Vol. 2 Nomor 2 Desember 2024

# Evaluation of Rubric-Based Assessment in Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Higher Education

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Abstract In today's academic environment, higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of fostering critical thinking skills among students. As such, this study evaluates the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in developing critical thinking skills education among higher students. А quantitative descriptive survey design was employed, targeting 65 respondents from various academic disciplines at institutions in Anambra State. Data were collected through a structured, validated questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including one-way ANOVA, were used to analyze the Results indicated that rubric-based data. assessments significantly enhance students' critical thinking skills by providing clear criteria, promoting consistency, and encouraging selfreflection. Specific components like analysis, logical reasoning, and synthesis contributed significantly most to critical thinking development. Additionally, feedback provided through rubric-based assessments played a crucial role in improving students' analytical reasoning and problem-solving abilities. This study highlights the importance of rubric-based assessment in higher education and provides for effective recommendations its implementation to foster critical thinking skills among students.

**Keywords:** *Rubric-based assessment, critical thinking skills, higher education, academic evaluation, student performance, self-reflection.* 

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Rubric-based assessments are evaluation tools that outline specific criteria and performance levels to measure students' achievements and skills systematically. A rubric typically consists of a set of criteria aligned with learning objectives and distinct levels of performance, ranging from exemplary to inadequate. This structured approach offers clear guidance to both educators and students by defining what is expected for each level of achievement (Fitriyani et al, 2024). Rubrics promote transparency in the assessment process, ensuring consistency and fairness in grading. They are particularly effective in evaluating complex skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, as they break down these skills into measurable components. Additionally, rubric-based assessments encourage self-reflection and active learning by enabling students to understand the benchmarks for success and identify areas for improvement (Volante et al, 2025). Widely used in higher education, rubrics serve as valuable tools for aligning teaching, learning, and assessment to achieve desired educational outcomes. The integration of rubric-based assessments in higher education has been recognized as an effective approach for fostering critical thinking skills among students. In the Nigerian context, several studies have examined the utility of rubrics in enhancing learning outcomes and critical thinking abilities (Adah, 2021).

Rubric-based assessments clarify performance expectations and provide a structured framework for evaluating complex skills like critical thinking. Park et al, (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study to explore the impact of rubric-referenced self-assessment on students' achievement in Basic Science. Their findings indicated that students who used rubrics for self-assessment achieved significantly better results than those taught through conventional methods. This highlights the role of rubrics in promoting student autonomy and deeper engagement with learning tasks. In a related study, Adah (2021) assessed the effectiveness of rubric-based tools in improving performance in Basic Science among students in Jalingo Education Zone. They found that the use of rubrics not only enhanced student achievement but also improved understanding of assessment criteria. These findings align with broader educational objectives, as rubrics provide a transparent and consistent means of evaluating student performance, thereby encouraging critical reflection and analytical skills.

Onwuagboke and Singh (2016) emphasized the importance of fostering critical thinking in higher education, identifying it as a core mandate for institutions seeking to prepare graduates for complex societal challenges. While his work did not focus exclusively on rubric-based assessments, it underscores the necessity of adopting strategies that promote analytical and evaluative thinking, a goal rubric is well-suited to achieve. However, the implementation of rubric-based assessments in Nigerian higher education is not without challenges. Nsabayezu et al, (2022) reviewed the adoption of rubrics in tertiary institutions and identified significant barriers, including limited familiarity with rubric design among educators and concerns about the time investment required for their effective application. Many educators remain hesitant to integrate rubrics into their teaching due to these practical constraints, despite the proven benefits. Hence the need to evaluate rubric-based assessment in developing critical thinking skills in higher education.

## Objectives

- 1. To assess the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students.
- 2. To identify the specific components of rubric-based assessments that contribute most significantly to the development of critical thinking skills.
- 3. To evaluate the role of feedback provided through rubric-based assessment in improving critical thinking skills.
  - Research questions
- 1. How effective is rubric-based assessment in fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students?
- 2. What specific components of rubric-based assessments contribute most significantly to the development of critical thinking skills?
- 3. How does feedback provided through rubric-based assessment influence the improvement of critical thinking skills?

## Hypotheses

- 1. Rubric-based assessment has no significant effect on fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students.
- 2. The specific components of rubric-based assessments do not significantly contribute to the development of critical thinking skills.
- 3. Feedback provided through rubric-based assessment does not significantly influence the improvement of critical thinking skills.

### 2. METHOD

The research methodology for this study utilized a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive survey design, to assess the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students. This design was chosen as it allows for the collection of numerical data, which can be statistically analyzed to identify trends and relationships in the students' perceptions of rubric-based assessment and its impact on developing critical thinking. The study was conducted in higher education institutions located in Anambra State across various academic disciplines, including humanities, sciences, social sciences, and business administration. The reason for selecting a broad range of academic fields was to ensure a more representation of students' experiences with rubric-based assessments. The population for the study consisted of all undergraduate students enrolled at the selected institutions, who had encountered rubric-based assessments in their coursework.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each faculty within the institutions was adequately represented in the sample. The sample size was calculated using the Yamane formula, yielding a sample of 65 respondents. This sample size was deemed sufficient for the study's aims and allowed for meaningful analysis of the data. To gather data, a structured questionnaire was designed as the primary instrument. The questionnaire was divided into sections corresponding to the research questions: the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment, the specific components that contribute to critical thinking development, and the role of feedback in improving critical thinking skills. The instrument was reviewed for content validity by experts in educational assessment and critical thinking, ensuring that it comprehensively addressed the relevant aspects of the study. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with 10 respondents to check for clarity and relevance, and the instrument was refined based on their feedback.

The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, which returned a coefficient of 0.76, indicating high internal consistency. Data collection took place through both online and paper-based questionnaires, and participants were given a week to complete their responses. Ethical considerations were adhered to, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Data analysis involved the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, were used to summarize the responses and provide understandings into the perceived effectiveness of rubric-based assessments. To test the significance of differences between groups, one-way ANOVA was used, allowing for an evaluation of how different components of rubric-based assessments and feedback influenced critical thinking skills. The data were entered and analyzed using SPSS software to ensure accurate processing and interpretation of the results.

## **3. RESULTS**

	Frequenc		Valid	Cumulative
	у	Percent	Percent	Percent
Valid Male	39	60.0	60.0	60.0
Female	26	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Participants in the Study

The gender distribution of the participants in Table 1 shows that (60.0%) are male (39 participants), while (40.0%) are female (26 participants). This indicates a higher representation of males compared to females in the sample, with males making up the majority of the participants. The cumulative percent column reveals that after including all male and female participants, the total reaches (100.0%), indicating that all survey respondents are accounted for. This suggests a balanced gender representation, although males slightly outnumber females in this particular sample. The total sample size is (65) participants.

Research question 1: How effective is rubric-based assessment in fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Effectiveness of Rubric-Based Assessment inFostering Critical Thinking

Statistic		Bootstrap <sup>a</sup>	
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						95% (	Confidence
			Std.		Std.	Interval	
			Error	Bias	Error	Lower	Upper
Rubric-based	N	65		0	0	65	65
assessment	Mean	1.82	.156	.00	.15	1.52	2.12
provides	Std.	1.0.11		010	224		1 201
clear criteria	Deviation	1.261		013	.086	1.059	1.386
for	Variance						
evaluating							
critical		1 500		0.05	011	1 100	1 000
thinking		1.590		025	.211	1.122	1.922
development							
effectively.							
Rubrics	Ν	65		0	0	65	65
promote	Mean	3.23	.122	.00	.12	2.98	3.46
consistent	Std.	001		008	000	702	1 196
evaluation,	Deviation	.901		000	.069	.193	1.130
ensuring	Variance						
fairness in							
assessing		967		008	173	678	1 701
critical		.902		008	.175	.020	1.271
thinking							
abilities.							
The use of	Ν	65		0	0	65	65
rubrics	Mean	2.83	.140	.00	.14	2.57	3.11
encourages	Std.	1 1 2 6		009	070	067	1 716
deeper	Deviation	1.120		005	.070	.907	1.240

understandi Variance						
ng and						
critical	1.268		015	.155	.934	1.554
engagement						
with content.						
Rubrics N	65		0	0	65	65
guide Mean	2.85	.123	.00	.13	2.59	3.09
students in Std.	000		008	060	020	1 004
organizing Deviation	.900		008	.060	.000	1.094
thoughts and Variance						
presenting						
arguments	.976		011	.118	.754	1.197
more						
effectively.						
Rubric-based N	65		0	0	65	65
assessment Mean	1.66	.136	01	.13	1.40	1.92
fosters self- Std.	1 004		017	002	07(	1 001
reflection, Deviation	1.094		016	.093	.876	1.231
crucial for Variance						
developing						
critical	1.196		026	.197	.768	1.516
thinking						
capabilities.						
Valid N N	65		0	0	65	65
(listwise)	05		0	0	05	05

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show the effectiveness of rubric-based assessments in fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students. The mean values for the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in various aspects are as follows: clear criteria for evaluating critical thinking (Mean = 1.82), promoting consistent evaluation (Mean = 3.23), encouraging deeper understanding and engagement (Mean = 2.83), guiding organization of thoughts (Mean = 2.85), and fostering self-reflection (Mean = 1.66). The standard deviations indicate moderate variability across responses. The 95% confidence intervals for the means range between (1.52–2.12) to (2.57–3.11), suggesting a positive impact on critical thinking development.

The descriptive statistics for rubric-based assessment in fostering critical thinking show positive results across various components. The mean scores for rubricbased assessment effectiveness in providing clear criteria (Mean = 1.82), promoting consistent evaluation (Mean = 3.23), encouraging deeper understanding (Mean = 2.83), guiding thought organization (Mean = 2.85), and fostering self-reflection (Mean = 1.66) all indicate a significant impact on the development of critical thinking skills among higher education students. In contrast to these findings, a study by Park et al, (2020) found that while rubric-based assessments provided clarity, the impact on deeper student engagement was less pronounced. This finding agreed with previous research by Nsabayezu et al, (2022), which reported that rubric-based assessments primarily benefited students in organizing thoughts but had a limited effect on fostering selfreflection. However, a related study by White and Maher (2024) demonstrated that rubrics significantly enhanced critical engagement with content, aligning with the current findings. Additionally, in a study by Cheung (2023), rubrics were shown to promote fairness in evaluation, similar to the results here, emphasizing the importance of consistent assessment criteria. The findings indicate that rubric-based assessments are effective in fostering critical thinking, with clarity, fairness, and guidance being key components that support critical thinking skill development in higher education.

Research question 2: What specific components of rubric-based assessments contribute most significantly to the development of critical thinking skills? Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Components of Rubric-Based Assessments Contributing to Critical Thinking Development

Confidence
Upper
Unper
Opper
65
3.23
1.010
1.248
1 550
1.559
65
2.06
1 240
1.340
1 707
1.797
65
3.15
1 100
1.162

the Variance						
importance						
of coherent	1 000		Ω1 <i>1</i>	165	716	1 307
and	1.090		014	.105	./40	1.377
structured						
arguments.						
Depth of N	65		0	0	65	65
understandi Mean	3.11	.144	.00	.14	2.83	3.37
ng Std.	1 161		010	080	0.021	1 206
components Deviation	1.101		010	.000	.901	1.290
foster critical Variance						
understandi						
ngs and	1 348		- 016	183	963	1 679
comprehensi	1.340		010	.105	.905	1.079
ve						
knowledge.						
Synthesis of N	65		0	0	65	65
ideas criteria Mean	2.82	.126	.00	.12	2.57	3.05
evaluate the Std.	1 014		008	071	044	1 120
ability to Deviation	1.014		000	.071	.000	1.139
integrate Variance						
multiple	1 028		_ 011	147	750	1 297
perspectives	1.020		011	.172	.750	1.277
effectively.						
The inclusion N	65		0	0	65	65
of evidence- Mean	1.75	.149	.00	.15	1.46	2.06
based criteria Std.	1 100		013	000	1 000	1 3/0
encourages Deviation	1.177		015	.070	1.000	1.040

students to Variance support claims with	1.438		022	.209	.999	1.797
valid data.						
Rubrics N	65		0	0	65	65
guide Mean	2.85	.123	.00	.12	2.60	3.09
students in Std.	088		007	060	964	1.007
organizing Deviation	.900		007	.000	.004	1.097
thoughts and Variance						
presenting						
arguments	.976		009	.118	.746	1.203
more						
effectively.						
Valid N N	65		0	0	65	65
(listwise)	00		0	0	00	00

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The descriptive statistics in Table 3 highlight key components of rubric-based assessments that contribute to the development of critical thinking skills. The mean values for each component are as follows: analysis and evaluation (Mean = 2.97), evidence-based criteria (Mean = 1.75), logical reasoning (Mean = 2.94), depth of understanding (Mean = 3.11), synthesis of ideas (Mean = 2.82), and organization of thoughts (Mean = 2.85). The standard deviations indicate moderate variability, with evidence-based criteria showing higher variability (SD = 1.199). The 95% confidence intervals range from (1.46–2.06) to (2.57–3.37), suggesting that these components significantly support critical thinking development in students.

The descriptive statistics for the specific components of rubric-based assessments contributing to critical thinking development reveal that analysis and evaluation (Mean = 2.97), logical reasoning (Mean = 2.94), depth of understanding (Mean = 3.11), synthesis of ideas (Mean = 2.82), and organization of thoughts (Mean = 2.85) are key components

in enhancing students' critical thinking abilities. These components foster the ability to break down information, construct coherent arguments, integrate multiple perspectives, and present ideas effectively. In contrast, a study by Belle and Zhao (2023) indicated that while analysis and reasoning were essential, evidence-based criteria, particularly supporting claims with valid data, were not as strongly emphasized in their rubric-based assessments. This finding agreed with the study by Sapri et al, (2022), which suggested that evidence-based criteria, though useful, were less integrated into critical thinking development compared to logical reasoning. Furthermore, in a related study by Onwuagboke and Singh (2016), the depth of understanding was identified as a stronger factor in fostering critical thinking, correlating with the current findings where depth of understanding ranked highly. Additionally, Putra et al (2024) found that rubrics guiding thought organization (Mean = 2.85) were particularly beneficial for developing structured arguments, aligning with the current analysis showing the importance of organizing thoughts for critical thinking. In summary, these components – analysis, reasoning, depth of understanding, and synthesis – are crucial for developing critical thinking skills in higher education.

Research question 3: How does feedback provided through rubric-based assessment influence the improvement of critical thinking skills?

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for the Influence of Rubric-Based Feedback on CriticalThinking Improvement

				Bootstrap <sup>a</sup>				
						95%	Confidence	
			Std.		Std.	Interval		
		Statistic	Error	Bias	Error	Lower	Upper	
Rubric-	N	65		0	0	65	65	
based	Mean	3.09	.138	.01	.13	2.82	3.35	
feedback clarifies	Std. Deviation	1.114		015	.086	.922	1.255	

expectation	Variance						
s, fostering							
better							
critical		1.241		025	.187	.851	1.576
thinking							
developme							
nt.							
Detailed	Ν	65		0	0	65	65
feedback	Mean	3.08	.137	.01	.13	2.80	3.32
encourages	Std.	1 108		015	084	010	1 252
self-	Deviation	1.100		015	.004	.515	1.252
reflection,	Variance						
enhancing							
students'		1 228		025	102	Q15	1 544
analytical		1.220		025	.165	.040	1.300
reasoning							
skills.							
Constructiv	Ν	65		0	0	65	65
e feedback	Mean	3.18	.140	.00	.14	2.88	3.46
promotes	Std.	1 1 2 0		016	001	017	1 074
iterative	Deviation	1.130		016	.091	.917	1.274
learning,	Variance						
strengtheni							
ng							
problem-		1.278		028	.200	.840	1.624
solving and							
evaluation							
abilities.							
	Ν	65		0	0	65	65

Feedback	Mean	3.14	.155	.01	.15	2.83	3.43
on	Std.	1 749		014	082	1.045	1 200
reasoning	Deviation	1.248		014	.083	1.045	1.382
structure	Variance						
helps refine							
logical and		1 550		000	202	1 000	1 010
coherent		1.559		029	.202	1.093	1.910
thought							
processes.							
Rubrics	N	65		0	0	65	65
provide	Mean	1.68	.144	01	.15	1.39	1.95
actionable	Std.			212	107	212	
feedback,	Deviation	1.161		019	.107	.918	1.318
helping	Variance						
students							
address		1 0 4 7		000	220	0.42	1 50 (
gaps in		1.347		033	.239	.843	1.736
understand							
ing.							
Rubrics	Ν	65		0	0	65	65
guide	Mean	2.85	.123	.01	.12	2.60	3.08
students in	Std.	000		000	060	057	1 007
organizing	Deviation	.988		008	.060	.857	1.097
thoughts	Variance						
and							
presenting		076		011	110	704	1 000
arguments		.976		011	.118	./34	1.203
more							
effectively.							

Valid N N	<b>6</b> 5	0	0	<b>4F</b>	<b>6E</b>
(listwise)	65	0	0	60	65

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The descriptive statistics in Table 4 illustrate how rubric-based feedback influences the improvement of critical thinking skills. The mean values for feedback components are as follows: feedback clarifying expectations (Mean = 3.09), encouraging self-reflection (Mean = 3.08), promoting iterative learning (Mean = 3.18), refining reasoning structure (Mean = 3.14), addressing gaps in understanding (Mean = 1.68), and helping with argument organization (Mean = 2.85). The standard deviations suggest moderate variability, with feedback on addressing gaps showing the highest variability (SD = 1.161). The 95% confidence intervals range from (1.39-1.95) to (2.82-3.46), indicating significant positive impacts of feedback on critical thinking development.

The descriptive statistics for the influence of rubric-based feedback on critical thinking improvement show that feedback components such as clarifying expectations (Mean = 3.09), encouraging self-reflection (Mean = 3.08), promoting iterative learning (Mean = 3.18), refining reasoning (Mean = 3.14), addressing gaps in understanding (Mean = 1.68), and guiding argument organization (Mean = 2.85) significantly contribute to the improvement of students' critical thinking skills. In contrast to these findings, a study by Park et al (2020) found that feedback on reasoning structure was less emphasized in their rubric-based assessments, with students focusing more on content mastery than analytical reasoning. This finding agreed with research by Gallardo (2020), which reported that constructive feedback, while valuable, was not as effective in encouraging critical thinking skills unless it was highly specific and actionable. In a related study, Adah (2021) highlighted that feedback promoting iterative learning (Mean = 3.18) was particularly effective in improving problem-solving abilities, which aligns with the current findings. However, feedback on addressing gaps in understanding (Mean = 1.68) showed less impact in their study, suggesting that students may require more detailed or personalized feedback to address these gaps effectively. These findings emphasize that rubric-based feedback, especially when it clarifies expectations, promotes self-reflection, and encourages iterative learning, plays a crucial role in developing and improving critical thinking skills in higher education.

Hypothesis 1: Rubric-based assessment has no significant effect on fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students.

Table 5: ANOVA Results for the Effect of Rubric-Based Assessment on Critical Thinking Skills

	Sum of		Mean		
	Squares	df	Square	F	Sig.
Between	60 808	1	69 808	5 069	028
Groups	07.000	1	07.000	5.007	.020
Within		()			
Groups	867.577	63	13.//1		
Total	937.385	64			

The ANOVA results in Table 5 show a significant effect of rubric-based assessment on critical thinking skills, with a p-value of (0.028), which is less than the significance level of (0.05). The F-statistic is (5.069), indicating that the variability between groups is significantly greater than within groups. Therefore, we **reject** the null hypothesis (Rubric-based assessment has no significant effect) and conclude that rubric-based assessments do have a significant impact on fostering critical thinking skills among higher education students.

Hypothesis 2: The specific components of rubric-based assessments do not significantly contribute to the development of critical thinking skills.

Table 6: ANOVA Results for the Contribution of Specific Components of Rubric-Based Assessments to Critical Thinking Skills

	Sum of		Mean		
	Squares	df	Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	185.541	1	185.541	5.366	.024

Within Groups	2178.244	63	34.575	
Total	2363.785	64		

The ANOVA results in Table 6 indicate a significant contribution of specific components of rubric-based assessments to the development of critical thinking skills, with a p-value of (0.024), which is less than the significance level of (0.05). The F-statistic is (5.366), showing that the variability between groups is significantly greater than within groups. Therefore, we **reject** the null hypothesis (The specific components do not significantly contribute) and conclude that the components of rubric-based assessments significantly contribute to the development of critical thinking skills.

Hypothesis 3: Feedback provided through rubric-based assessment does not significantly influence the improvement of critical thinking skills.

Table 7: ANOVA Results for the Influence of Feedback on Critical Thinking Skills Improvement through Rubric-Based Assessment

	Sum of		Mean		
	Squares	df	Square	F	Sig.
Between	180 703	1	180 703	6 809	011
Groups	109.703	1	109.703	0.009	.011
Within	1755.282	63	27.862		
Groups					
Total	1944.985	64			

The ANOVA results in Table 7 show a significant influence of feedback on the improvement of critical thinking skills through rubric-based assessment, with a p-value of (0.011), which is less than the significance level of (0.05). The F-statistic is (6.809), indicating that the variability between groups is significantly greater than within groups. Therefore, we **reject** the null hypothesis (Feedback does not significantly influence the improvement) and conclude that feedback provided through rubric-based assessment significantly influences the improvement of critical thinking skills.

### 4. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of rubric-based assessment in developing critical thinking skills among higher education students. The findings indicate that rubric-based assessments significantly enhance critical thinking by providing clear criteria, ensuring consistent evaluation, and fostering self-reflection. Specific components, such as analysis, logical reasoning, depth of understanding, and synthesis of ideas, play pivotal roles in promoting critical thinking. Furthermore, feedback provided through rubric-based assessments – especially when it clarifies expectations, encourages self-reflection, and promotes iterative learning – further contributes to the improvement of critical thinking skills. The results suggest that rubric-based assessments, when designed and implemented effectively, can be a powerful tool for developing critical thinking competencies in students. As such, educators should consider refining and emphasizing rubric-based assessments in their teaching practices to better support the development of these essential skills.

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