Abstract

Although the implementation of rubrics as teaching-learning and assessment tools has progressively become more visible in all educational settings, including the higher education context, lecturers' bona fide viewpoints about the matter remain largely unknown. Moreover, a noticeable gap in the literature on research regarding South African lecturers' views on the implementation of rubrics in a higher education environment was detected. Emanating from the above, the main purpose of this paper was to explore the views of a cohort of South African lecturers on the implementation of rubrics in a higher education environment. By applying a qualitative case study research design, 13 purposively sampled South African lecturers on one university campus participated in the research. After conducting semi-structured individual interviews with the sampled participants, six themes emerged from the data: types of rubrics; principal use of rubrics; rubric development; procedures for implementing rubrics; challenges of rubrics and the value of rubrics. The findings of the research revealed that the sampled participants prefer the use of holistic rubrics; that rubrics are principally used for assessment purposes; that the development of rubrics is informed by various sources; that rubrics are implement as antecedents to a task and that rubrics have benefits for students and lecturers.

Keywords: rubrics, feedback, assessment, constructivism, higher education, student engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last number of years, South African higher education has been confronted by a variety of transformational issues. Amongst others, one of the most demanding issues includes the considerable upsurge in student numbers and its consequences on retention and throughput rates; but perhaps more importantly, on the quality of students' learning experiences. Even though Hornsby and Osman (2014:713) maintain that regardless of the fact that large student numbers occupying university classrooms is not necessarily a distinguishing feature of student performance, it has an undeniable impact on educational goals and the quality of educational experiences. In an era that is almost emphatically characterised by constructivist views of learning, educational goals in higher education are supposed to move beyond mere knowledge acquisition to promoting student engagement and higher order cognitive thinking, which characterises deep
learning (Hornsby & Osman, 2014:713). Therefore, large student numbers compel lecturers to reflect on, appraise and modify their teaching and assessment approaches to maximise student learning by monitoring, improving and optimizing students' ability to “construct, learn, retain and transfer knowledge” (Wilson & Scalise, 2006:636). However, large student numbers inevitably result in disproportionate student to lecturer ratios, which complicate these matters. This is evident in lecturers' apparent unresponsiveness to implement effective processes and procedures to support and scaffold learning (Wilson & Scalise, 2006:643; Hendrey, 2013:133/134), the over-dependence on lecturer-centred or didactic teaching practices which merely aim to accomplish on time completion of the curriculum (Lombard, 2008:1038; Hornsby & Osman, 2014:713), and the distorted emphasis on product-oriented or end-loaded assessment (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell & Litjens, 2008:56; Bailey & Garner, 2010:188).

Although it is not claimed as a panacea for the conditions outlined above, Goodrich (1996/1997:14) regards rubrics as “powerful tools for both teaching and assessment” while its benefits to learning are also implied when it is stated that rubrics help students to “become more thoughtful judges of the quality of their own and others' work” (Goodrich, 1996/1997:15). Underscoring the aforementioned, Reddy and Andrade (2010:437) and Rezaei and Lovorn (2010:21) submit that the value of rubrics as one of the most promising emerging teaching-learning and assessment tools in constructivist educational practices during recent years should not be underestimated. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the implementation of rubrics have progressively become more visible in all educational contexts, including that of higher education. The university campus, on which this research was conducted, is no exception. On this campus, workshops were offered during the last couple of years to raise lecturers' consciousness about the potential of rubrics for encouraging student engagement and to motivate them to implement rubrics, especially in classes occupied by large student numbers. Although lecturers appeared to be positive about the implementation of rubrics in their classes after attending these workshops, their bona fide viewpoints about the matter remained unknown. Moreover, when applying inclusion criteria such as “rubrics”, “higher education”, “lecturer views” and “South Africa” to search the literature for related research to this study, only one source published during the past five years matched the said criteria (cf. Bharuthram, 2015). Hence, there appears to be a noticeable gap on research regarding South African lecturers' views on the implementation of rubrics in a higher education environment, which this paper envisages to address.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Theoretically, the purpose of this paper consists of two parts. The primary purpose entails the exploration of the views of a cohort of South African lecturers on the implementation of rubrics in a higher education environment
by applying a qualitative case study research design. To initiate the discussion, the secondary purpose of the paper is to provide a condensed theoretical outline of rubrics.

3. RUBRICS: AN ABRIDGED OVERVIEW

The term “rubric” originates from ruber or rubrica, the Latin for “red ink”, which initially signified the large red letters used in medieval manuscripts to highlight initial capitals in a text or to distinguish between the major sections of the manuscript. Modern-day educationalists have adopted the idea to differentiate and describe the rules that guide their scoring of students' work. Therefore, in some circles rubrics are also referred to as scoring guides or scoring matrixes.

Although defined in a variety of ways (cf. Goodrich, 1996/1997:14; Popham, 1997:72; Goodrich Andrade, 2000:13; McKenna, 2007:22; Andrade, Wang, Du & Akawi, 2009:287), an all-encompassing recent definition of a rubric suggests that it is “a document that describes the expectations for an assignment in an analytical way. It is usually presented in two dimensions: a component of pre-established criteria and performance levels in which performance features of each level is described in contrast with those of other levels” (Huang & Gui, 2015:126). Although various types of rubrics are distinguished in the literature, holistic and analytic rubrics appear to be the most recognisable. In the case of holistic rubrics, a task is assessed in its totality without judging the component parts separately (Nitko, 2001). Consequently, holistic rubrics do not clearly differentiate between strengths and weaknesses in student work (Suskie, 2018:546). Analytic rubrics are composed of several performance indicators and performance levels which are explicitly defined (Suskie, 2018:546). Hence, each performance indicator can be rated separately according to the stipulated performance levels that enhance the reliability of an analytic rubric as an assessment tool.

In relation to teaching, learning and assessment, it appears as if the motives for using rubrics are almost endless. A review of the literature reveals that the reasons for using rubrics are largely founded on, what can be called, operational functions. Without replicating excessive information from the literature, a condensed corpus of these functions covering a period of nearly 20 years is provided in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Operational functions of rubrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Popham (1997) | Serve as “instructional illuminators” to enhance instructional quality  
Serve as evaluative criteria to distinguish acceptable responses from unacceptable responses  
Provide quality definitions which describe the way that qualitative differences in responses are to be judged |
| Whittaker, Salend & Duhaney (2001) | Delineating various categories associated with learning activities  
Clarify and communicate learning expectations  
Link instruction with assessment  
Help students to reflect on the quality of their own work  
Guide learning improvement  
Establish standards of excellence  
Specifying qualities associated with different levels of proficiency  
Delineating various categories associated with an assessment task  
Make grading more objective and consistent  
Assist in the explanation of how grading will be done  
Involving students in their own learning |
| Cooper & Gargan (2009) | Help lecturers to think carefully and critically about what they are teaching and what students need to learn  
Make expectations and standards for performance clear to students  
Provide opportunities for reflection, feedback and continued learning |
Allow for fairer and more consistent grading  
Make assessment criteria more explicit  
Different levels of performance are described  
Allow students to judge and reflect on the quality of their work |
| Reddy & Andrade (2010) | Clarify and help students to understand the targets of their learning  
Help students to understand the standards of quality for a particular assessment task  
Help students to make dependable judgements about their own work  
Allow students to regulate their progress  
Make grades or marks transparent and fair  
Allow students to engage in a specified task  
Provides an objective basis for evaluation  
Makes grading more consistent, reliable and efficient  
Helps to keep focus on specific performances  
Increases interaction and participation in the classroom  
Could be used as source for feedback  
Suitable to grade an array of student performances  
Serves instructional, learning as well as evaluative purposes |
| Jonsson (2014) | Promote transparency since it clarifies expectations  
Increase students’ understanding of criteria  
Allow students to structure and assess the progress of their work  
Allow for student reflection on own competency |
| Panadero & Romero (2014) | Enhance students’ self-regulation  
Enhance the accuracy of self-assessment |
| Wang (2014) | Provide transparent criteria |
| Wu, Heng & Wang (2015) | Provide students with clarity about the learning goals  
Increase student self-efficacy  
Clarify learning expectations  
Provide a clear idea of what constitutes excellence  
Help students to take ownership of their learning  
Serve as a powerful motivational tool  
Enrich students’ learning experience |
From the information presented in Table 1, it can be inferred that hardly any differences in the operational functions of rubrics are observed over almost 20 years. However, a number of fundamental operational functions are perceptible. These include that rubrics are suitable tools for teaching, learning and assessment; they support transparency in as far as learning expectations, assessment criteria, performance standards and the attainment of these are concerned; they serve as sources for feed forward and feedback; they allow for more objective, reliable and valid assessment; they serve as basis for scholarly dialogue between lecturers and students and even among students; they serve as reflective tools for lecturers and students and they potentially encourage self-regulated and self-directed learning.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Background

As part of the new lecturer induction and ongoing professional development programmes offered on the university campus on which the research was conducted, several teaching, learning and assessment related topics are included. Amongst these, is the development and use of rubrics, which is offered in the form of a three-hour workshop. During this workshop, a brief theoretical overview of rubrics is provided by touching on aspects such as how it is defined, possible advantages and disadvantages of rubrics, distinguishing between different types of rubrics, specifying the purposes of rubrics, suggestions on how to approach the development of rubrics and how to introduce rubrics to students. In addition, workshop participants are engaged in practical exercises, which focus on the development of quality rubrics. After the completion of the workshop, participants are encouraged to develop and use their own rubrics. They are invited to seek further advice from the workshop facilitator, should they require supplementary information or any assistance concerning rubrics.

| Becker (2016) | Increase transparency of learning expectations  
| Menéndez-Varela & Gregori-Giralt, (2016) | Clarify learning targets  
| | Set standards of learning expectations  
| | Empower students to meet standards and make academic judgements  
| | Allow students to regulate their progress  
| | Allow for transparency and avoid effects of personal prejudices  
| | Improve communication between lecturer and students  
| | Provide a basis for structured dialogue centred on learning goals and processes  
| | Contribute towards assessment validity  
|
4.2 Research design

As indicated in the purpose statement, it was decided to approach the research from a qualitative perspective, which is embedded in the interpretivist paradigm. In this research the implementation of rubrics is explored by considering the views of the sampled lecturers, denoting that in terms of the interpretivist paradigm, reality is interpreted “through the meaning that research participants give to their life world” (Fouché & Schurink, 2012:309/310). Furthermore, due to the fact that the cohort of lecturers resides on one university campus, it was resolved that a case study would be the most suitable strategy of inquiry since the study concerns itself with an in-depth exploration of the views of these lecturers regarding the implementation of rubrics. It could be argued that the case study represents an instrumental case (Creswell, 2014:493), since it intends to illuminate a cohort of lecturers’ views on the implementation of rubrics.

4.3 Sampling

Based on their relevance rather than their representativeness (Flick, 2014:173) with regard to the purpose of the research, the cohort of lecturers was purposively selected. The sampled lecturers complied with the following criteria: they all attended the rubric workshop six months prior to the research; they all indicated that they certainly use rubrics, and they all signalled their willingness to share their views on the implementation of rubrics. Eventually, a group of 13 lecturers submitted their informed consent to participate in the research after ethical matters were clarified. This group of lecturers reflected heterogeneity in the sense that novice and lecturers that are more experienced, males and females, different ethnic groupings, different subject groupings, and teaching different academic year levels were represented in the research.

4.4 Method of data collection

Merriam (1998:72) postulates that interviewing is probably “the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals”. By applying semi-structured, individual interviews, the 13 sampled lecturers shared their views on the implementation of rubrics. Semi-structured interviews were regarded as apposite for this explorative study since such interviews conform to “a line of inquiry” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:93) which helps the researcher (and interviewees) to keep to the focus of the research. Although interview questions were informed by the literature review, the phrasing of key questions were primarily stimulated by the researcher’s curiosity about the impact of the three-hour rubric workshop offered as part of the new lecturer induction and ongoing professional development programme. Care was taken to ensure deliberations during the interviews centred on lecturers' implementation of rubrics. Therefore, the researcher found the following key questions appropriate:
a) Clarify which type(s) of rubric(s) do you prefer using?
b) For which purpose(s) do you use rubrics?
c) Explain how you go about developing the rubrics you use.
d) Describe how you implement the rubrics that you have developed in your classroom.
e) What do you find challenging about the development and implementation of rubrics?
f) Express your opinion about the value of rubrics.

The interviews were conducted at suitable times that were pre-arranged with the sampled lecturers and all interviews were done in the privacy of participants' offices. Interviews were voice-recorded with the participants' permission and a timeframe of approximately 30 minutes was allowed for each interview.

4.5 Quality criteria

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several sources of rigour were considered. Interview responses were validated for their credibility by applying “member checking” (Creswell, 2014:286) where interviewees were requested to endorse the accuracy of their transcribed responses. Triangulation, in the form of the inclusion of a variation of research participants and the researcher's efforts to maintain “a degree of neutrality” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:125) throughout the study, allowed for the crystallisation and confirmability of the research findings (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:121/125). In addition, thick descriptions of the research methods and the data analysis, direct quotes from the interviews and consideration of the literature, contributed towards the transferability of the findings (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2012:420).

4.6 Limitations of the research

Limitations of the research include that the research was restricted to only one South African university campus and that a relatively small sample (n=13) participated in the study. However, considering the nature of this qualitative study, it mainly focused on the exploration and understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014:10), which in this case was the views of a cohort of South African lecturers on the implementation of rubrics in a higher education environment. The fact that the researcher acted as workshop facilitator and conducted research on the same topic could be seen as yet another limitation. To guard against the possible contamination of the research results due to this dual role of the researcher, several precautionary measures were taken (cf. 4.5).
The data analysis was done manually. After all 13 interviews were transcribed, it was coded by means of open coding. By following a process of constant comparison (Flick, 2014:496), the identified open codes were associated with axial codes which evolved as the centre points of the data. These centre points were then categorised as themes to provide “advanced abstractions” (Mills, Birks & Hoare, 2014:115) to serve as a framework for the discussion and interpretation of the data. Eventually six themes transpired from the inductive data analysis, which included: types of rubrics; principal use of rubrics; rubric development; procedures for implementing rubrics; challenges of rubrics and the value of rubrics. Subsequently, the information shared by the research participants that resulted in the emerging themes will be discussed.

5.1 Types of rubrics

Although some of the participants indicated that they use a mix of holistic and analytical rubrics, the data clearly suggest that the use of holistic rubrics dominates the type of rubrics implemented by the participants. The preferences for using holistic rubrics more often were indicated by some of the research participants as: “Compared to an analytic rubric, they [holistic rubrics] are quite easy to create”; “I am still finding my way with rubrics” and “The time factor…”. One participant alluded to the fact that the reason why she likes holistic rubrics better is due to her belief that students do not always know how to interpret analytical rubrics. In cases where analytic rubrics are favoured, one research participant replied: “Holistic is just … too broad, they [the students] are still left with the question: 'I don't know for what I got my mark’”.

Quite troubling is the fact that two of the research participants revealed that they are not sure which type of rubric they use or how types of rubrics are differentiated. One responded: “… at the moment … what I know, I know what a rubric is … but now, the types … the different types of rubrics, I am not sure…”, while the other one doubtfully said: “I do not really know what the difference between rubrics is … I am not totally sure what the differences are …”

5.2 Principal use of rubrics

Notwithstanding the type of rubrics used, it was also clear from the participants’ responses that rubrics are most commonly used for formal assessment purposes. Self-assured, one participant replied: “I use rubrics definitely more for formal assessment because we only discuss matters when doing informal assessment”. Still uncertain about the application of rubrics in informal assessment, another participant said that he uses rubrics for formal assessment purposes but that “I would like to get guidance regarding the use
of rubrics for informal [assessment], because I don't have the knowledge. I certainly have a need for more guidance … and I think more specifically regarding informal assessment”.

5.3 Rubric development

According to the sampled participants, the development of rubrics is mainly guided by four sources. These sources include: the nature of the assessment task, the applicable learning outcomes, examples on the internet and examples in the study material. With regard to the nature of the assessment task as guiding source for rubric development, one participant stated: “I look at my assessment task and divide it into sections which will represent what I will be looking for in the rubric”. Extending on considering the nature of the assessment task, one more participant added that colleagues teaching the same course are also consulted for their inputs when developing rubrics: “One of us will start a framework on the task and send it to the others who will make track changes or comments … it takes approximately two days and then we finally sit and finalise the rubric”. Two participants mentioned the learning outcomes as a guiding source for developing rubrics: “Outcomes play an important role … you definitely have to consider the outcomes … you must be sure of what you want to assess; what precisely is it that you want to know”; “If they [the students] can't understand what I am looking for, then there is no use for them … I am steered by the outcomes”. Adapting internet examples of rubrics for developing their own are probably the most prevalent guiding source amongst the sampled participants. Some responses regarding the use of internet examples for developing rubrics include the following: “I got a lot of examples from the internet … I rely very heavily on the internet to gather information”. “It's difficult [to develop a rubric], especially if you are attempting a new one. I usually go on to the internet and then I will go and search and look at examples - then it gives me a little bit of foundation to work on”. “It's a big problem … constructing the rubric … that is a headache. It is so nice to get a sample … a model from the internet and then work from there and maybe align it to the needs of your task”. “As a novice, I always google… go to Google and check the types and examples of rubrics … and I take it from there”. “Up to this stage, I never developed a rubric from scratch on my own … I don’t want to take chances on this level and rather consult the net”.

Three of the research participants indicated that they develop their own rubrics by consulting the examples of rubrics provided in their study material. One participant remarked: “Through trial and error … I make use of the rubric examples which are standard in all our study guides” while yet another participant said: “I develop my own rubrics … I think I … I refer to what others have done in the study material and see how I can adapt it to what I require”. 


5.4 Procedures for implementing rubrics

Without exception, and irrespective of the fact of whether holistic or analytic rubrics are favoured, all the sampled research participants asserted that they provide their students with an applicable rubric to the assessment task before students commence working on such a task. By implication, this also relates to the value the research participants attach to rubrics in terms of sharing information preceding a specific task with their students (cf. 5.6). However, it appears as if a distinction can be drawn between a direct and indirect approach when providing rubric information to students. A direct approach implies that the rubric information is shared on a personal or interactive basis with students, while an indirect approach suggests that information is provided to students without any personal contact or interaction.

The following responses exemplify a direct approach in sharing the rubric information with students: “I do not just give the rubric [to students]; I train them in class of how they should use it. I am always open for further consultations, should individuals want to ask any questions [concerning the rubric]”. “I use the rubric together with the task and explain in class what I expect them [the students] to do upfront”. “The rubric and assignment are loaded on …[the LMS] for students to get familiar. They should not yet start [with the assignment]. After about a week we discuss it [the rubric and assignment] in class and only then they may continue.” By following an apparent indirect approach, participants reacted as follows: “The students receive the rubric with the assignment; so they know how I will assess them.” “The rubric is attached to the assignment and handed to the students in class to give them enough time to complete their work.” “The assignment is given in class…we then discusses it for clarity. The rubric ... I put that on.... [the LMS].”

5.5 Challenges of rubrics

According to the interviewees, the challenges posed by rubrics are mainly threefold: they are difficult to develop; their development is time consuming, and students do not always pay attention to them.

With regard to the difficulties experienced in developing rubrics, three research participants reacted as follow: “I find it difficult to link the outcomes to what should be in the rubric”. “To hit the right mix is demanding...outcomes, level descriptors, criteria…all should be pulled together.” “It is not easy to develop…the subtle differentiation between various performance levels...wow, if your language is not good, you suffer.”

Some of the sampled participants highlighted that the development of a rubric requires time. “I am not always eager to set rubrics … it takes considerable time to develop.” “Developing them [rubrics] …oh…is so time consuming. On the other hand, when you have them, they can be used over and over …

1 Learning Management System
sometimes with only some modifications.” “Well, I can say time is a challenge. A lot of effort goes into their development.”

Pointing to another challenge of rubrics revealed the participants' frustration with students not realising that rubrics could actually assist in improving their performance. “I often find that my students…although they have it… do not read them [the rubrics]. Maybe it is also a matter of not really understanding the purpose of rubrics.” “I can get so annoyed if a student quarrels about marks, but admits that he only looked at the rubric but completed the assignment by relying on his own initiatives…which are not always in line with the criteria.” “Students do not read them [the rubrics] because I think they feel uncertain of how to use them.” “I know that not all lecturers use rubrics…so, students … especially those junior ones…are not familiar with them and do not know how to use them.”

5.6 The value of rubrics

Justifying the value of rubrics, the research participants' responses can mainly be clustered under two broad categories: benefits to students and consistency of marking. Viewed holistically, these two categories imply that the participants reason that rubrics have value for both students and lecturers. With regard to how rubrics benefit students, responses included the following: “It [a rubric] addresses weak and excellent performers…in that it guides and supports them and explains levels of performance.” “Occasionally some of my students come back to me and tell me how the rubric helped them. They tell me that the rubric provided a pathway for the completion of their assignment…they knew exactly what counts.” “I could detect…when students got a rubric, their work improved. The work quality is just better because they rather look at the rubric than only at the instructions [of the assignment].”

Participants also valued rubrics for aiding them to mark students' work more consistently. “Rubrics certainly come in handy when marking. I feel I treat all students more equal.” “It ensures criterion referenced marking…students' performance is supported by specified criteria.” “If I use a rubric, biasedness is avoided…it helps me to steer clear from giving an impression mark…my marking is more fair. A rubric brings order to my marking.” “It promotes consistency in my marking since I can easily distinguish between important and less important information and where and for what marks should be considered. With a rubric it is also simpler to detect where students experienced problems with the assignment.”

6. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Derived from the transpired themes (cf. 5.1-5.6) five key findings of the research are delineated below by also considering applicable operational functions of rubrics as advocated by the literature (cf. 3).
6.1 A preference for holistic rubrics

The sampled participants’ preference for holistic rubrics is noticeable (cf. 5.1). Considering the challenges experienced by the participants with the development of rubrics (cf. 5.5), which include effort, time and students' apparent disregard of rubrics, the tendency of favouring holistic rubrics could be ascribed to its simplicity and less amount of time required to construct. Moreover, the preference of holistic rubrics could further be justified by the fact that students would probably find this type of rubrics more comprehensible. However, the predominance of holistic rubrics raises questions about the extent to which they satisfy the following operational functions of rubrics as referred to in Table 1: the provision of quality descriptive definitions to distinguish amply between qualitative differences in students' work (Popham, 1997); the sufficient delineation of various categories associated with an assessment task (Whittaker, Salend & Duhaney, 2001); explicitly specifying assessment criteria, expectations, standards and levels of performance (Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Mansilla, Duraisingh, Wolfe & Haynes, 2009); increasing students' understanding of criteria (Jonsson, 2014); providing a clear idea of what constitutes excellence (Wu, Heng & Wang, 2015), and empowering students to make sound academic judgements to meet standards (Menéndez-Varela & Gregori-Giralt, 2016).

6.2 Rubrics are principally used for assessment

From the participants' responses, there is convincing evidence that the implementation of rubrics is predominantly devoted to assessment. In more particular terms, it is deduced that the sample group use rubrics for formal or summative assessment purposes, which mainly constitute assignments (cf. 5.2). Thus, the participants implement rubrics in a more restrictive or narrow way than indicated in the literature, where a more comprehensive implementation of rubrics would also include teaching and learning. For example, Popham (1997) refers to rubrics as “instructional illuminators”, while Whittaker, Salend and Duhaney (2001) suggest that rubrics delineate categories associated with learning activities and guide learning improvement. According to Cooper and Gargan (2009), rubrics also help lecturers to think carefully and critically about what they are teaching and what students need to learn. It is also contended that rubrics make student learning visible, enrich learning experiences by clarifying and helping students to understand their learning targets and increase interaction and participation in the classroom (Mansilla, Duraisingh, Wolfe & Haynes, 2009; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Wu, Heng & Wang, 2015; Becker, 2016; Menéndez-Varela & Gregori-Giralt, 2016).

6.3 Various sources inform rubric development

With regard to the development of rubrics, it could be argued that irrespective of the sources guiding rubric development, the purpose for which the rubric
will be used and the intentions of the task at hand (whether it be teaching, learning or assessment related), should be transparent, understandable and attainable to all parties concerned.

The research participants admitted that the development of their rubrics is essentially informed by four sources. For developing rubrics, they consider the nature of the assessment task, the applicable learning outcomes, examples on the internet and examples in the study material (cf. 5.3). Noticeable in the participants' responses, is the apparent prevalence of examples as basis for rubric development. It therefore appears as if the respondents associate themselves with Crusan's (2001:72) “adopt and adapt” strategy or “intuitive methodologies” (where rubrics are based on other rubric samples) (Janssen, Meier & Trace, 2015:53) when developing rubrics.

6.4 Rubrics are implemented as antecedents to the task

The sampled participants reported that rubrics are shared with students before they start working on their assessment task (cf. 5.4). This practice certainly raises students' awareness of expectations associated with a particular task; helps them to reflect on the quality of their work and assists them in knowing how grading will be done (Whittaker, Salend & Duhaney, 2001; Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Mansilla, Duraisingh, Wolfe & Hayne, 2009). It also promotes transparency (Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Jonsson, 2014; Wang, 2014; Becker, 2016; Menéndez-Varela & Gregori-Giralt, 2016), constructive engagement with a specific task (Reddy & Andrade, 2010) and self-regulation of progress (Panadero & Romero, 2014; Wu, Heng & Wang, 2015).

6.5 Rubrics have mutual benefits

The research participants acknowledge that rubrics hold value for both students and lecturers (cf. 5.6). Notwithstanding factors such as the research participants' preference for holistic rubrics (cf. 6.1) and that rubrics are mainly used for assessment purposes (cf. 6.2), the participants are tacitly aware that rubrics benefit students in that it communicates and explicates expectations and standards (Whittaker, Salend & Duhaney, 2001; Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Mansilla, Duraisingh, Wolfe & Haynes, 2009; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Johnsson, 2014; Wu, Heng & Wang, 2015; Becker, 2016). Seemingly, participants are also conscious that rubrics constructively contribute towards objectivity, consistency (Whittaker, Salend & Duhaney, 2001) fairness (Mansilla, Duraisingh, Wolfe & Haynes, 2009) transparency, reliability and validity (Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Johnsson, 2014; Wang, 2014; Becker, 2016; Menéndez-Varela & Gregori-Giralt, 2016).
7. **CONSEQUENCES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS EMANATING FROM THE RESEARCH**

Although it appears as if the workshops offered to the academic staff who participated in this research stimulated the implementation of rubrics to some extent, a number of general and more specific recommendations to advance the use of rubrics could be inferred from the research findings. Implicitly, both these sets of recommendations also articulate the need for further research on rubrics in especially the South African higher education milieu. With reference to general recommendations, it is suggested that more intensified staff development and follow-up sessions over longer periods of time are required to sanction the full potential of rubrics in this specific higher education environment. In addition, it turns out that faculty and departmental endorsement of the use and value of rubrics as well as establishing communities of practice within academic departments, could enhance the quality, development and effective implementation of rubrics. In as far as students and the effective implementation of rubrics are concerned, it is evident that students need to be taken on board at an early stage (with a formative purpose in mind), by enabling them to understand and skilfully apply the rubrics.

Against the backdrop of large student numbers occupying university classrooms as well as the present prominence of constructivist views on teaching, learning and assessment as alluded to earlier in this paper, more specific recommendations are induced by the findings. These recommendations point towards so-called “crucial competences for higher education students” (Panadero, Alonso-Tapia & Reche, 2013:125) and include, amongst others, the following:

- **Due to its perspicuous potential, the development and implementation of quality analytic rubrics should be vigorously promoted.** Viewed from a constructivist point of view, and despite alerts that rubrics could negatively affect student creativity (Young, 2009), the range and extent of 'feed forward' and 'feedback' information offered by quality analytic rubrics, could enhance students' ability to assess and reflect critically on their own work.
- **Underscored by research findings by Reddy and Andrade (2010:446), the current research also revealed that stronger efforts are required to stimulate the use of rubrics beyond the purposes of assessment only and to adopt them as teaching and learning tools as well.** Inherent in adopting rubrics for teaching and learning purposes, the latent value of rubrics for learning engagement and student reflection could also emerge.
- **In as far as student empowerment and autonomy is concerned, the involvement of students to co-develop rubrics should also be considered.** This practice could support the potential value of rubrics in creating 'deep learning' (Stefl-Mabry, 2004).
• The direct engagement of students when introducing a rubric for a specific task appears to be imperative. This would probably raise student awareness of task expectations; genuinely immerse students in the task as from the very beginning and encourage self-regulated or self-directed behaviour.
• To establish the true value of rubrics, student voices should be prudently noted. Detailed research on students' perspectives of rubrics appears to be limited and their opinions may differ significantly from those of lecturers and researchers.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the views of a cohort of South African lecturers on the implementation of rubrics in a higher education environment. As gathered from the literature, the paper demonstrated that the operational value of rubrics remains indisputable. In addition, the reported empirical research drew attention to some thought-provoking information as outlined in the previous section. It can finally be concluded that rubrics, especially in the South African higher education context, warrants more extensive research since its conjectured value in overcrowded classrooms which supposedly exemplifies constructivism, still needs to be proved.

9. REFERENCES


