during the instructional process to check students' progress, monitor learning, and diagnose learning problems. The learning cycle then caps with a post-instruction assessment that would gauge students' learning and evaluate the effectiveness of teacher's instruction (McMillan, 2007).

Assessments have long been proven to drive quality instruction; thus, the Department of Education of the Philippines has adopted the 'backward design' for the 2010 Basic Education Curriculum, placing premium to the role of assessment in improving learning outcomes. These assessments must be designed to foster deep understanding

of the concepts and mastery of target skills and they usually come in the form of performance assessments. Performance assessments are defined as ways "in which the teacher observes and makes a judgment about the student's demonstration of a skill or competency in creating a product, constructing a response, or making a presentation" (McMillan, 2007, p. 229). These forms of assessments allow optimal learning of students by engaging the latter in meaningful classroom experiences that enable them to perform tasks and produce works with the use of their knowledge and skills in a given context.

Given that performance assessments constitute students' constructed - responses, these responses must be scored using a set of evaluative criteria. These criteria will be used in determining whether or not learning targets are achieved and they are typically reflected in a rubric, a scoring guide used to evaluate the quality of students' constructed responses (Popham, 1997).

Rubrics have been widely acknowledged to enhance student learning and improve instruction. Andrade & Du (2005) presented in their study that students use rubrics in a number of purposeful ways: to understand teacher's expectations and make an appraisal of their performance. Rubrics are also believed to have a significant impact on grading, quality of work and students' anxiety on assignments (Reynolds-Keefer, 2010). These results are aligned with previous research findings (Brookhart, 2003; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001; Moskal, 2003) asserting the role of rubrics in communicating learning goals and in aiding in the learning process. The ability of rubrics to articulate clear learning targets makes them positively appealing and meaningful to students who appropriately use them.

Teachers, on the other hand, commonly use rubrics to make assessments more efficient and quicker (Andrade, 2000) and they utilize them to improve instruction. Defining clearly the performance criteria in the rubric assists teachers for a fair and more consistent grading. It lessens subjectivity in grading and allows for a swifter grading of student's performance or work. Clearly defined criteria in the rubric also relates to improvement of instruction for it helps clarify instructional goals and serves as teaching targets (Arter & McTighe, 2001). These rubrics are ideally created before instruction (based on learning targets) to guide both teachers and students. They are expected to reflect the teacher's expectations and describe the levels of performance or product quality.

Despite results of previous researches recognizing the instructional benefits of rubrics, questions on the role of rubrics in enhancing and supporting learning and improving instruction still remains afloat. Some of which were raised in Andrade's (2001) study on the effects of instructional rubrics on learning how to write which revealed that rubrics were not found to have positive effects on students' writing. Similar with the results of Schafer et al. (2001), it was found that teachers' knowledge of rubrics (especially in English) does not have any instructional value. Both findings were attributed to the lack of knowledge of apt rubric use and lack of a more sustained exposure to instructional rubrics of both teachers and students.

There is also a dearth of studies on the impact of rubrics in improving students' oral performances. Most researches were on perceptions of students on the general uses of rubrics (see Andrade & Du, 2005; Schafer et al., 2001) or on rubrics utilized in the writing process (see Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Andrade, 2001). Thus, it is very crucial to explore the perceptions on the use and determine the actual use of rubrics in oral performance assessments of the students.

This study intends to explore the perceptions of students on the uses of rubrics and present the actual use of students of these rubrics in their oral production assessments. It specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students on the uses of rubrics?
2. How do students use rubrics in oral production assessments?
3. What are the limitations of the rubric based on students' perceptions?
4. What are students' suggestions on how to make rubric more useful for their learning?

Method

A qualitative design, which is an inductive, naturalistic inquiry strategy of approaching a setting without pre-extant assumptions, was deemed appropriate for a study that sought to explore the perceptions of 4th year high school students on the uses of rubrics in oral production assessments, as well as the students' actual classroom use of these rubrics. The participants *(N = 10)* of this study were purposively selected to take part in a focus group discussion, a very ideal and practical means of discussing and gathering perceptions of a limited number of participants. FGD is also most appropriate for they are meant to be used in conditions where the researcher lacks knowledge about the participants' perception and beliefs on a particular topic (Armstrong, 2004). Questions asked during the FGD can be found in the Appendix 1.

The language arts program of the institution in study utilizes debate as a main means of developing students' oral communication. In all oral production assessments, analytic rubrics were consistently used. Hence, it is expected that participants of this study were familiar with oral performance assessments and the evaluative criteria that goes along with it.

To clarify unclear points given during the discussion and verify accuracy of data transcribed, a follow-up interview was conducted for each of the participant. Responses in the follow-up interview were then utilized to substantiate the discussion section of this paper.

Result

Student – participants of the study consistently recognized the value and use of rubrics in understanding teacher's expectations and justifying the grades that they receive from their teacher and/or peers. Though majority of the participants clearly articulated the minute attention that they give to rubrics before, during, and after their oral production performances, they all acknowledged that rubrics have instructional value and can be considered as an effective tool in evaluating learning. Improvements on the rubrics themselves and how they are utilized in class were proffered for an optimal use in instruction.

Students' perceived uses of rubrics

1. Understanding teacher's expectations
   Making a student understand the expectations of the teacher is one of the most widely recognized uses of rubrics. The standards in a rubric clarify to the students the targets that are to be achieved during the assessment. This use of rubric was expressed when students were asked about their perceived uses of rubrics and in

the probing question on how these rubrics help them understand teacher's expectations. The students distinctly expressed:

. . .**it specifies what it is that we should do** 'coz most of the time it's just for technicalities of the things that we are doing and it specifies those kinds of things so whenever we get lost, sort of lost in whatever we search with what we're doing at that moment, **we get back to the actual learning objectives of the thing**. (Student # 7)

. . .it limits me on what I should do and what I should not do so that it would guide me throughout what I would work for. (Student # 2)

Students overall responses might be very positive on the usefulness of rubrics in understanding teacher's expectations, however, it should be noted that when this was specifically asked, students began raising their concerns about rubrics and its effectiveness in making them understand teacher's expectations. Majority might have acknowledged its value on this aspect but some students argued that the rubrics used in class (specifically the rubric used for debate) can still be improved in terms of clarity and comprehensibility. This will be further elucidated in the latter section of this paper.

2. Planning for the oral production assessment
   Rubrics were not used by the students in planning for their oral production assessments especially in their debates. This is consistent with students' actual use of rubrics where they articulated that they, rarely, and most of the time, do not read the rubrics before their performance assessment.

Actually no, the lessons do. It's more of what we learned in class rather than the rubric, which helps us plan for our debate. Because usually, when we plan for our debate, we just assign roles, right?, and then do the arguments, and then, you do this, you do that. We don't really look at the rubric 'coz if you look at the rubric, you'd be too scared and too anxious to actually execute what we have planned. (Student # 9)

In this part of the discussion, students also raised rubrics' proclivity to trigger anxiety which also served as one of the main reasons why students do not use it to plan for their oral production assessment. This will be further elaborated in the latter part of this section.

3. Use of rubrics in the process of delivering a speech
   During the delivery of their speeches in their oral performance assessments, all students deliberately mentioned that rubrics do not play a part at all. They feel that rubrics can actually make one's speech become rigid and may confuse the speaker if she constantly recalls what were written in the rubric. Given that students are required to deliver spontaneous speeches, thinking about the rubric appears to be impossible to most of the students who admitted to have struggles in delivering a coherent and complete speech.

4. Reflecting on the oral production assessment
   Rubrics allowed students to reflect on their oral production performances by specifically defining their strengths and areas to improve on. It served as a form of

feedback to the students, instructing them what they are to do the next time they have to deal with a similar oral production assessment. Students expressed this in different ways:

Yes, it does, after. I mean, when you read it first, hindi mo masyadong papansinin. (you will not really notice/bother). Pero (But) after, you just know how you did. Kasi (Because) when you're there standing, you don't know what you look like to the others. You know what you are saying but you don't know ano yung dating sa iba if pareho sa iniisip mo (how it is understood by others, if it's the same with what you were thinking).So after makikita mo na Ah, mejo malabo pala 'yung pagkasabi ko nito sa kanila, okay, expound." (Then you will see after that what you've said was somewhat vague so I have to expound). It helps you reflect kasi para siyang (because it's like) feedback. It's like feedback of whoever is judging you, whoever gave you the grade. (Student # 5)

> Despite this prevalent recognition of the ability of rubrics to make students reflect on their performances, students were very vocal in saying that having positive and negative comments specific to the performance of a particular student is better than having a rubric that includes general comments for the oral production performance. They feel that the positive and negative comments are far more personal than the descriptors the teacher would encircle in a rubric.

But what really helps us pag nagco-comment 'yung teachers 'coz kahit na makita mo 'yung eto 'yung nakuha kong grade dito, it is not really specified para sa'ken so mas helpful pa 'yung may comments, even though our rubric helps a little, mas productive po sa'ken 'yung comments ng teachers (is when the teachers make comments. Even though I see my grade, it is not really specific to me that's why comments will be helpful. Rubrics help a little but comments of teachers are more productive for me.) (Student # 7)

5. Grading

   When students were first asked on their perceived uses of rubrics, most mentioned that rubrics provided them the justification for the grades given by the teacher. These rubrics were also recognized to aid teachers in evaluating students' performances and assigning grades to their respective performances.

I think the main use of a rubric is to guide the teachers or like, the peers who are critiquing a person on how to objectively grade the performance since there are already points and standards that must be met for a certain grade. (Student # 8)

> Some students also stressed at the outset of the focus group discussion that rubrics allow for a fairer and more objective grading.

Sort of what she said. I mean, I think it's like a proof that everything is fair so if you like want to question like your grade like you know that there are certain things that they were looking for and so if you didn't meet it then you'd know that you were given a fair grade. (Student # 6)

However, during the in-depth discussion about its possible impact to grading, students recounted the propensity of rubrics to be subjective for two reasons. First, students felt that the descriptors indicated in each of the performance level in the rubric do not specifically tell them what is expected from them and that the teacher and student may have differing understandings of certain qualifiers in the criteria. For example, if the criterion requires students to be 'concise,' they question what is exactly meant by 'concise,' There were times that they would feel that what they were saying is already concise, but for the teacher it may still be not that concise. This sentiment was expressed in this line:

. . .but then 'yung problem if I think that this is clear enough that I have stated this to the audience as clear as possible tapos dun sa teacher baka naman hindi clear sa kanya 'yung pag i-explain ko, for me maganda na yung grade ko, tapos sa kanya hindi maganda." (Student # 10) (**Trans.: "**I think rubrics will really help if you read it before doing something but then the problem is if I think that this is clear enough, that I have stated this to the audience as clear as possible but then for the teacher, my explanation is not clear to her/him. For me, I should have a good grade, but for her/him it's not a good grade.) (Student # 10)

Second, students also perceived rubric grading as subjective because of the score ranges in each category/criterion that rubrics would have. The choice between the scores in the range that the teacher would assign to the student is unclear to them. Because of this, students question the teacher's basis in choosing one score over the other even if these scores would have similar performance descriptors.

I agree with Bea, parang gut feel lang kasi pag ako nun nag adj ako, feeling ko ang taas ko magbigay ng grade pero parang pag may range, pag 8-7, parang "Ano bibigay ko,8 or 7?" e kung pareho lang naman na fails to be complete, or whatever, parang anong ibibigay ko (I agree with Bea. I think it is just gut feel for when I judge, I feel that I give high grades but if there's a range, for example, 8 -7, I get confused on what to give. "Will I give a 7 or an 8? especially if both failed to complete.) Should I just be kind and give them highest or like be sort of mean and give the lower part of it? (Student # 6)

In terms of rubrics' impact on their grades, the students believed that rubrics have an immense impact on their grades especially if they follow and meet the criteria for a perfect performance; that this impact on the grade can only be achieved if the rubric is used accordingly.

6. Dealing with speech anxiety

Students in this study unanimously expressed their belief that rubrics trigger anxiety. Knowing the expectations may help them aim for a good grade; nonetheless, it also puts pressure on them to meet all the expectations. Anxiety is brought about by rubrics because of that fear that they might not meet all expectations set by the rubric. This is one of the predominant reasons why students would not read the rubric before their performance assessment.

. . .parang with all the things written there, parang nakaka pressure siya kasi like parang 'eto yung expected sa'min and I don't want to get naman the lowest grade."

(Student # 4) (**Trans.:**"... with all the things written there, I get pressured of the expectations set by the rubric and I don't want to get the lowest grade.) (Student # 4)

> The lengthy and vague descriptors were also said to contribute to their anxiety. Seeing that a bulk of expectations are required from them to meet and the difficulty to accurately comprehend some of the expectations stated in the descriptors make delivering speeches more challenging to them, making them restless and tensed with their performances. The lines below capture this reaction of students towards rubric and its propensity to elicit anxiety.

It **makes me anxious because there's so many things written on the criteria and sometimes, the words are too vague.** There's a grade range, right, and then the description, but then sometimes, you get the lowest grade for that range and then, I don't understand because the grade range, you know the description satisfies the grade range but how come I got the low...? I don't get it. (Student # 9)

> Because of this anxiety, students believed that their performances worsen; thus justifying why the majority of the students would not utilize the rubric before and during their oral production performances.

Actual use of rubrics in oral production assessments

It was discovered that students consistently use rubrics after their performance assessments, not really before and during the performance. A majority of the students distinctly mentioned that they do not read the rubrics before the assessment because it makes them anxious and in a way limits them on what they should do (this will be further elaborated in the students' perceived limitations of the rubric). Students, who would read it before the assessment, use rubrics to remind them of the expectations that were set during instruction.

It should be noted though that none of the students used rubric during the performance assessment itself. They cannot imagine exactly as to how rubrics should be used during the performance. They felt that thinking about the rubric while delivering a speech can greatly disturb their concentration, thus affecting their overall performance.

> Same thing, I use it before and after not really during. I read it before so I'd know what things the teacher are looking for like what she said (referring to Ericka). But not during because it's hard to focus on what you are trying to say when you are thinking of what they want you to say so I just use it before so I can already condition my mind so that whatever I say, will not exactly come out as planned, but you know, to that general direction. And after, so I know which areas I need to improve on. (Student # 5)

Students were also found to have the tendency not to read the rubrics. When they were asked why they read the rubrics, one said that they are "forced to read it because the entire class has to read it" (Student #2). This statement was agreed on by the majority of the students.

Students' perceived limitations of rubrics and suggestions for rubric improvement

All throughout the discussion, some limitations of rubrics were identified. First, rubrics were said to be quite subjective grading tools. Students' perception of subjectivity in rubrics is attributed to their experience in grading their peers with the use of rubrics where they believe that they only used their "gut feeling" in determining the scores for their classmate's performance despite the descriptors indicated in the rubric. This belief stems from the students' observations that teachers and students, at times, would have differing conceptions of the set standards.

This limitation also brings about another problem on the lengthy and vague descriptors of the rubric. As mentioned in the early part of this section, the lengthy and vague descriptors in the rubric discourage students to read it because it can just trigger anxiety and probably, further confusion.

> I think it'd better if the words are shorter and the standards are clear cut and simply stated. I think that it will make me want to read it more. I think that I have to remember this and not that—I want to remember some details about that. (Student #' 10)

The group suggested that the rubric to be used in performance assessments must be collaboratively discussed by both students and teachers to clarify the expectations. As proposed by *Student # 2*:

> . . .we should discuss the rubric. Discuss in a way that the teacher and the student would be on an agreement in terms of the words or in terms of the category that they should follow or to guide, just a discussion but not a thorough, not in a sense that you give examples or such, just like what Cza said, not everything should be done in that way.

The impersonal comments of rubrics *(impersonal in the sense that comments to students' performances are only chosen from the stipulated performance indicators in the rubric)* were also pinpointed to be one of the weaknesses of the rubric that dishearten students to read it. The students strongly recommended the inclusion of positive and negative comments that would specifically address the strengths and lapses of the student's performance. They stressed that inclusion of these comments can actually motivate them to improve their performances.

The score ranges in rubrics were also identified as one of the shortcomings of a rubric that results in students' distrust in the objectivity of a rubric as a tool for grading.

> . . .pero di ko maintindihan na parang ang category nga ay perfect pero bakit may 10- 8 or 10-9 (referring to the range). (Student # 2) (**Trans.:**". . .but I don't understand why is it that the category is 'perfect' but there's a 10 to 8 or 10 to 9 score range.) (Student # 2)

All of the students proposed that each performance level in the rubric must have a specific score to reduce and possibly eliminate subjectivity in grading. Some of the students also raised the proclivity of the rubric to limit the ability of the student to perform beyond the set expectations. Rubrics tend to impose on the students what they should do and how they should do it. They feel that they are not anymore given

the opportunity to develop their own ways of achieving the standard set during instruction.

> I think it will limit me with all the things that I should say. Like for example, the standard is just like this but I want to exceed the standard or anything. So, I don't read it because I don't think it will be helpful for me because I think it limits my capacity and it can be frustrating if you fail to meet the standard that eventually affects your performance." (Student # 3)

Discussion

Findings of this study revealed three widely-recognized uses of rubrics for students: (1) to understand teacher's expectations, (2) reflect on the oral production performance, and (3) justify the grades being given by the teacher.

First, rubrics inform students of teacher's expectations in their oral production assessments in the form of the criteria lengthily embedded in them. This is consistent with findings of previous studies that stress the primary purpose of rubric to make students understand what should be done and how it should be done (see Andrade & Du, 2005; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001; Brookhart, 2003). Through the performance descriptors indicated in each level of the rubric, students gain an understanding of the learning targets of the oral production assessment. Despite this, a majority of the student-participants does not utilize the rubric for this purpose. This can be inferred from their account that they only read the rubric after the teacher has written her grade on it. Even though the rubric is distributed before the performance assessment, students intentionally do not read the rubric for they believe that it can actually trigger their anxiety as they perform the oral assessment because of the standards that are set for them to achieve. This supports Reynolds-Keefer (2010) study where several students claimed that rubrics have the tendency to increase anxiety by pressuring them to meet these expectations and further worsened by the fear of failing.

In addition to rubrics' propensity to trigger anxiety, students in study specifically stressed that rubric quality plays a crucial role for them to understand teacher's expectations. Clear, brief and comprehensible descriptors are necessary for students to read, appreciate and learn from the performance indicators stipulated in the rubric.

It can also be deduced from the findings that queries about clarity and general comprehensibility of the performance indicators stem from students' level of mastery of skills and their lack of involvement in the process of rubric design and creation. The majority of the students had difficulty delineating differences between and among descriptors of quality performance across levels. Others even found some of the descriptors vague and, at some point, confusing. One of the reasons for this predicament can be inferred from the students' lack of mastery of the skills targeted during instruction that they cannot identify for themselves what exactly comprise a quality, average or poor performance. This also implies that instruction must be revisited to identify the difficulties of these students. Consistent provision of tangible models for each performance level might also be helpful in making students see and fully understand the expectations set.

Vague descriptors and/or qualifiers can also be clarified if students will be involved in the creation of the rubric. This is in line with Spandel's (2006) belief that if students

participate in the design and creation of their own rubrics, they are believed to improve their learning outcomes for they would approach these assessments in a different way. In this case, students, together with their teachers, are given the opportunity to set the goals that these assessments are to target.

Rubrics were also said to allow students to reflect on their oral production performances. This reflection comes in a form of making students identify what they have missed and/ or failed to meet in the expectations set by the rubric. The learning brought about by reflection were said to be utilized by the students in their succeeding oral production performances. This is in contradistinction to Reynolds-Keefer (2010) findings which point to this student's' use of rubrics as the most underutilized element of the rubric. However, the participants said that reflection typically comes after they have already received the rubric from the teacher with the grade in it. This is the time when they would start thinking about their performances - what they did right and what they should work on for the next assessment, thus suggesting a need to use the same rubric for multiple assessments.

Even though they recognize the capacity of rubrics to make them reflect on their performance, students still feel that reflection and self-assessment will be more meaningful if comments, in positive and negative forms, are included in the rubric. These comments are to be created in a way that it is specific to the performance of the student. They are said to be more appreciated by students because they make students feel that the comment is really meant for them unlike the general descriptors of the rubric that appear to be very impersonal to them. Holmes & Smith (2003) presents a similar suggestion that good grading practices provide closing comments that give a summative picture of the student's work, addressing students' strengths and weaknesses. Through this, students are given the opportunity to reinforce what they did right as well as point out how they can improve their performance. Establishing a nurturing and positive teacher-student relationship through personal comments has been proven to be achieved if teachers learn and begin to show pleasure in students' effort (Tchudi, 1986; Walvoord, 1986, as cited in Holmes & Smith, 2003).

The third most predominant use of rubrics to students is its ability to justify the grade being given to them by the teacher. Students have always raised faculty grading methods as their main issue with their teachers (Holmes & Smith, 2003) where they would claim that teachers are unfair in grading and give very modest amount of feedback to their performances that evidently fails to utilize assessment as a form of reinforcing instruction and convince them that they deserve the grade that they have just received. Student-participants believed that rubrics were designed to justify the grades being given to them. However, even with this belief, in actuality, students still question the capacity of rubrics to provide an objective and fair grade to their performances. However, the score range in each performance level and lack of general understanding of descriptors make students perceive rubric as subjective grading tools. The score range in each performance level is provided because the teachers of the institution in study recognize the limitation of the performance descriptors of the rubric to accurately capture the nuances of an oral production performance. Teachers are constantly faced with a dilemma that both students would satisfy the expectations included in one particular performance level, but one is obviously better than the other. They feel that having a specific score for each level is unfair to other students who would exceed the

expectations of the rubric. To address this problem, teachers opted to have a score range for each performance level. However, based on students' responses, these score ranges make students perceive teacher's grading subjective. Students consistently recommended that a specific score must be assigned for each performance level for them to really identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Consistent and fair grading can also be attained if students and teachers share a similar understanding of the performance criteria. As mentioned earlier, this can be addressed if rubrics are created collaboratively by both teacher and students.

Findings of this study also identify the underutilized elements of the rubric: (1) help students plan for their oral production assessments, (2) assist them in the delivery of their speeches, and (3) improve their oral performance. Students in study do not utilize the rubric to aid them in planning because of their practice of not reading the rubric prior to the assessment. They also do not use rubrics during the actual speech delivery. Unlike in writing where students might have the opportunity to check the rubric occasionally as they develop their work, use of rubrics during the oral production assessment seem to be impossible for students because they are too pre-occupied with what they are to say next. It should be taken into account that the oral production assessments of the participants require them to speak spontaneously (with only an outline to guide them), thus making the assessments very challenging to them. Rubrics, at this point, will less likely to be used because they are perceived to be an additional burden to the students.

Lastly, students really do not believe that rubrics can help them improve their oral production performance. This is because they do not read it prior to the assessment. In the follow-up interview conducted to the participants, they clearly said that rubrics may help them improve their oral performance after they have reflected on the grade that they received from the rubric. This only implies that multiple oral production assessments must be provided to the students for them to be able to utilize rubrics in a way that could help them improve their oral production performance. One time use of a rubric may not yield any effect on students' performance because rubric use comes after the performance assessment.

Limitations of rubrics and students' suggestions on how to make rubric more useful to their learning have already been presented in the previous paragraphs. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that students perceive rubrics as limiting them to perform beyond the set expectations. Aligned with Wolf & Stevens (2007) precaution for teachers on the use of rubrics, these rubrics have the tendency to act as a 'straitjacket' limiting the performance of the students in the levels prescribed by the creator of the rubric, in this case, the teacher. The participants felt that rubrics (through the descriptive performance criteria) impose on them what they should do and not allow them anymore to devise their own ways to exemplify the targeted skills using their creativity and imagination.

Conclusions

Findings of the present research proffer pedagogical implications on the use of rubric as an instructional and grading tool. First, it is deemed necessary that students develop a lucid understanding of the value and use of rubrics as instructional and grading tools.

This should be established at the outset and must be religiously stressed to the students all throughout the year. They must be taught and trained on its proper use to achieve optimal results for instruction and grading. Second, it is crucial that students take part in the creation of the rubric. Students' involvement in instructional decision-making such as this, empower them to be more engaged and active in their own learning. Collaborative creation of the rubric can hopefully address students' difficulties in understanding the expectations of the teacher which can result in improved learning outcomes. Third, models of strong and weak oral production performances might also contribute in making students understand expectations set in the rubric. For students to completely understand the different levels of quality of a particular performance, providing students with models of strong and weak performance may be helpful. Fourth, rubric improvement must always be done with the help of students' suggestions. Use of score ranges in each performance level must be reviewed for it can raise doubts on the objectivity of rubrics in grading oral production performances. Inclusion of personal comments can also be added in the rubrics for teachers to provide a more personal interaction with his/ her students regarding the latter's performance in the oral production assessment. Fifth, a rubric can be best utilized to improve instruction if students use it for more than one occasion. Thus, this implies that multiple oral production assessments are needed for students to really take advantage of the rubric in helping them improve their oral production performance. Consistent and iterative use of a particular rubric steadily increases students' awareness of his/her strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, findings of the study highlight the pivotal role of teachers to encourage students to engage in a reflection of their performance through self-assessment using the rubric. Through this, students can devise ways on how they can improve their oral production performances.

With these findings, the study recommends future research that would determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of using rubrics as a grading method in assessing oral production assessments.

Appendix 1
FGD interview guide
Purpose of the FGD: Explore the perceptions on and actual use of rubrics in oral production assessments of high school students.

List of themes

I. Uses of Rubrics
II. Actual Use of Rubrics
III. Usefulness of Rubrics
IV. Limitations of Rubrics
V. Suggestions on Rubric Use

FGD guide questions
The guide questions below are listed right after each research question to ensure that all research questions are properly and adequately addressed during the FGD.

RQ #1: What are the perceptions of students on the uses of rubrics?

1. What do you think are the uses of rubrics?
2. Why do use rubrics?

RQ # 2: How do students use rubrics in oral production assessments?

1. How do you use rubrics before, during and after your oral production assessment?
2. Can you cite examples on how you specifically use the rubric?

RQ # 3: How useful are rubrics in:

a. understanding teacher's expectations;
b. planning for the assessment;
c. process of delivering the speech;
d. reflecting on the oral production performance;
e. grading; and in
f. dealing with speech anxiety?

1. How (if at all) do rubrics add to your understanding of your teacher's expectations?
2. How (if at all) do rubrics help you plan how to approach your oral performance assessment?
3. How (if at all) do you use rubric in the process of delivering your speech?
4. How (if at all) do rubrics impact your ability to reflect on your oral production performance?
5. To what extent (if at all) do you think your use of rubrics impact grading?
6. To what extent do rubrics impact the level of anxiety you feel about oral performance assessment?

RQ #4: What are the limitations of the rubric based on students' perceptions?

1. Do you think rubrics also have disadvantages/ limitations? What are these?
2. What made you say that these are rubrics' disadvantages? Cite specific examples if possible.

RQ # 5: What are students' suggestions on how to make rubric more useful for their learning?

1. What can teachers do differently to make rubrics more useful to your learning?
2. Would you like to use rubrics in all forms of assessment? In which particular topic and/or subjects would you want to use rubrics more? Why?
3. Do you have anything more to comment about rubrics?

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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