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THE ROLE OF STRUCTURED RUBRICS IN ENHANCING HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN SABAH PRIMARY SCHOOL: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract: *Assessment practices in primary school social sciences education present unique challenges due to the multifaceted nature of the competencies involved. While holistic assessment has been promoted as a way of reflecting the interrelated aspects of student learning, its application is usually undermined by inconsistent scoring, lack of diagnostic feedback, and subjectivity of the evaluators. Structured rubrics are one of the tools that have been highly suggested to mitigate these constraints. The purpose of the scoping review is to map and synthesize the literature available on the role of structured rubrics in improving holistic assessment in primary school. The review is conducted in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) and is a systematic study of peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025, based on the Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC databases, guided by the framework by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), as refined by Levac et al Results show that structured rubrics enhance assessment transparency, inter-rater reliability, help students to regulate themselves and develop metacognition, and provide more focused instructional feedback. The review cites constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) and formative assessment theory (Black and Wiliam, 1998) as the major theoretical frameworks which support effective rubric-based assessment. The recent meta-analysis (Panadero et al., 2023) supports the presence of a moderate positive impact of rubrics on academic performance. Nevertheless, there are still issues regarding teacher evaluation literacy, time, contextual flexibility and accessibility of the rubric language to young learners. This scoping review contributes to the field by providing a comprehensive synthesis of research evidence and offering practical recommendations for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen holistic assessment in primary education.*

Keywords: *structured rubrics, holistic assessment, primary school, social sciences education, scoping review, formative assessment, self-regulated learning*

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Introduction

Assessment is widely recognized as one of the most consequential elements of educational practice. It is not only a measurement device of what students have learned, but it is a process that influences learning, but has effects on student motivation, self-perception and attitude to study (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Assessment stakes are especially high in the domain of social sciences education in the primary school level since the subject area involves competencies that cannot be broken down to right-or-wrong answers. Learners should gain skills in historical reasoning, civic responsibility, cross-cultural empathy, the ability to study social phenomena in a multi-faceted manner, and the skills to learn to make evidence-based arguments associated with complex social issues (Jones et al., 2015; Bordoh et al., 2024). These interrelated competencies call for assessment approaches that can honour their complexity.

One approach that has been suggested to be quite appropriate due to its capacity to measure this complexity is that of holistic assessment, which considers student performance as a whole, not as a collection of disaggregated components (Arter & McTighe, 2001). An example is the use of holistic rubrics, which offer a single overall score through a global assessment of excellence, which can be more reflective of the interrelationships of competencies in social sciences (Brookhart, 2018). Nonetheless, there are serious challenges to holistic assessment. It has been reported that there are always challenges in the scoring consistency when evaluators use global impressions and not explicit criteria, low diagnostic value since a single score does not inform students on the specific areas to improve on and that it is vulnerable to subjective bias due to lack of structured evaluative criteria (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013).

The structured rubrics have become a potential solution to these problems. In a general sense, a rubric is a assessment instrument that outlines the standards that student work will be evaluated based on and offers descriptions that describe the attributes of work at various quality levels (Andrade, 2000; Brookhart, 2013). The word has its roots in the Latin rubrica, which translates to red earth, an allusion to the medieval tradition of highlighting important text in red in order to indicate what is the most important- an etymology that well serves to describe the current role of the rubric as an indicator of what constitutes the ideal in student performance (Arter & McTighe, 2001). Additionally, in primary school, rubrics were linked to increased transparency, more consistent scoring, increased formative feedback, and increased student involvement in self-assessment (English et al., 2022; Panadero et al., 2023).

Objectives of the Scoping Review

The primary aim of this scoping review is to identify, map, and synthesize the available literature on the issue of the role of structured rubrics in improving holistic assessment in primary school education, especially in the social sciences. The research questions that guide the review include:

RQ1. What is the nature, extent, and range of research activity on structured rubrics in the context of holistic assessment in primary education?
RQ2. How are structured rubrics conceptualized, designed, and applied in primary school holistic assessment practices?
RQ3. What evidence exists regarding the impact of structured rubrics on the quality and outcomes of holistic assessment?
RQ4. What challenges, enablers, and knowledge gaps can be identified in this domain?

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This study is intended to be of value to several audiences. For educators, it offers a research-based summary of the way that structured rubrics can be designed successfully and incorporated in holistic assessment practice. To curriculum developers, it provides evidence on the circumstances of how rubrics are most effective at enhancing the quality of assessment. It can be used by policymakers to determine the systemic factors such as teacher professional development, time allocation and policy coherence that impact the success of the rubric-based assessment reform in primary schools.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing international evidence on rubric-based assessment, four interrelated concerns drives review. Firstly, holistic assessment in primary social sciences remains inconsistently implemented, leading to variable scoring and limited diagnostic value (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Brookhart, 2018). Secondly, primary school teachers in many jurisdictions including Sabah, Malaysia, often lack sufficient assessment literacy to confidently design and apply rubric-based holistic assessment (Gupta & Mehrotra, 2024; Winters, 2021). Thirdly, classroom-level support for rubric use such as exemplars, calibration training, and collaborative moderation, is frequently weak or absent leaving teachers without the necessary infrastructure required for effective implementation (Stanley, 2021; Ling, 2024). Fourthly, and the existing scholarly literature on structured rubrics in primary school holistic assessment is fragmented across disciplines educational levels and geographic contexts. Available reviews often combine findings from higher education and K–12 settings, rarely distinguish between formative and summative rubrics use and seldom address primary education. (English et al., 2022). The intersection of structured rubrics and holistic assessment in primary school, particularly within Southeast Asian and Malaysian contexts, has not received dedicated scholarly synthesis. The review addresses the problem of a lack of synthesised evidence on the role of structured rubrics in enhancing holistic assessment at the primary school level. By mapping the available literature, the review aims to inform the practitioners and policymakers about the contextual concerns of implementation assessment literacy and classroom support they must address.

Methodology

Scoping Review Framework

This scoping review was carried out according to the five-stage methodology framework, which was firstly developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and then improved by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010). These five steps include: (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) selecting studies; (4) charting the data; and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) guidance on scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020) was also used to ensure methodological rigour, especially the charting of data and consultation with stakeholders. The review is reported based on the Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension of Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist, a list of twenty required and two optional reporting items aimed at improving the transparency and reproducibility of scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018).

The scoping review approach was chosen instead of a systematic review since the main objective of the current study is to chart the scope and character of the accessible evidence, as opposed to evaluating the quality or synthesizing the impacts of single studies. Scoping reviews are especially suitable in situations when the research problem is broad, the literature is heterogeneous in its methodology and setting, and the purpose is not to provide a clear response to a specific clinical question (Munn et al., 2018; Pham et al., 2014).

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A search strategy was constructed using an iterative process with the help of a research librarian. Three databases were searched: Scopus, Web of science and ERIC. These databases were chosen because of their indexing of peer-reviewed literature in the field of education and the social sciences. Search terms used included combinations of the following words with Boolean operators: "structured rubric" OR "assessment rubric" OR "scoring rubric" OR "holistic rubric" OR "analytic rubric" AND "holistic assessment" OR "formative assessment" OR "assessment for learning" AND "primary school" OR "elementary school" OR "K-12" OR "primary education." Further search of reference lists of included studies and other pertinent review articles was done by hand to find more eligible sources. Only publications in English were searched between January 2000 and December 2025.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was developed after discussion with research expert. Three electronic databases were used to search for related articles and journals. This research uses databased from Universiti Malaysia Sabah and open access. The electronic databased were Scopus, ProQuest/ERIC, and Lens.org. Scopus was selected for its broad multidisciplinary indexing of peer-reviewed literature, including journals from all major publishers. ProQuest&ERIC was included as an education-specific database with strong coverage of primary and K–12 education literature. Lens.org is a free open-access scholarly search platform and was added to complement the institutional databases and maximising research coverage. Google Scholar was also searched as a supplementary source to capture additional literatures and case-study. Each database was searched between January 2000 and December 2025 and restricted to only English-language publications. Three concept blocks were combined using Boolean operators: a rubric block, a holistic and formative assessment block, and a primary education block. Internal terms block were combined with *OR*, and blocks were combined with *AND*. The exact search strings applied in each database are reported in Table . This combined the searched fields, filters applied, and number of records retrieved on the final search date.

Table 1: Database Search Strings, Fields, Filters, and Records Retrieved

Database	Search string	Fields / Filters	Records (n)
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY("structured rubric*" OR "assessment rubric*" OR "scoring rubric*" OR "holistic rubric*" OR "analytic rubric*") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("holistic assessment" OR "formative assessment" OR "assessment for learning") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "primary education" OR "K-12")	Title, abstract, keywords; English; 2000–2025; document type: article or review	3
ProQuest / ERIC	("structured rubric" OR "assessment rubric" OR "scoring rubric" OR "holistic rubric" OR "analytic rubric") AND ("holistic assessment" OR "formative assessment" OR "assessment for learning") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education")	Abstract; English; 2000–2025; peer-reviewed only	20
Lens.org	("structured rubric" OR "assessment rubric" OR "scoring rubric" OR "holistic rubric" OR "analytic rubric") AND ("holistic assessment" OR "formative assessment" OR	Title, abstract, keywords; English; 2000–	496

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	"assessment for learning") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school" OR "primary education" OR "K-12")	2025; document type: journal article	
Google Scholar	("structured rubric" OR "assessment rubric" OR "rubric") AND ("holistic assessment" OR "formative assessment") AND ("primary school" OR "elementary school" OR "pupils" OR "K-12")	Title and full text; English; 2000–2025; first 20 result pages screened	35
Total			**554**

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Both the inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined a priori and were narrowed down as the screening process occurred, in line with the advice given by Levac et al. (2010) to remain rigorous and flexible in scoping review study selection. Table 1 summarizes the criteria.

Table 2: Summary of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Primary/elementary school students (ages 5–12) or their teachers	Exclusively higher education, secondary, or adult learners
Concept	Design, implementation, or evaluation of structured rubrics in assessment	Rubrics used solely for programme accreditation or teacher evaluation
Context	Social sciences or cross-curricular settings with transferable findings	Discipline-specific contexts without generalisable implications
Source type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, dissertations	Editorials, book reviews, opinion pieces, non-empirical commentaries
Language/Date	English; published January 2000 – December 2025	Non-English; published before 2000

Study Selection and Data Charting

Study selection followed a two-stage screening process. The inclusion criteria were screened against these two reviewers in the first stage, where titles and abstracts of all records retrieved were individually screened against the inclusion criteria. Records that were considered potentially relevant by either of the reviewers were also kept as full-text review records. The second stage involved evaluation of entire texts of retained records on the criteria of eligibility. Conflicts among reviewers were settled by discussion and in cases where this was necessary, by consulting a third reviewer. All the steps of the selection process were captured in a PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1). A standardized extraction form was utilized to data chart to capture the following data about each of the included studies: author(s), year of publication, country, educational setting, study design, type of rubric, assessment purpose (formative or summative), important findings, and challenges identified. The data were charted and analyzed using thematic analysis, which included deductive (based on the research questions) and inductive (based on the contents of the included studies) themes, as suggested by Levac et al. (2010).

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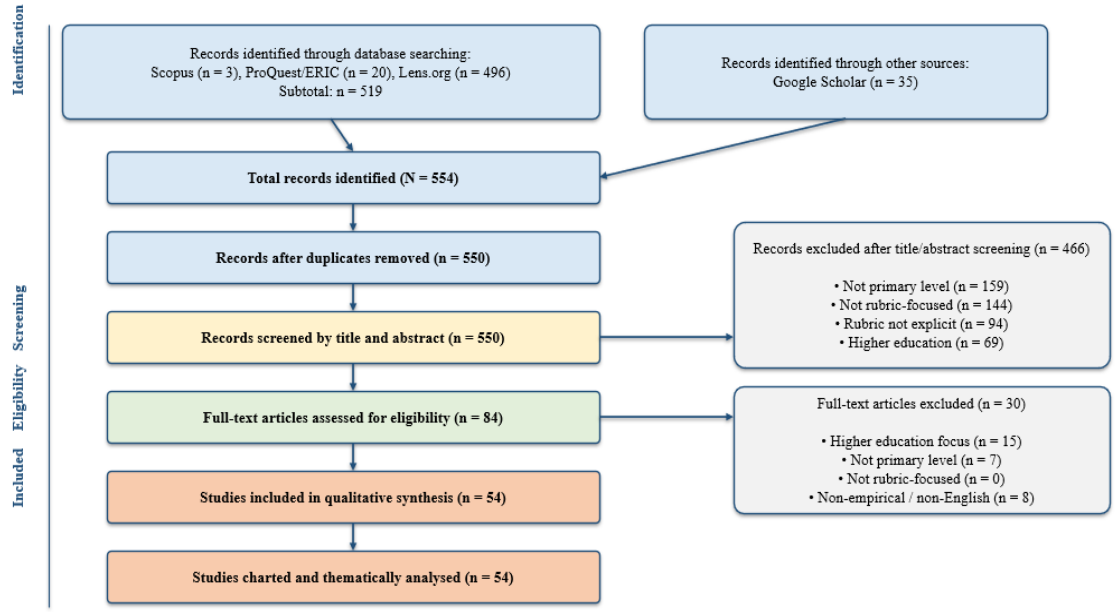
Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process



Adapted from Tricco et al. (2018). PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR).

Findings

Synthesis Overview: Consistent, Mixed, and Underexplored Evidence

The analytical pattern that appeared in all 54 included studies is summarized in this section. As demonstrated by the meta-analytic synthesis by Panadero et al (202, the literature consistently supports the contribution of structured rubrics to assessment transparency, the formative function of assessment, inter-rater reliability when assessors are trained, and a moderately positive effect on academic performance (g = 0.45. Additionally, effects are regularly documented in relation to how well students comprehend expectations and how feedback dialogue is structured (English et al. 2022; Jonsson and Panadero, 2013). Effects are also consistently reported in relation to student understanding of expectations and the structuring of feedback dialogue (English et al., 2022; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Several areas remain underexplored. Few studies have addressed primary social sciences specifically and very few conducted in the Global South or in Malaysian primary schools. Longitudinal effects on student learning trajectories, the role of student voice in rubric development at primary level, and the implications of curriculum reforms such as Malaysia's classroom-based assessment (Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah) for rubric use are insufficiently documented in the international literature.

Overview of Structured Rubrics

According to the assessment literature, a structured rubric is an assessment instrument that clarifies the criteria by which the student work is measured and outlines the performance levels on a quality scale by providing a detailed description (Andrade, 2000; Brookhart, 2018). The rubric has two purposes: to guide the scoring process to assessors and to offer students a learning experience during which they can see the standards and expectations of quality in a particular task (Panadero and Jonsson, 2013). The rubrics can be designed in various ways, and three main types are distinguished throughout the literature reviewed.

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Analytic rubrics decompose a task into specific criteria (such as content knowledge, critical thinking, organization, and communication), each of which is rated separately on a specified rating scale. The eventual score is usually a sum or weighted total of the criterion scores. Analytic rubrics are appreciated due to their ability to offer criterion-specific feedback that is rich in details and helps the students to comprehend where they have improved and where they should improve (Brookhart and Chen, 2015; Kan, 2007). *Holistic rubrics* use a single total mark on the basis of an impression of overall quality and the descriptions of the performance level are given in terms of the overall features of work as opposed to using a specific criterion. Holistic rubrics are effective to mark, and can reflect the overall quality of student work, but give less diagnostic information (Arter & McTighe, 2001). The *developmental rubrics* explain development of students on a proficiency scale between novice and expert and they are mainly applicable when one is interested in monitoring the development of students over time. A newer version, *the single-point rubric*, offers descriptors in detail at the proficiency level, leaving blank space where the individualized comments and areas of improvement may be written (Gonzalez, 2014; McTighe et al., 2020).

The conceptual frameworks that support the application of structured rubrics in assessment rely on two overlapping frameworks. Constructive alignment, proposed by Biggs (1996, 2003) is the idea that successful learning takes place when the desired learning outcomes, the activities of teaching and learning as well as the tasks of assessment are aligned in a coherent way. This alignment is operationalized through rubrics, which transforms the desired learning outcomes into clear, measurable standards, thus making sure that what is being taught is the same as what is being graded (Biggs and Tang, 2011). The concept of formative assessment as described by Black and Wiliam (1998) focuses on the fact that assessment must be a learning tool, rather than a certification tool. In this context, rubrics are formative by helping create transparency around success criteria, allowing students to assess themselves and evaluate their work by other students, and offer a systematic foundation when offering specific instructional feedback (Panadero and Jonsson, 2013; English et al., 2022).

The advantages reported in the studies reviewed are large. Rubrics also increase the clarity of assessment by clarifying the expectations of the assessment to the students and the assessor, which minimizes ambiguity (Stevens and Levi, 2005). They enhance inter-rater reliability by ensuring that they have a shared system of evaluation, which limits subjective variation (Jonsson and Svingby, 2007). Most importantly, the last and the most extensive meta-analysis of the rubric effects (Panadero et al., 2023) that synthesized the results of 21 studies reported a moderate positive effect of rubrics on academic performance ($g = 0.45$, 95% CI [0.312, 0.831]) which is a strong quantitative evidence in support of the argument that rubrics The same meta-analysis also identified positive, but not statistically significant effects on self-regulated learning and self-efficacy, indicating that these effects might be more context-specific.

Impact on Holistic Assessment

The reviewed literature provides convergent evidence that structured rubrics improve the quality and rigour of holistic assessment in primary education, and works in a number of interconnected mechanisms.

Enhancing Transparency and Reducing Assessment Anxiety

A recurring finding is that posting rubrics with students prior to an assignment helps develop a better idea of what good work entails. This transparency helps to facilitate self-directed learning, and has been linked to lower levels of assessment-related anxiety, especially in

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younger learners who otherwise might experience uncertainty about what is expected of them by the teacher (Panadero and Jonsson, 2013; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Rubrics have a role to play in a holistic assessment setting, where the standards of success might appear especially unclear, in mediating between professional judgment of the assessor and the sense of quality as perceived by the student.

Supporting Formative Assessment and Feedback

In the scoping review of rubrics in K-12 formative assessment, English et al. (2022) found 36 studies published between 1998 and 2020 covering kindergarten through the last year of high school. They find that when teachers rely on rubrics to facilitate formative assessment, it improves teacher practice and student outcomes such as achievement, engagement and lifelong learning skills. The review highlights the fact that rubrics serve as a means of making learning goals visible and in organizing the feedback dialog between the teacher and the student.

Facilitating Self-Assessment and Self-Regulation

Various studies have been able to prove that rubrics aid in student self-assessment and metacognitive growth. A study of primary school students revealed that performance positively correlated with self-assessment with rubrics, especially in writing (Papadakis and Kalogiannakis, 2021). According to Panadero and Jonsson (2013), there are five ways in which rubrics serve to enhance self-regulated learning: enhancing the transparency of the assessment process, reducing anxiety, supporting the comprehension of feedback, developing self-efficacy, and promoting self-regulation strategies. The mechanisms have specifically been significant in holistic assessment where without clear criteria, students would otherwise lack a clear guideline on how to assess their own progress.

Improving Scoring Consistency

In their seminal review of rubric reliability and validity, Jonsson and Svingby (2007) identified that rubrics enhance inter-rater reliability, especially when assessors are trained in the use of rubrics. Such a discovery is important to the holistic assessment process, whereby inconsistencies among the raters can be increased due to the dependence on global judgments. Structured rubrics alleviate this risk by offering common evaluative standards that limit the field of interpretive variation.

Contextual Variation

Nevertheless, the effects of rubrics on holistic assessment do not apply consistently in learning situations. Research in high-stakes standardized testing systems, including England and some of the United States, has indicated that rubrics may get co-opted as accountability mechanisms, instead of being actually formative, especially when they are not accompanied by teacher professional development (Lingard and Lewis, 2016). Conversely, research in systems with higher formative assessment cultures, including Finland, the Netherlands, and Australia, outlines higher achievement of rubrics into holistic assessment practice (Brookhart and Chen, 2015; English et al., 2022). In a recent study that determined the factors that influence the effectiveness of rubric implementations, Jonsson et al. (2025) discovered that rubrics are most efficient when they are applied in a series of instructions, but not when they are applied as scoring instruments, and when students are able to comprehend the criteria and language of the rubric.

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Challenges and Considerations

Although the positive results reported, the introduction of structured rubrics into the primary school context is also associated with a range of challenges, which the reviewed literature discusses fairly consistently.

Time and Workload Demand

The most mentioned obstacle is time needed to develop, calibrate, and implement rubrics. The requirements of considerate rubric-based evaluation can be a strain on primary school educators, who normally have to balance the needs of diverse classrooms in a variety of subject areas, especially when school districts lack sufficient planning time, or even collaborative rubric development and moderation (Stanley, 2021; Ling, 2024).

Teacher Assessment Literacy

Application of rubrics involves a complex knowledge of assessment principles, such as matching criteria to learning outcomes, calibration of performance descriptors and using rubric-generated information to influence instruction. Studies also show that most primary school educators lack adequate pre-service and in-service training on assessment design, which results in the poor quality and inconsistency of rubrics and their use (Gupta and Mehrotra, 2024; Winters, 2021). The review of the use of rubrics in education by Ling (2024) points out that, teachers might find it difficult to develop useful rubrics and that a poorly developed rubric can indeed worsen the quality of assessment.

Standardization Versus Flexibility

A tension exists between the consistency that rubrics promote and the contextual flexibility that holistic assessment in social sciences may require. A prescriptive rubric can be too prescriptive to capture the variety and creativity with which students can show their knowledge of social phenomena, cultural orientations, and values of civicity (Brookhart, 2013). Literature indicates that effective rubrics should be specific and open enough to give clear criteria and to allow various types of evidence and expression.

Accessibility For Young Learners

The language of rubrics that are overly technical or abstract can be unreachable by primary school students, which is likely to compromise the formative role of the tool. Scholars suggest that the rubric criteria should be co-constructed with students, vocabulary related to rubrics should be explicitly taught, and vocabulary used should be age-appropriate and student friendly as the means to make rubrics more accessible and engaging (Andragogy, 2000; Goodrich, 1996; Ling, 2024).

Rubric Design Quality

According to Panadero et al. (2023), reporting quality in rubric research is frequently weak, and little information exists regarding the characteristics of rubric design and details of its implementation. This complicates the determination of the particular design features that are most effective. Jonsson et al. (2025) also develop the alignment between the rubric and the assignment, and the ability of the students to fully understand the rubric as vital factors that distinguish between successful and unsuccessful implementations.

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Discussion and Recommendation

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this scoping review lead to a subtle yet promising image of the role of structured rubrics in promoting holistic assessment at primary school level. The data clearly indicates that properly designed and carefully executed rubrics may be effective tools used to enhance the level of transparency, consistency, formative value, and educational purpose of assessment in teaching social sciences. This finding aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996), which places coherence between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment and formative assessment theory (Black and Wiliam, 1998), which places assessment as a means of learning, as opposed to measuring.

The meta-analysis of Panadero et al. (2023) has significantly added to the existing quantitative evidence base as it confirms the moderate positive impact of rubric use on academic performance. This result is significant as it takes the field beyond the mostly qualitative and narrative data that defined previous reviews (Jonsson and Svingby, 2007; Panadero and Jonsson, 2013; Brookhart and Chen, 2015). The meta-analytic data along with the qualitative results, which were uniformly demonstrated in the reviewed literature, creates a solid basis on which to suggest the use of rubric-based methods of holistic assessment.

Simultaneously, the review also unveils some crucial moderating variables, which determine the efficacy of rubrics. Teacher assessment literacy, quality of rubric design, the level of rubric integration with instruction, and the accessibility of rubric language to students are critical to the success of rubric implementation (Jonsson et al., 2025; Ling, 2024). These results indicate that rubrics cannot be seen as self-implementing tools, their use is moderated by the instructional setting in which they are embedded.

Simultaneously, the review also unveils some crucial moderating variables, which determine the efficacy of rubrics. Teacher assessment literacy, quality of rubric design, the level of rubric integration with instruction, and the accessibility of rubric language to students are critical to the success of rubric implementation (Jonsson et al., 2025; Ling, 2024). These results indicate that rubrics cannot be seen as self-implementing tools, their use is moderated by the instructional setting in which they are situated.

Another important finding of the review is that there is a considerable imbalance in geographic and contextual representation of the literature. Most of the studies have Anglophone and Western European educational systems, and few examples of primary education settings in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The generalizability of findings should be interpreted carefully, as there is a wide variety of assessment traditions, pedagogical philosophies, and resources environments in these areas. This unmet need is a major research opportunity in future.

Another interesting conclusion is the contradiction between the rubrics as accountability tool and as a learning tool. In a context where rubrics are used to assess students summatively or to comply with institutional requirements, especially in high-stakes testing settings, this could inhibit their formative potential, furthering the process of narrowing curriculum and pedagogy (Lingard & Lewis, 2016; Livingston & Doherty, 2020). Conversely, rubrics that have been developed collaboratively, given to students before assessment, and used to facilitate discussions about learning may serve as genuine tools of holistic assessment that recognise the complexity of student development in social sciences.

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Recommendations for Practice

The synthesis of the evidence of the reviewed studies allows offering the following recommendations to educators, institutions, and policymakers.

Invest in Teacher Professional Development

Assessment literacy needs to be made a central issue of initial teacher education and lifelong learning. The professional development programmes must offer training on the principles of rubric design based on constructive alignment theory, calibration practice based on the use of anchor work samples, and collaborative moderation sessions during which teachers should come up with common knowledge about performance standards (Brookhart, 2013; Gupta and Mehrotra, 2024). The studies that have been conducted always have teacher preparation as the most significant determinant of successful implementation of rubrics.

Embrace Co-Construction of Rubrics

The approach to rubric design should be a cooperative effort that cannot only rely on teachers but students, and in some cases, parents and members of the community. Building rubric criteria together with primary school students, both by analyzing examples, discussing quality attributes, and creating criteria in language students can understand (and can create) enhances their knowledge of what is expected of them as well as their metacognitive abilities (Andrade, 2000; Fraile et al., 2017). This is especially critical in social sciences, where values, perspectives, and cultural knowledge are essential aspects of the learning process.

Design For Both Specificity and Flexibility

Holistic assessment rubrics in primary social sciences must be specific to facilitate consistent assessment and valuable feedback but must be flexible to meet the needs of learners who exhibit various approaches to learning. Developmental rubrics where the growth is depicted through the course of time, can be especially suitable in the context of primary schools, where the learning paths are dynamic and nonlinear. Another design approach that promises to be effective is single-point rubrics that specify proficiency but allow room to provide individualized feedback (Gonzalez, 2014).

Integrate Rubrics into Instruction, Not Just Assessment

The most practical applications of rubrics found in the literature are where rubrics are integrated into the instructional process instead of being applied as end-of-task scoring resources. It implies that rubrics are shared with students at the beginning of a learning sequence, are used to frame self-assessment and peer feedback activities, and revisited as part of instructional discourse on quality (Jonsson et al., 2025; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013).

Ensure Systemic and Policy Support

Policymakers must note that successful introduction of rubric-based holistic assessment must have a systemic support such as sufficient time allocation, the provision of professional development resources, and the alignment of assessment policy with formative assessment principles. Policies that impose rubrics as compliance mechanisms without providing the necessary infrastructure risk undermining the very benefits that rubrics are intended to deliver.

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Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

This scoping review has given a detailed mapping and synthesis of the literature on the role of structured rubrics in improving holistic assessment in the primary school environment, especially social sciences education. The search based on the Barkley and O'Malley (2005) framework and reported in the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) has found a steadily increasing and increasingly advanced research body published between 2000 and 2025.

The key findings can be summarized as follows. Well-considered and carefully designed structured rubrics can benefit holistic assessment by making it more transparent, more consistent in scoring, promoting student self-regulation and metacognitive growth, and enabling more specific and meaningful feedback. Theoretical background of constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996) and formative assessment theory (Black and Wiliam, 1998) forms a sound framework of how the rubrics relate intended learning outcomes, instructional activities and assessment practices. The qualitative results are supported by the quantitative evidence that the meta-analytic evidence (Panadero et al., 2023) provides through a moderate positive effect on academic performance. Yet, effectiveness is highly contingent on a number of mediating variables: the quality of teacher assessment literacy, the quality of rubric design, instructional integration, contextual adaptability, and age-related accessibility.

The review also found out that there were still several challenges such as lack of teacher training, time, conflicts between standardization and flexibility, and necessary language of the rubric that can be easily understood by young learners that must be resolved in order that rubric-based holistic assessment can achieve its potential in primary education.

Final Thoughts

The broader implications of this review extend beyond the technical domain of rubric design and implementation. The practices of assessment are a reflection and a shaping of the educational values. Assessment systems focused on standardized testing and quantitative measures, at the cost of more comprehensive learning outcomes, may be accused of marginalizing the social, emotional, and civic aspects of learning that are at the heart of education in social sciences and the overall growth of the youth (Jones et al., 2015; Antonio and Prudente, 2024). Being part of an aligned system of formative assessment, structured rubrics provide a channel of acknowledging the complexity of student learning, without compromising the rigour and transparency to which the stakeholders are entitled.

The potential impact on educational policy is significant. With the global education system struggling to meet the demands of equipping students to operate in a more complex, interconnected and uncertain future, current assessment practices need to move beyond the traditional understandings of achievement to include all of the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that make up meaningful learning. It is possible to use structured rubrics as a balance between the requirements of accountability and the requirements of holistic education-but only with proper implementation through professional development, careful design, institutional buy-in and policy coherence.

Future studies ought to deal with the geographic and contextual deficiencies observed in this review, with specific reference to primary education systems in the Global South. There is a need to carry out longitudinal studies to determine the long-term impacts of rubric-based

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assessment on student learning patterns and studies that determine the importance of student voice in rubric design. The potentials of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, on rubric development, calibration, and application is another place of significant potential and needed caution. Onward exploration, innovation, and critical inquiry in assessment practices can continue to be vital to the development of fair, significant, and effective education to all learners.

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