

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relevance of Home-Grown Rubrics for Online Communicative Assessment in an Islamic Institution During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT - Assessing English communicative abilities within an online environment poses challenges, particularly when aligning assessment instrument rubrics to enhance the evaluation process and learning outcomes. Home-grown rubrics (HGR) can address specific situations where standardised rubrics might only partially meet an assessment's goals or unique requirements. However, several challenges associated with HGR have been identified when assessing complex skills such as communication. These include inconsistencies in rubric design, limitations in capturing subjective aspects of performance, and difficulties in providing coherent, actionable feedback. This study investigates the relevance of HGR assessment rubrics for English communication skills to cater to online contexts, primarily during the pandemic. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design focused on an Islamic institution's English for Proficiency (Pre-Intermediate) course was used to gather data from students for quantitative analysis and from instructors for qualitative inquiries after using the HGR for a semester. A survey instrument with scales of agreement was adapted, piloted, and distributed to 87 students. An unstructured interview was chosen to uncover in-depth insights from four lecturers actively involved with the HGR. Descriptive and thematic analyses were employed to determine users' perceived agreement and experiences in developing and utilising the HGR. Findings indicate that the students accepted the HGR as a tool for self-assessing their English communicative abilities in a virtual environment. The HGR has also enhanced both lecturers' and students' awareness of the assessment process, improved the efficiency of online assessments, and helped students focus on critical components of their assessments. The outcome substantiates the relevance of the HGR for the studied context, suggesting its broader applicability and tailor-made design for other online English language courses and skills.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, rubrics have emerged as powerful tools in educational settings, impacting student learning and performance. Brookhart (2018) defined a rubric as a tool that "articulates expectations for student work by listing criteria for the work and performance level descriptions across a continuum of quality" (p. 1). According to Panadero et al. (2023), rubrics often contain three features: evaluative criteria, quality definitions, and a scoring strategy. It is also commonly mistaken with other tools, such as checklists, rating scales, or performance lists (Panadero et al., 2023). The definition and features posited that students who engaged with rubrics demonstrated improved learning outcomes.

In other words, rubrics enhance scoring reliability and contribute to students' academic achievement (Lipnevich et al., 2023). Rubrics have become essential educational instruments that significantly impact student performance and encourage teachers and students to feel positive about themselves (Nawrin & Sadek, 2023). Their well-organised rubrics render evaluation criteria transparent and easy to understand, assisting students in reaching the intended learning objectives. Krebs et al. (2022) found that the rubric group demonstrated higher accuracy, lower bias, and reduced the assessor's cognitive load during self-assessment. These findings support the notion that rubrics are effective in enhancing judgment accuracy.

Under the participatory assessment strategy supported by Kilgour et al. (2020), co-creating rubrics with students effectively elevates ESL teachers' and students' understanding of the evaluation process. This cooperative endeavour fosters a sense of responsibility and involvement in the assessment procedure, enabling a deeper comprehension of the assessment standards and goals. Teachers can customise evaluation instruments by involving students in the rubric construction process to more closely match students' needs and learning objectives.

Furthermore, Gong et al. (2023) emphasised the transformative power of collaboratively produced rubrics, particularly concerning peer assessment in higher-level EFL programmes. Their findings highlight how incorporating students in creating rubrics enhances evaluation techniques and alters the nature of classroom interactions. Teachers can cultivate a peer learning and collaboration culture

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by actively engaging students in establishing evaluation criteria. Involving students in defining evaluation criteria enables teachers to foster a culture of peer learning and collaboration, thereby improving the educational experience for all involved.

Expanding on these observations, Olson et al. (2021) highlight the many uses of rubrics as instruments for efficient evaluation. In addition to helping with alignment with learning objectives, rubrics allow teachers to assess student performance and raise the standard of instruction. Furthermore, Dang et al. (2023) draw attention to students' favourable opinions of rubrics, especially in EFL speaking classes where rubrics are appreciated for their use in peer and self-evaluation. The study highlights the significance of rubrics in enhancing student engagement, improving assessment methods, and fostering meaningful learning experiences across diverse educational contexts.

However, despite their potential benefits, issues persist. According to Phan and Phuong (2017), though students generally have positive impressions of using rubrics for self-assessment, they encountered difficulties using the rubric effectively and needed help pinpointing its shortcomings. After careful examination of research data, it is possible to conclude that students must be aware of the downsides of using an analytic rubric (Phan & Phuong, 2017).

1.1 Home-grown Rubrics

Home-grown rubrics (HGRs) are assessment tools for individual educators or small groups that evaluate specific skills or competencies in their unique classroom contexts. Unlike standardised rubrics, HGRs are typically designed to align closely with specific course objectives, instructional methods, or student needs and perspectives (Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2023), particularly for students at a tertiary level of education. The notion is purposeful for lecturers or teachers to adapt criteria and performance levels based on students' learning environments and goals, which, in the case of this study, was done online during the pandemic.

Wolf and Stevens (2021) described HGRs as locally developed assessment tools that allow instructors to tailor evaluation criteria to the specific needs of their classroom and learning objectives. These rubrics are often customised based on the particular learning outcomes a teacher emphasises and may reflect individual or institutional priorities. Vercellotti and McCormick (2021) added that HGR is defined as non-standardised rubrics created in-house by educators for specific assignments, often without formal validation processes. These tools allow for greater flexibility but may lack the reliability and consistency of externally validated rubrics, primarily when used to assess subjective skills like communication or critical thinking. The one closest to this study is defined by Hopfenbeck et al. (2023), in which educators create rubrics to meet the unique demands of their instructional setting. They are seen as valuable for offering tailored feedback, though they may present challenges in consistency and scalability. These rubrics offer adaptability and can be powerful for formative assessment, but they also present challenges, particularly around consistency and objectivity, when used for more formal or summative evaluations.

HGR is not new. Allen and Tanner (2006) provided a foundational understanding of how rubrics can clarify learning goals and evaluation criteria. Their study underscored how rubrics can make assessment processes more transparent and understandable for teachers and students, which aligns with the study's focus on enhancing online communicative assessments. When developing their rubric to match the objectives best, instructors can define the language outcome and depth of knowledge that students need to demonstrate competency (Allen & Tanner, 2006). Hence, the rubric designer must approach the task with a clear idea of the desired student learning outcome (Haugnes & Russell, 2016). Additionally, instructors should provide formative feedback to students about progress, streamline the grading process to monitor desired outcomes, and encourage reflective practice.

After nearly a decade, Bharuthram and Patel (2017) extended the advantages of HGR. The study on co-constructing a rubric checklist with first-year university students emphasised involving students in creating rubrics. A self-assessment tool highlights the potential for rubrics to promote student engagement (Bharuthram & Patel, 2017). The insights from this article contribute to understanding how rubrics can be co-constructed with students to meet their needs better and improve their learning outcomes in online settings. The responses from instructors were also positive, as developing the tools made them reflective practitioners, enabling them to communicate their expectations to students – strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, the drawback arises when involving novice instructors or less trained lecturers because of its context-dependent features.

In a recent study, Abbas et al. (2019) offer a comprehensive analysis of teachers' views and practices regarding using the HGR. From the analyses of the perceptions and practices of assessment rubrics in assessing students' learning at higher education level, the teachers expressed its benefit in improving learning outcomes and saving time. The study also concurred with the stress on consistency and reinforcement of a specific learning objective. It added that scaffolding and facilitation of students' metacognitive processes can shape their learning behaviour (Abbas et al., 2019). More advantages were reported on the ability to determine the quality of the rubrics, whether they were being done well or poorly, and consistency and fairness when the rubrics were made available to the students before the assessment, indicating openness and transparency. These studies provide benefits and practical challenges associated with using HGR, providing valuable perspectives on how rubrics can be effectively implemented in online communicative assessments.

Nevertheless, instructors should be mindful of the challenges and considerations associated with assessing HGR. The challenges include common issues like bias, lack of clarity, inconsistencies, and alignment challenges, especially in custom rubrics created for formative evaluation of communication skills (Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Brookhart, 2013), noting the potential for subjectivity and the difficulties of achieving consistency in scoring (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). Recent studies also indicate several vital challenges with HGR, particularly when assessing complex skills like communication. Notable limitations, biases, and practical issues can arise when using HGR. These issues primarily include inconsistencies in rubric design, limitations in capturing subjective aspects of performance, and challenges in offering direct, actionable feedback (Gallardo, 2020; Vercellotti, 2021).

The HGR often lacks standardised criteria, leading to inconsistency and variability in scoring. This problem can significantly impact high-stakes skills like communication, where subtle differences in delivery, expression, or subjective factors like tone and engagement may be weighted inconsistently if rubric parameters are not clearly defined or calibrated across assessors (Gallardo, 2020). Another area for improvement is that rubrics not based on a standardised framework may limit meaningful feedback. Students benefit most from specific feedback about how to improve, but when rubrics are inconsistently designed or vague, they may not provide adequate guidance on areas for development. Consequently, students may need help understanding how to bridge the gap between their current performance and expectations for higher proficiency (Vercellotti, 2021). These studies underscore the importance of carefully designing rubrics to enhance consistency and accuracy, address subjective performance areas and provide constructive feedback.

1.2 Online Communicative Assessment

The shift to online learning, accelerated by the global pandemic, has brought new challenges in assessing English communication skills within virtual environments. Traditional assessment tools, primarily designed for in-person settings, often need to capture the nuances of online communication or accurately measure students' abilities in these contexts. This issue is particularly pronounced in extensive courses such as English for proficiency, which are mandatory for all students, making the evaluation process demanding for lecturers.

One of the critical components of language acquisition is evaluating one's ability to communicate in another language, particularly when English is frequently used as a lingua franca (Nagy, 2016). Valid and trustworthy evaluation systems are crucial for ensuring the efficacy of language instruction and learning (Mellati & Khademi, 2018). One tool that may provide students with precise and targeted feedback and influence teaching methods is a set of rubrics. Rubrics have emerged as a promising solution, offering a structured and efficient method for evaluating students' performance. They are particularly advantageous in streamlining the assessment process, providing clear criteria that can benefit both lecturers and students.

When assessing the effectiveness of a home-grown rubric (HGR) for online communicative assessment amid the pandemic, qualitative research provides insightful information about the real-world experiences of lecturers. Using thematic analysis of qualitative data collected from the lecturers' interviews, researchers can explore the fundamental elements affecting the perceived utility and relevance of the HGR. Researchers can uncover recurrent themes and patterns in participants' rich narratives and viewpoints, providing insights into the complex dynamics of online communicative assessment in an Islamic institution during the pandemic. The qualitative technique also allows researchers to investigate the unique challenges and provide valuable context to complement the quantitative findings.

Therefore, this study investigates the relevance of a self-developed rubric, or home-grown rubrics (HGR), for online communicative assessment for the Pre-Intermediate English for Proficiency course in a Malaysian Islamic institution. The study aims to examine the students' perceived value of the custom-made rubric for assessing their English communicative abilities after undergoing online learning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also explores the lecturers who are actively involved in the HGR experience. The study findings can improve the evaluation methods for English language instruction and learning in Malaysian Islamic institutions.

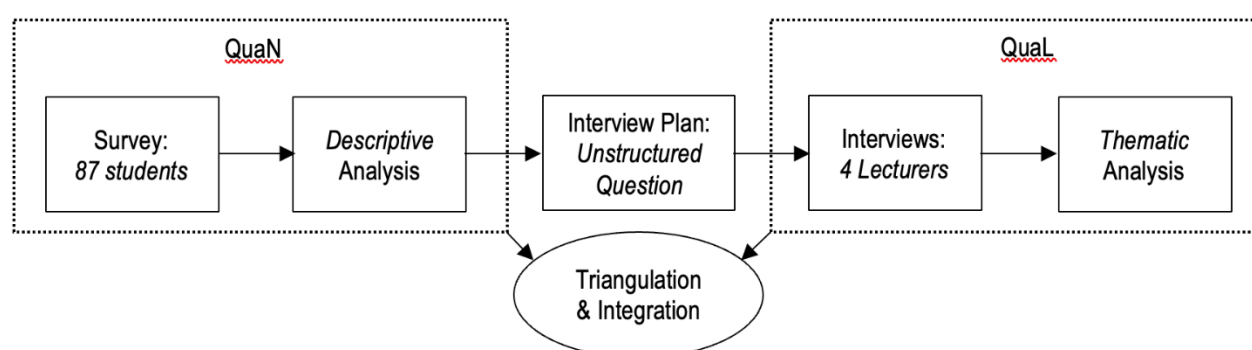
2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted from Creswell and Clark (2017), focusing on the English for Proficiency (Pre-Intermediate) course at an Islamic institution (Figure 1). Data collection and analysis began with an emphasis on the quantitative, followed by the qualitative, before the triangulation and integration. This approach is helpful as it seeks to explain or elaborate on quantitative results with qualitative insights.

Figure 1

Sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Emphasis on the quantitative phase)



2.2 Participants

Eighty-seven students, comprising 60 females and 27 males, from a private Islamic university on the East Coast of Malaysia participated in this study. A non-probability sampling method was conducted on ESL students enrolled in the English for Proficiency (Pre-Intermediate) course, a mandatory course for first-semester first-year students. Additionally, four lecturers were interviewed to provide qualitative insights to complement the study's quantitative data. A coding system was applied to identify the four lecturers' interview data, labelled L-01 to L-04. L-01 has over ten years of experience teaching English, while L-02 is a seasoned lecturer with more than 15 years of expertise. L-03 has taught for over seven years, and L-04 has taught for over six years. These lecturers assessed students using HGR while teaching the English for Proficiency (Pre-Intermediate) course.

2.3 Research Instruments

The quantitative data were collected using the "Learner Opinions of Rubric Effectiveness – Revised 2014" questionnaire, an instrument specifically designed to evaluate the effectiveness of rubrics in educational settings. This survey questionnaire originally consisted of 34 items by Haugnes and Russell (2016). It was later revised and refined by Phan and Phuong (2017) to capture better the nuances of learner perceptions in diverse educational contexts. It employs a 3-point Likert agreement scale: 'Agree', 'Disagree' and 'No idea'. After a pilot study, revisions were made to align with the study's objectives, reducing the number of items to 29 (Appendix). The 29-item questionnaire on finding perceptions of using an analytic rubric for self-assessment in speaking comprises four sections with specific items as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The questionnaire sections and items

Section (S)	No. of Item
S1 HGR for Online Communicative Assessment	10 (S1.1 – S1.10)
S2 HGR for Online Communicative Abilities Self-assessment	7 (S2.1 – S2.7)
S3 HGR in Self-assessing Oral Presentation Preparation	5 (S3.1 – S3.5)
S4 HGR in Assessing Oral Presentation	7 (S4.1 – S4.7)
Total	29

This research also employed qualitative data collection, precisely an unstructured interview question designed to align with the study's objectives and research questions. Unstructured interview questions in mixed methods research serve as a flexible and exploratory tool for data collection, particularly in the qualitative phase of a study. This type of interview question is adaptable, flows naturally, and comprises introducing, probing, and interpreting questions (Chauhan, 2022; Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009). It has the advantage of gathering rich data due to its open-ended nature, enabling the comprehensive capture of feelings and experiences and adaptability, where interviewers can adjust their questions based on the responses, leading to new findings or discoveries (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2017). The unstructured interview question elicited detailed responses from four lecturers actively involved with the HGR. The natural flow of the interview would enable the researchers better to understand the variables of interest through a question:

"Can you describe your experience using the home-grown rubric for online communicative assessment?"

2.4 Research Procedure

2.4.1 Pilot Stage

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability of the research instruments. The pilot testing of the quantitative instrument, followed by the careful administration of a questionnaire, was aimed at identifying unexpected misunderstandings or confusion regarding the items that could affect the quantitative data. Two expert lecturers assessed the content validity of the customised questionnaire, one from the study team's university and one from another university, to ensure its accuracy and relevance. The revision of the items from 34 to 29 involved obtaining input from experts to validate the instrument. Additionally, a few minor issues were identified, such as ambiguous wording in two questions. These were promptly addressed by rephrasing the problematic items. Following the expert assessment, the 29 items were pilot tested again on 15 students, who found the items to be clear and understandable.

Also, a preliminary test with a participant group helped to refine the unstructured interview question, which was conducted to ensure it was contextualised to the study's objective. The qualitative inquiry was conducted with an involved lecturer, and the feedback data were collected through lecturer interviews. These interviews complemented the quantitative findings, providing deeper insights into the topic.

2.4.2 Actual Study

The collection of data was conducted after the students had completed the course. The 29-item survey questionnaire was distributed to 87 students via Google Forms. A link was shared, and the respondents were required to respond in the presence of the researchers to ensure they fully understood the items and could react accurately. For the interview, an interview protocol was developed to serve as a structured guideline for conducting the interviews with the four lecturers, ensuring that the process is systematic and focused.

The unstructured interview questions were used to gather the experiences of the four identified lecturers in developing and utilising the HGR.

2.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and the rich qualitative data from the unstructured interview questions were analysed thematically. The students' agreement towards the 29 items was calculated into percentages to determine the majority of the responses as 'Agree', 'Disagree' or 'No idea'. The lecturers' experiences were thematically analysed, and a coding system was used to systematically organise data into themes, sub-themes, and categories. Coding aids researchers in retrieving information from the data, whether in the form of words or phrases (Kuckartz, 2019). To engage deeply with the interview data, repeated readings were conducted to identify themes and sub-themes. Consequently, the quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated and integrated to determine the relevance of the developed HGR online communicative assessment in an Islamic Institution during the Pandemic.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

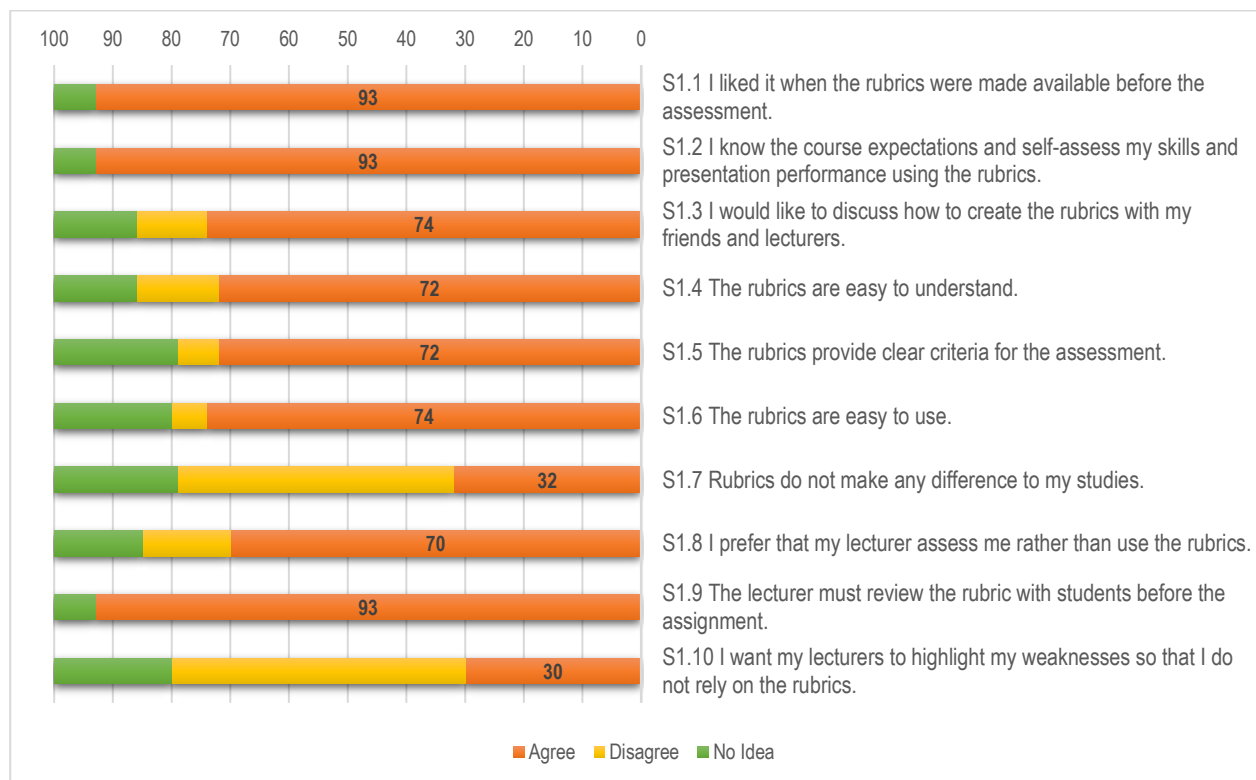
The students' findings are analysed and presented in four sections, followed by reports on themes and subthemes of the lecturers' HGR experiences. The questionnaire items are numbered according to the sections, such as Section 1(S1), and the sequence of the item numbering, for example, S1.1. The complete questionnaire is available in the Appendix. The triangulation and integration of data are presented in the qualitative data discussion.

3.1 HGR for Online Communicative Assessment

The students' perceptions of using HGR are presented in Figure 2. Most students (93%) agreed they wanted to know the HGR criteria before the presentation day (S1.1, S1.2). The result emphasised the significance of setting clear objectives and rules for the students to plan accordingly and evaluate their skills independently, enhancing their self-directed learning and creating a more active and engaged online learning environment. The results pointed to the potential use of HGR to assess the students' English communicative abilities in a virtual environment by informing them about the assessment criteria and quality levels concerning a task assignment. The HGR helped them understand course goals and self-evaluate their competence and presentation performance, as rubrics are a means to support students in self-assessing their task performance (Krebs et al., 2022). As a result, better grasping what is expected of them and how they might accomplish their objectives can also help increase their motivation and involvement in the learning process. Additionally, the findings emphasise the significance of providing students with specific, quantifiable learning objectives as a roadmap for their education and improving outcomes.

Figure 2

Students' perceptions towards the HGR for online communicative assessment



Moreover, the students appreciated openness and precision in the evaluation process. 93% would like the lecturer to review the HGR with them before the assessment (S1.9) so that they know the standards that will be applied to assess their communicative abilities. The students valued the chance to review the rubric with their lecturer to ensure they fully comprehended the requirements

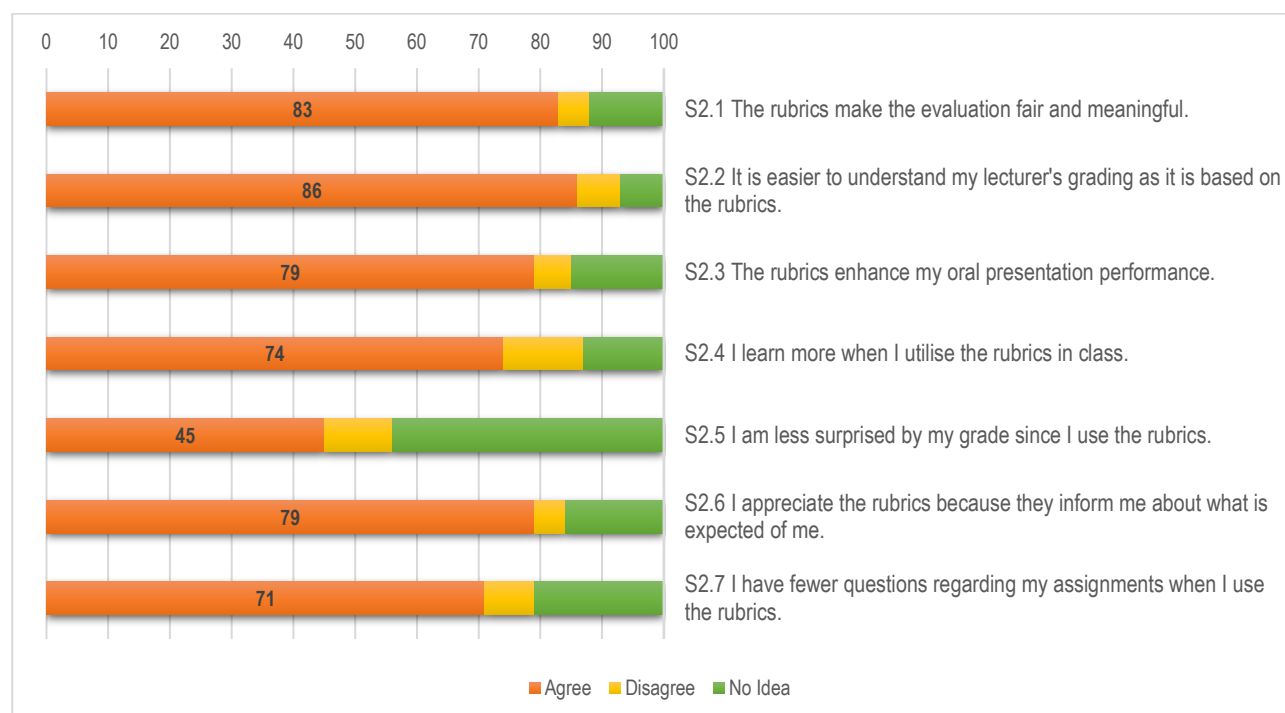
and standards for evaluation. Other higher agreements were also revealed through items S1.3, S1.4, S1.5, S1.6, and S1.8, indicating the potential of HGR, including the higher disagreement (47%) for the negative item in S1.7. Half of the students did not agree with the assertion, indicating that they thought rubrics could improve learning outcomes. However, the large percentage of students (70%) who needed clarification (S1.10) suggested an insufficient understanding or awareness of the HGR for online assessment. Changing the students' and lecturers' views towards the HGR requires longer training sessions. The results revealed the students' positive perception of the HGR to self-assess their English communicative abilities online.

3.2. HGR for Online Communicative Abilities Self-assessment

Figure 3 presents the students' perceptions of the HGR for online communicative self-assessment. In the second section, the students gave positive feedback on most items except for S2.5. 86% found that the HGR helps them understand their lecturers' grading (S2.2), and 83% agreed that using the HGR made the evaluation fair and meaningful (S2.1).

Figure 3

Students' perceptions towards the HGR online communicative abilities self-assessment



86% agreed with S2.2 that the HGR is more straightforward in understanding their lecturer's marking if their presentation is assessed using the HGR. The HGR could help students better comprehend the evaluation criteria and how their work is evaluated. By offering a clear and unbiased approach to judging students' achievement (Lipnevich et al., 2023), rubrics help make the assessment process more significant for students (Wolf & Stevens, 2021). It underscores the advantages of using the HGR to elucidate the grading process and lessen lecturer grading inconsistencies. As a result, employing the HGR can enhance lecturers' understanding of the assessment process and, thus, increase the efficiency of online assessments.

Data from S2.3 show that 79% of the students believed that applying the HGR enhances their performance in oral presentations, while only 6% disagreed and 15% were unsure. To infer, the students felt that using the HGR would help them improve their ability to communicate in English online. According to Olson et al. (2021), the HGR enabled students to accomplish the learning objectives by assisting them in understanding what was expected of them and giving them detailed feedback on their performance.

According to S2.3, 79% of the students concurred that they appreciate using rubrics since they could see what was expected of them, with only 5% disagreeing. This finding suggested that using the HGR to assess the students' communicative abilities helped them comprehend the assessment requirements and what they must do to score. The result matches Kilgour et al. (2020), who demonstrated the value of using rubrics to assist students in grasping expectations and what they must do to achieve. Additionally, using the HGR might enable students to concentrate on the assignment's most crucial components while avoiding time-wasting activities due to its benefits in providing judgement accuracy, lower bias, and lessening cognitive loads (Krebs et al., 2022).

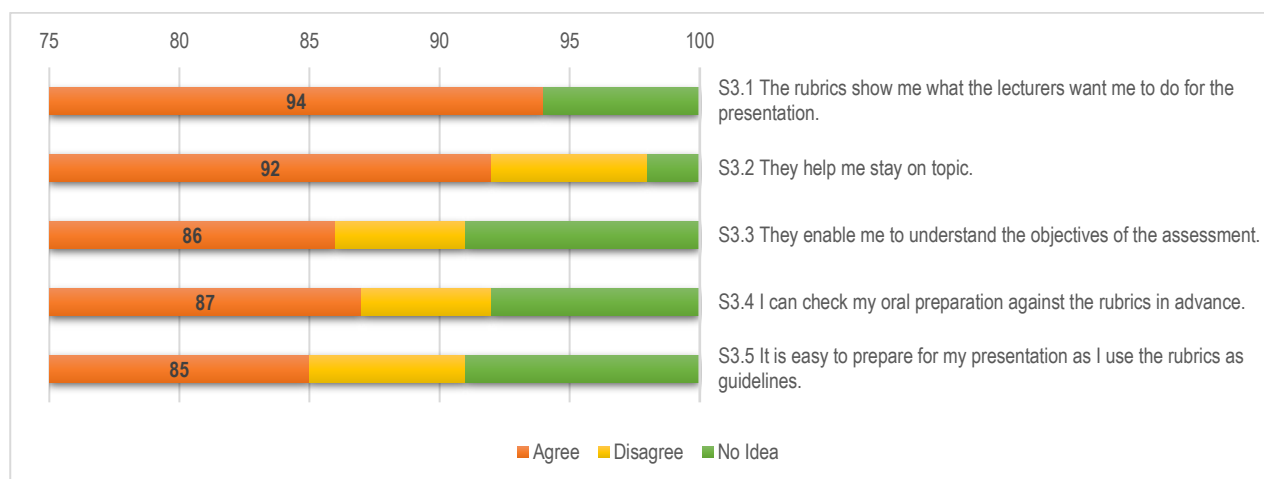
The HGR successfully fostered an atmosphere of impartiality and transparency in the evaluation process, a crucial component of any evaluation instrument. The rubric ensured that all students were evaluated according to the same standards and reduced the possibility of bias or subjectivity on the part of the evaluator. The low disagreement (5%) of S2.5 implies that most students found the HGR application justifiable and appropriate for judging their English communication proficiency online. The result aligns with the study of Abbas et al. (2019), which stresses the vital role of rubrics in encouraging fair and impartial evaluation processes.

3.3 HGR in Self-assessing Oral Presentation Preparation

The data on the HGR in self-evaluating their preparation of oral presentations are shown in Figure 4. 94% of the students agreed that the HGR made comprehending what the lecturers expected from their presentations easier. Adopting a rubric for assessing students' presentations could help lecturers clarify their expectations and aid students in tailoring their presentations. Although it could help the students prepare for the assessment, the study supported using the HGR to assess online English language teaching and learning. The high degree of agreement on this item also implied that the HGR helps them to gain explicit knowledge of the specifications for the activity, which could help reduce uncertainty and anxiety when completing the assignment.

Figure 4

Students' perceptions towards the HGR in self-assessing oral presentation preparation



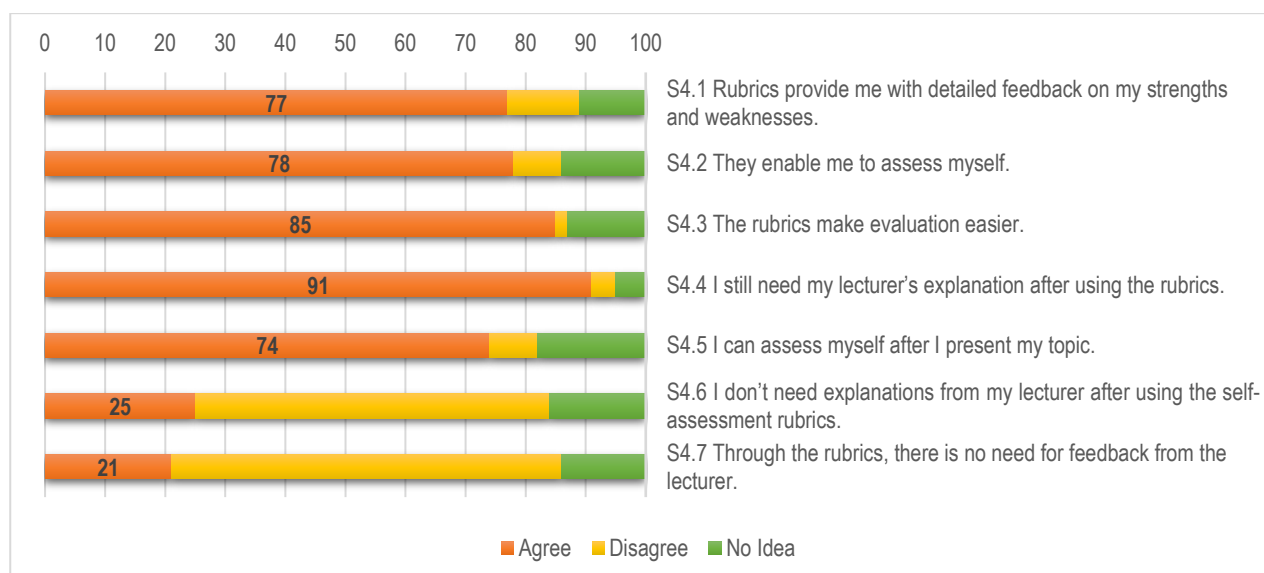
Furthermore, 92% of the students perceived that the HGR had helped them stay on topic while preparing their presentations (S3.2). The HGR could help students concentrate on the essential components needed for the presentation while minimising extraneous or irrelevant information. It is significant to remember that good communication in any language necessitates the delivery of a clear and concise message, and the rubric could be a helpful tool to ensure that students stay on task and adequately explain their thoughts. Since it provides the students with a clear and objective evaluation criterion, the HGR could be helpful for online English language teaching and learning in Malaysian Islamic institutions to develop their communicative abilities.

3.4 HGR in Assessing Oral Presentation

Lastly, the students provided their perceived agreement toward the HGR in assessing oral presentation (Figure 5). After utilising the rubric to self-assess their presentation, 92% of the students believed they still needed their lecturers' explanations. As shown in Table 4, Item 28, this finding suggested that rubrics could be helpful for self-evaluation; however, lecturers' feedback was still necessary. This result aligned with earlier research, which contends that while rubrics can help students improve at self-evaluation, they cannot replace lecturers' feedback. To provide a more thorough assessment of students' communication skills, lecturers should combine rubrics with other types of feedback.

Figure 5

Students' perceptions towards the HGR in assessing oral presentation



Two items in the section (S4.6 and S4.7) received low agreement from the students. S4.6 indicated that, after utilising the HGR to assess oneself, 59% admitted that they still needed more explanation from their lecturer, in contrast to the 25% who believed they did not need it. The findings implied that even though using a rubric for self-assessment is advantageous for students, there might be more to give them all the feedback and direction needed to progress. It also emphasised how crucial a lecturer's involvement is in learning. Even when utilising a rubric for self-evaluation, students still needed direction and criticism from their lecturers. Students could better comprehend the evaluation criteria and develop their presentation abilities using the rubric to prompt conversation and further explanation with their lecturers.

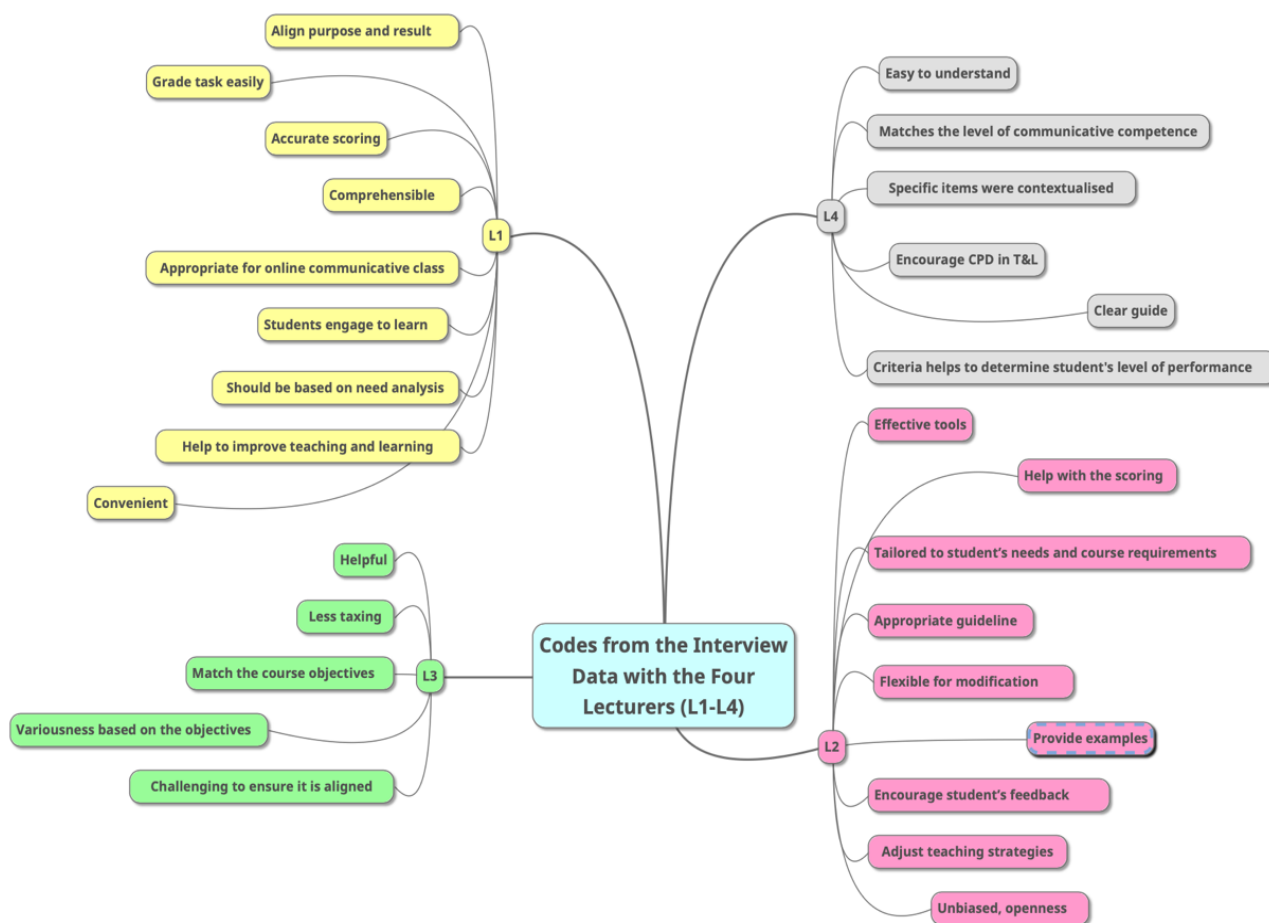
Only 21% of the students responded to S4.7, agreeing that the lecturer's input would have been unnecessary if the HGR had been employed. However, 65% of the students disagreed, showing that they still thought feedback from their lecturer was crucial even when grading rubrics were employed. 14% of the students were still debating whether they needed comments from their lecturer. This finding implied that although rubrics for self-evaluation and assessment might be helpful, they should not be used in place of lecturers' input. Students could gain a more profound understanding of their strengths and shortcomings and enhance their English communication skills online by using the HGR alongside comments from the lecturer. In short, this emphasised the potential advantages of using rubrics as an online assessment method for English communication skills while highlighting the importance of including lecturers' input in the evaluation process.

3.5 The Lecturers' Experience Developing and Using the HGR

Four lecturers provided rich, detailed qualitative data on their experiences developing and using the HGR. The interview data were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis to create relevant themes and subthemes. The first participant was L1, who had taught English for over ten years. The second data set came from participant L2, an experienced educator with over 15 years of expertise. The final data set came from L3, who had taught for over seven years. The fourth data set came from L4, who had taught for over six years. These volunteers were chosen because they were involved in assessing students using the HGR while teaching English for Proficiency (Pre-Intermediate). Figure 6 illustrates the codes gathered from the interview data.

Figure 6

Codes from the interview data with the four lecturers (L1-L4)



Several key themes emerged from analysing the collected data, providing insight into this study. These themes reflect the core issues and experiences shared by the participants and are integral to understanding the survey. The data collection was subjected to

thematic analysis, forming three key themes: practicality, lecturers' growth, and alignment. Three themes emerged from examining the interview transcripts and documentation: HGR practicality, lecturers' professional growth, and constructive alignment, with each subtheme depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7

The interview data themes and sub-themes



3.5.1 HGR Practicality

In analysing the HGR's relevancy, the lecturers frequently used the theme 'practicality'. It came from the notions of purposefulness, ease of use, and openness of the HGR when assessing the assessment. They were the significant factors in its adoption and success among educators. Designing a rubric is a helpful tool for evaluating students (Bharuthram & Patel, 2017). The HGR practicality also encapsulated that each participant agreed that the HGR is valuable and convenient for lecturers. One of the lecturers, L2, emphasised that the HGR used for online assessment during the pandemic was instrumental. L1 believed the HGR was convenient and helped him to grade the task quickly.

It's convenient and helps give the students a clear picture of what is expected of them. It also helps me, as the instructor, to grade the task quickly and proves why the marks are given as such.

Other participants supported the claim, in addition to the students' agreement, which can be retrieved from items S1.4, S1.6, and S4.3. L4 claimed that the HGR is suitable and easy to understand: *Overall, the rubrics are easy to understand, and I can say they're ideal for the subject.* She also emphasised the clarity of the HGR by stating that *"the rubric provides a straightforward guide on how the students learn and improve specific skills during online learning."*

Another subtheme from the rubric was the emphasis on the HGR's openness. The rubric provided clear and straightforward criteria, assisting pupils in understanding what was expected of them. Ulker (2017) concurred with the finding regarding the assessment's openness and transparency for students and lecturers. As agreed by the students via items S1.1, S1.3, S2.5, and S2.6, L3 supported this idea, stating that the HGR was unbiased and open. Using the HGR for online communicative assessment benefits my students and me because it offers a more impartial, open, and organised way to assess students' communicative proficiency online, support student learning, and enhance instructional methods.

3.5.2 Lecturers' Professional Growth

Lecturers' growth appeared as a significant subtheme in the data. One of the critical factors in lecturers' professional development is the emergence of reflective practice. When a rubric is considered reflective practice, lecturers can reflect on and enhance their teaching methods. According to Allen and Tanner (2006), developing one's rubric can foster reflective practice. Bharuthram and Patel (2017) asserted that rubrics served as guided practice tools, enabling lecturers to become reflective practitioners by identifying gaps in communicating student expectations. The HGR was reported to have collected feedback from students, allowing lecturers to reflect on their instruction. Based on the comments from the students, L2 reflected and altered her teaching strategies, as corroborated by the students via items S1.3, S3.1 and S4.6.

Based on the results, I can use them to adjust my teaching strategies or instructional materials.

The next subtheme was the HGR's role in enhancing learning outcomes. Assessing students' performance using the HGR could help them better understand learning objectives and improve their academic performance (Lipnevich et al., 2023). L3 supports concurred that the HGR was well-designed and had a clear purpose.

It offers a precise and consistent evaluation structure and ensures that assessments align with the course's goals and learning outcomes.

Lastly, the HGR helped improve the lecturer's teaching and learning. L02 expressed this, stating that the HGR provided room for improvement in teaching.

I think it's a valuable experience since it helps improve my learning and teaching experience.

3.5.3 Constructive Alignment

The HGR presented constructive alignment between the assessment and the course objectives. All students were evaluated using the same criteria. The HGR provided precise scoring and was associated with the course objectives, which helped to guarantee that the evaluations were fair and consistent; this was also acknowledged by 83% of the students (S2.1). Creators of the HGR frequently construct their rubrics to match an assignment and its objectives for a specific course (Allen & Tanner, 2006). The scenario was experienced by L3, who stated that *HGR is well-designed and aligned with the course objectives and learning outcomes to effectively capture the essential components of communicative competence for online language assessment*.

L2 also claimed that the HGR assessment aligned with the learning outcomes. The HGR offers a precise and consistent evaluation structure and ensures assessments are tallied with the course's objectives and learning outcomes. L2 argued that the HGR matched the communicative assessment objectives.

The interpretation matches what I expected when evaluating the students using a rubric.

The last subtheme that appeared was that the HGR was tailored to the student's needs. Notably, from the survey findings, 93% (S1.2), 79% (S2.6), and 85% (S3.5), most of the student's learning needs were the priority in developing the HGR. The needs may include their learning styles, abilities, preferences and viewpoints impacting students' outcomes (Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2023). The HGR provided a record of students' progress toward meeting desired outcomes. They also agreed that the HGR designer must approach the task with a clear idea of the desired student learning outcome (Haugnes & Russell, 2016). L1 also believed that HGR was tailored to the perspectives and needs of the students as agreed by the students via items S3.2, S3.5 and S4.1.

The HGRs were better at evaluation since the lectures themselves did it, allowing them to be tailored to the student's viewpoint and the specific needs of the subjects' objectives and outcomes.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study on the relevance of the developed HGR indicated a promising future. The HGR proved a successful and practical approach for online communicative assessment during a pandemic crisis based on the users' perception and experience. The use of rubrics for assessing communication abilities and self-evaluation was perceived positively by students. Furthermore, the study discovered that the HGR was convenient for lecturers and could help them enhance their pedagogical practices while aligning with the course and communication evaluation objectives. Overall, the findings implied that using the HGR is relevant for the studied context due to its benefits in enhancing online English teaching and learning at the institution. The HGR has helped strengthen students' communicative abilities and reduced cognitive load.

The study's findings suggest several recommendations. First, students and lecturers need more training and instruction on the value and application of rubrics for online communicative assessments. The input could help shift any negative perceptions and increase the acceptance and use of this assessment method. Additionally, promoting rubrics as a fundamental component of online English teaching and learning is crucial. Highlighting how rubrics can enhance the efficiency of online assessments may also raise awareness among teachers and students about the assessment process.

Furthermore, the HGR should help students concentrate on the most critical aspects of their assignments, thereby reducing time-wasting activities. This focused approach can lead to greater student engagement and motivation. In particular, promoting the use of rubrics for self-assessment in oral presentations can provide students with clear, objective evaluation criteria, minimising ambiguity and anxiety. This approach encourages further dialogue between students and professors, fostering a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses and enhancing communication skills.

The study also recommends encouraging self-developed rubrics for online communicative assessments. These HGRs should be practical, user-friendly, and contain clear criteria for evaluating students' performance. It is equally important to ensure that custom-made rubrics are aligned with course and communicative assessment objectives and tailored to meet the needs of students. This alignment will help ensure the effectiveness of the rubrics in assessing and improving English communication skills in online learning environments. Finally, lecturers should be encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices and develop HGRs to enhance learning outcomes and the overall teaching and learning process. HGR assessments must be aligned with course learning outcomes to maximise their effectiveness.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

Roszalina Abdul Rahim (Conceptualization, Quantitative Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing)

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire on HGR for Learners' Online Communicative Abilities' Self-assessment

Item No.	Statement	3	2	1
		Agree	No Idea	Disagree
S1	SECTION 1: HGR for Online Communicative Abilities			
S1.1	I liked it when the rubrics were made available before the assessment.			
S1.2	I know the course expectations and self-assess my skills and presentation performance using the rubrics.			
S1.3	I would like to discuss how to create the rubrics with my friends and lecturers.			
S1.4	The rubrics are easy to understand.			
S1.5	I find them easy to use.			
S1.6	They are easy to use.			
S1.7	Rubrics do not make any difference to my studies.			
S1.8	I prefer that my lecturer assess me rather than use the rubrics.			
S1.9	The lecturer must review the rubric with learners before the assignment.			
S1.10	I want my lecturers to highlight my weaknesses so I do not have to rely on the HGR.			
S2	SECTION 2: HGR for Online Communicative Abilities Self-assessment			
S2.1	The rubrics made the evaluation fair and meaningful.			
S2.2	It is easier to understand that my lecturer's grading and evaluation of my presentation are based on the rubrics.			
S2.3	It improves my oral presentation performance.			
S2.4	I learn more when I use the rubrics in class.			
S2.5	I am less surprised with my grade since I use the rubrics.			
S2.6	I like the rubrics because they let me know what is expected of me.			
S2.7	I have fewer questions about my assignments when I use rubrics.			
S3	SECTION 3: HGR in Self-evaluating Oral Presentation Preparation			
S3.1	The rubrics show me what the lecturers want me to do for the presentation.			
S3.2	They help me stay on topic.			
S3.3	They enable me to understand the objectives of the assessment.			
S3.4	I can check my oral preparation against the rubrics in advance.			
S3.5	It is easy to prepare for my presentation as I use the rubrics as guidelines.			
S4	SECTION 4: HGR in Evaluating Oral Presentation			
S4.1	Rubrics provide me with detailed feedback on my strengths and weaknesses.			
S4.2	They enable me to assess myself.			
S4.3	The rubrics make evaluation easier.			
S4.4	I still need my lecturer's explanation after using the rubrics.			
S4.5	I can assess myself after I present my topic.			
S4.6	I don't need explanations from my lecturer after using the self-assessment rubrics.			
S4.7	Through the rubrics, there is no need for feedback from the lecturer.			

Adopted from Learners Opinions of Rubric Effectiveness (Haugnes & Russell, 2016) and later by Phan and Phuong (2017)