


Review

# The progress in the application of rubric materials in chemistry teaching and students' learning enhancement during 21st century: a systematic review

Ezechiel Nsabayezi<sup>1</sup>  · Aloys Iyamuremye<sup>1</sup>  · Jean Pierre Nahimana<sup>1</sup> · Janvier Mukiza<sup>2</sup>  · Edwige Kampire<sup>2</sup> · Theophile Nsengimana<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

21st century teaching and learning emphasize the full engagement of students for improving their critical thinking and cooperation and the construction of the knowledge that demonstrates deep understanding. However, significant studies reported chemistry as a challenging subject caused of abstract concepts, phenomena and ways used in teaching and assessment. In this regard, rubrics were developed as guidelines to judge and score students' activities and see their achievements. As an assessment tool, a rubric is crucial in the twenty-first century for self-directed learning and individual students' assessment of the intended learning outcomes. Some teachers and researchers acknowledge the role of rubrics in teaching and learning chemistry. However, the application of rubrics is quite unconsidered. Thus, the present systematic review stresses the 21st-century overview of rubric materials and their progress in application in chemistry teaching and students' learning enhancement. In cooperation, chemistry teachers and students are encouraged to successfully use rubrics for teaching, learning and as well as in the assessment process as a supporting learning tool. Rubrics have great importance in helping assessors be consistent in scoring students' activities and availing assessment anticipations to students. Thus, integrating rubrics in teaching and learning chemistry improves students understanding of this subject.

**Keywords** Rubric materials · Twenty-first century · Teaching and learning enhancement · Teaching and learning chemistry

## 1 Introduction

The teaching and learning of Chemistry are of paramount role in science learning. One of the fundamental branches of natural sciences like food, drink, clothing, medicine, housing, vehicles, and others is closely linked to chemistry [47]. However, several Chemistry educators claim that students are not interested in learning chemistry [23, 36]. Teachers', students and learning environment variables were examined as the causes of poor achievements of students in science subjects, including chemistry [17]. The complications in science and little interest in its studies are the main challenge in teaching and learning chemistry [53].

✉ Ezechiel Nsabayezi, ezechielnsabayezu@gmail.com; Aloys Iyamuremye, aloysiyamuremye@gmail.com; Jean Pierre Nahimana, najeanpierre@gmail.com; Janvier Mukiza, janvier.mukiza@gmail.com; Edwige Kampire, edkampire@gmail.com; Theophile Nsengimana, nsengimanafr@gmail.com | <sup>1</sup>African Centre of Excellence for Innovative in Teaching and Learning Mathematics and Sciences (ACEITLMS), College of Education (UR-CE), University of Rwanda, Rukara Campus, Kayonza, Rwanda. <sup>2</sup>College of Education (UR-CE), School of Education, Department of Mathematics, Science and Physical Education, University of Rwanda, Kayonza, Rwanda.



Many teachers, researchers and students have claimed that Chemistry is a challenging subject to teach and learn at all education levels [7, 53]. Its main learning difficulties are in line with certain sights of its phenomena that are abstract, and some chemistry teachers do not specify what to be learned and assess in this lesson [56]. Thus, some students in high education and Universities do not get good grades in learning activities due to a lack of attention, lack of clarification of what is expected, and lack of motivation and direction while doing their activities [50]. To solve these challenges, rubrics help clarify learning concepts and learning activities and help the student recognize the criteria on which teachers based to grade their learning assessments as excellent, very good, good, fair and poor [12]. Yet, assessment is an integral part of teaching, and learning activities and its services are considered an intermediate between teachers and students [1]. It includes teachers' observation and analysis of students' works, presentation of students' findings of their works, and procedures for conducting laboratory experiments [1]. Therefore, it was expressed that a rubric is an assessment tool or gathered guidelines used to motivate the consistent application of learning expectations, education objectives and learning principles [37].

Rubrics help teachers grade students' activities reliably [15]. Rubrics are further known as a grading tool that is used to determine grades or the degree to which learning criteria have been proven or accomplished by students [12]. From this perspective, various researches on the use of rubrics in education were conducted. The research on generic skill development and learning/assessment process use of rubrics and student validation showed that rubrics are convenient assessment tools that facilitate students to acquire skills through the production of good works by referring to teachers' expectations [41]. However, to raise their effectiveness as a tool in the instruction process, some challenges, including students' lack of knowledge of the use of rubrics, lack of commitment and reactivity in the teaching/learning process, should be overcome. The effectiveness of rubrics is improved through the incorporation of students in the process of developing rubric materials for educational purposes. Thus, it is advised to keep working on implementing rubrics in the process of teaching and learning of sciences including chemistry subjects [41] since these tools play a great role in education process. In teaching and learning strategies, rubrics openly explain educational expectations for students and the needed skills of twenty-first century thereby ensuring uniformity in scoring the learning tasks [12, 13]. Therefore, the scholar recommended that rubrics should be offered and clarified to students before starting their learning activities and doing the learning tasks, and students are ensured that education expectations have been communicated and agreed on in order to increase their knowledge acquisition their performance [12].

It has been found that the continuous validation of students' work encourages students to be active in the process of teaching and learning, and this is good aspect that enhance students participation in learning courses, collaborate each other and with teacher and their knowledge retention is improved [46]. In addition, the teachers from the study on Rubrics and the enhancement of student learning indicate that rubrics are helpful assessment tools to facilitate the scoring of students' activities and guide students to do self-assessment and learning [44]. The promotion of the utilization of rubrics in learning helps mitigate the challenges such as subjectivity in grading, lack of focus, and lack of consistency that may happen during assessment and evaluation [41]. The use of rubrics in teaching STEM is an essential aspect as it removes students' misunderstandings about learning subjects like chemistry [33]. The application of rubrics also improves students' critical thinking skills that enhance students' knowledge acquisition, understanding of learning concepts and processing of information in STEM [46]. Rubric materials have also been identified to have various importance on students' learning. It was expressed that a well-defined rubric helps students work co-operatively among themselves and with their teachers. This aspect helps to share knowledge and increases the comprehension of learning concepts. The effective use of rubrics in teaching science improves students' understanding and motivation toward science education, this students' motivation is importance because it encourages the other students to be enrolled in science subjects [46]. The potential use of rubrics during teaching and learning chemistry increases students' performance and this is because students are learning referring to the teachers' expectation written in the provided rubrics. Rubrics help teachers to decide on laboratory experiments to be done by the students [12]. Furthermore, the use of rubrics encourages students to process skills during practical work [14] and develops the twenty-first century practical skills and scientific attitude [30].

Various research were conducted on the on the importance of using rubrics in education. However, it is an area that need further researches to explore the application of rubrics in chemistry teaching and learning [12]. Schafer et al. [49] and Ito [24] mentioned that rubrics facilitate the teaching and learning process thereby improving students' understanding of learning concepts. They added that the other studies are needed to explore the effect of using rubrics on students' achievement and acquiring the skills needed in twenty-first century. Though some research has explored the welfares of rubrics on students' achievement, studies on rubrics are at the starting stage [12]. Rubrics are used in learning various science subjects, including chemistry [19]. However, it is an area that needs further studies [45]. It is in this background

that the present systematic review aimed to investigate the progress in the application of rubric materials in chemistry teaching and students' learning enhancement during twenty-first century.

## 2 The research question

1. What are the contributions of rubrics in enhancing the teaching and learning of chemistry subjects during the twenty-first century?

## 3 Methodology

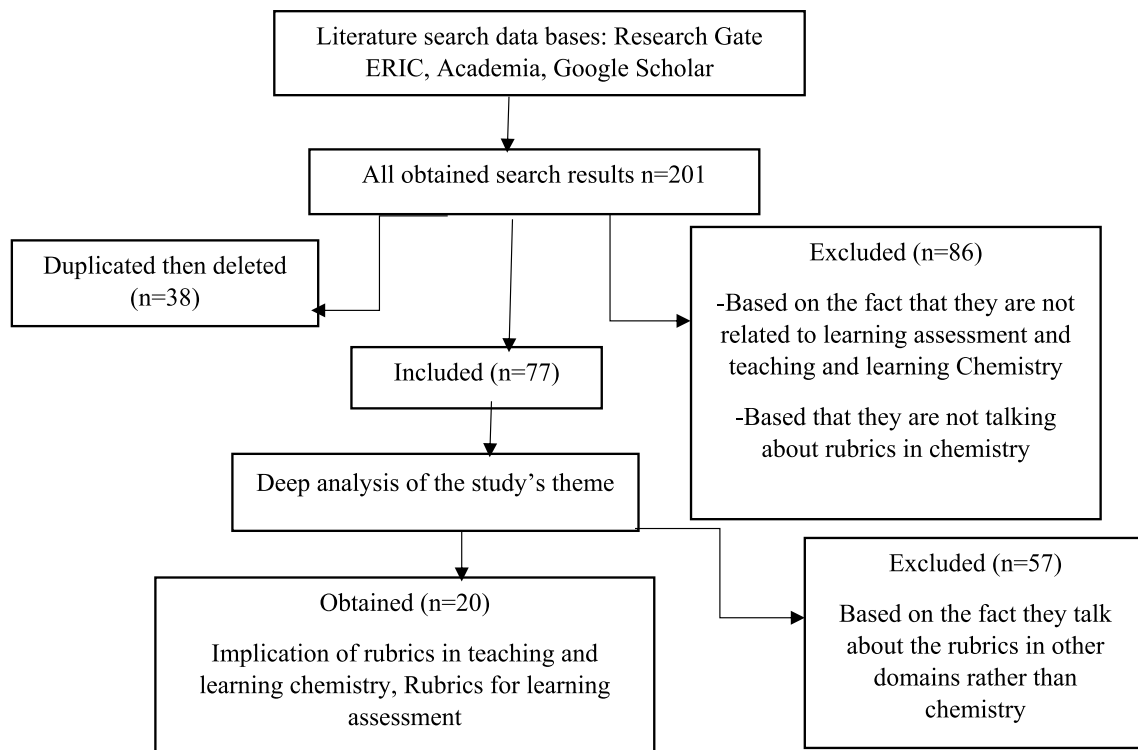
The authors conducted a primary search through the published research articles and books. The 201 studies published from 2000 to 2020 whose general findings expressed that rubrics added values when applied in the instruction process were gathered, critically analyzed, and reported. The examined materials were retrieved from the electronic database such as google scholar, Scopus, the web of science, the digital library etc. The authors recovered journals and books during the initial search and selected the literature according to the 21st-century publication that focuses on the importance of rubrics on students' knowledge retention. These publications were written in the English language. Based on the purpose of the systematic review to stress the 21st-century overview of rubric materials and their progress in application in chemistry teaching and students' learning enhancement, the articles published before the twenty-first century were excluded. The literature that is duplicated or written in another language rather than English was also omitted, and the articles were not related to learning assessment and teaching and learning Chemistry. The articles that we're not talking about rubrics in chemistry were also deleted, and the remained articles were 77. During the deep analysis of the study's theme, 57 articles were removed because they talk about the rubrics in other domains rather than chemistry. After that, the 20 articles were retained based on the implication of rubrics in teaching and learning chemistry and students' knowledge retention, and rubrics for learning assessment. The researchers used systematic analysis to review the existing literature grounded on the construct of the recent review, and the findings were presented. Figure 1 shows the systematic reviews used in this article.

## 4 Overview of rubrics and their implication in teaching and learning during the 21st century

Even though there are numerous definitions of a rubric, a commonly known and recognized is defined as a document that highlights the expectation for learning works and clarifies the grading criteria and explains the features of excellent work and a poor one [4]. Rubrics are also known as a scoring director that is used to assess learning assessments or projects. It has three main parts: achievement criteria, score scale, and indicators. Chowdhury [12] showed that rubrics clearly define what is expected and graded online or in a virtual or physical class. It specifies that the evaluation will agree to specified criteria. The other scholar expressed that rubrics help the grading and ranking of students' achievements, and this aspect becomes simple, easy, reliable, and realistic [6].

The Rwanda Education Board (REB) also defined a rubric as a scoring tool or a rating scale comprising specific performance criteria and achievement levels used to assess students' learning [43]. The most common forms of rubrics are analytic or holistic rubrics, and both contain performance criteria with levels of achievement [4]. Rubrics are usually planned to be clear and help students relate what they learned and what they are doing in assessment. This removes many claims which can arise when students receive feedback from teachers because the expectations are well explained [35]. Teachers may utilize the rubrics through a task to help students assess what they expect to show before they submit the final product [9, 45]. Rubrics motivate students to reflect on their learning progress and help to improve their learning techniques by focusing on learning weaknesses. Muhammad et al. [35] expressed that student should be involved in creating rubrics for a class task or tenacities of assessing their works.

According to [45], rubrics are successively used to initiate a regular set of learning potentials like critical thinking and self-learning that students need to prove and rise achievement and promote teaching and assessing learning activities. They are also used by school administrators and educators as a technique to retain steadiness and objectivity [45]. A rubric used by a teacher to allocate marks is a scoring rubric. The rubric developed in collaboration with students improves understanding of learning concepts and promotes cooperative learning by sharing knowledge and ideas



**Fig. 1** The PRISMA diagram showing the selection process of the reviewed articles

during their learning activities. With rubrics, students can do self-assessment, and peer assessment, and teachers can grade the students' works and release the students' feedback. As a result, the teaching of subjects becomes easy and students' learning is improved [39] stated that he used rubrics to teaching-oriented him to reach his teaching and learning goals as a teacher. The rubrics explain the learning goals and design teaching that addresses those goals connects the goals to students and evaluates the final products for offering a degree to which the goals were achieved [22]. Teachers use rubrics in advance, during and after delivering their lessons, which helps them clarify the expectations and focus of teachers from learning tasks. It is highlighted that the rubrics are used to plan a unit or a lesson, learning goals for students, and learning projects [3]. Instructional rubrics support students in comprehending the goals of a learning task and putting their efforts into innovative quality work [38]. The use of rubrics helps the scoring of students' works be systematic, and therefore, informative feedback is obtained with no students' complaints about the obtained grade. It is known that good learning feedback is educative and improve the learning process by identifying the students' weakness and putting more significant efforts to learn their subject. It also helps to give individualized students advice, which is crucial in education [16].

Instructional rubrics retain fairness and unbiased in scoring students' works, and there will be a temptation or struggle in assigning the grades to students' works [2]. Even though it needs to be planned and explained to students before its use. The rubrics have been known to share with students the expectations for a learning task to produce good focused work [46]. The rubrics are also used in assessing students' works, and it is normally an assessment tool or gathered guidelines used to motivate the consistent application of learning expectations. They are also used in setting education objectives or learning principles in the learning settings and to measure their accomplishment alongside the consistent set of benchmarks [39].

In teaching and learning settings, rubrics openly explain educational expectations for students and support to ensure uniformity in scoring the learning tasks starting student to student, work to work and lesson to lesson [54]. Rubrics are further known as grading tools that are used to determine the grades or the degree to which learning criteria have been proven or accomplished by students [39]. The study conducted on student perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment showed that rubrics help clarify learning approaches and assignments [3]. Thus, the students can check their learning progress by reflecting on what they are expected to do as they are written on rubrics. It is also reported that students who use rubrics focus on their learning, produce high-quality work, and obtain good grades [12, 32]. The study showed

that rubrics present a practical scheme for teaching and learning in the context of a school science classroom [20]. Chowdhury [12] showed that rubrics are used to help students and teachers identify students' weaknesses and strengths, which notify how the teaching and learning can be enhanced [12].

Furthermore, well-designed rubrics improve steadfastness in scoring performance tasks by removing subjectivity in assessment [34, 38]. In the research conducted about the students' perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment, students showed that when they have a rubric, they use it as an instruction that supports students in designing what they are going to do and study. Williams & Seddon, [58] expressed that rubrics explain the expectation for a learning activity and list the assessment criteria by relating levels of quality relative to each of these criteria. Panadero [39] highlighted that rubrics promote student learning and lead to 21st-century skills and knowledge retention. For that reason, it is essential to integrate rubrics in teaching to enhance the alignment of learning, instruction, and assessment. It has been suggested that the use of rubrics facilitates improvement in performance via the provision of transparency in the assessment, which students anxiety and support self-regulated learning because it promotes collaborative learning and self-assessment [39].

The use of rubrics also speeds up the feedback process, advances students' self-efficacy by supporting student self-regulation and helps the student to monitor their learning [29]. These result in facilitating to encouraging students' learning, and critical thinking, as students are aware of what teachers need from their works and focus on these expectations. Numerous studies mentioned the difficulties students encounter when studying and doing assessments and this is resolved by using rubrics in teaching, learning process and assessment [37]. They are various types of rubrics used in teaching and learning.

## 5 Actual types of rubrics and their specific application in learning and teaching

There are four types of rubrics: holistic, analytic, general, and task-specific.

### 5.1 Holistic rubric

The holistic rubrics are used to assess the learning activities and are applied when a teacher needs a quick snapshot of accomplishment. In this case, a solitary measurement is sufficient to express quality [25]. The holistic rubric is a type of rubric that aids the evaluators to assess all criteria instantaneously. It is impossible to set dissimilar weights to the criteria by this rubric. Thus, students get inadequate feedback [37]. Because of the inadequacy of students' feedback, most holistic rubrics in the assessment are built for a particular simple assignment [37].

### 5.2 Analytic rubric

This rubric identifies the strong or weak points among component tasks for detailed feedback to the students. It is good to use it for realizing the comparative strengths and weaknesses between component tasks. The analytic rubric is the best type for students to self-assess their understanding or achievement [25]. In a learning setting where students and teachers share the determinations, collaboration, students' interests and meaningful feedback are the primary concern. The analytic rubric is an irreplaceable learning material [37]. The analytic rubric offers comprehensive descriptions of performance levels. In addition, the analytic rubric lets the teachers allocate various grades to different features. Thus, students' learning tactics and choices will rely on educational objectives [35]

### 5.3 General rubrics

This type of rubric is used for assessing multiple tasks. However, it lacks specificity and enhances intellectual assessment and appropriate skills across tasks [37]. It comprises wide-ranging criteria and is returnable across tasks. It supports students in capturing the fundamental and general principles of the task [13].

## 5.4 Task-specific rubric

This rubric is used to assess the specific task and knowledge, especially when grading consistency is essential. However, its development is time-consuming [2, 37, 55]. This type of rubric is crucial to grade the precise activity.

## 6 Actual characteristics of a good rubric

There are the main characteristics of rubrics, such as a good rubric should be easy to understand and is appropriate for a variety of learning tasks. It should also be afforded to all students with the occasion to be successful at all performance levels; and produce reliable results [5]. Therefore, it is good to consider those characteristics when developing a rubric to be used during the instruction process.

## 7 Actual qualities of a good rubric

Qualitative rubrics in teaching and learning support students in teaching and assess the students' assignments. Rubrics improve students' achievement, and it has been found that students' performance increases at a reasonable level when teachers and students have the same views on what to learn and how to learn it [8]. The students become well engaged in learning a subject content when they know the criteria that teachers will use to grade their learning activities during their assessment. It is well known that the best way to recognize students' performance is to assess them to adjust the following steps [40].

Usually, teachers do not use rubrics to judge short-answer tasks or multiple-choice tests because they think that it is time-consuming and requires much attention to develop [12]. Instead, rubrics are primarily applied in scoring students' skills in achievement-based tasks, like writing a convincing essay on specified questions, laboratory reports, home works or assignments and learning projects because they explain what teachers need from those activities [12]. In addition, rubrics benefit teachers to express their anticipations to the students through availing scoring criteria [12]. Thus, students recognize works that are referred to as good, outstanding, excellent or bad. As a result, students get constructive feedback on their mistakes and acquire additional information about improving their work [12].

The use of qualitative rubrics in teaching and learning has been identified to help the students to answer the questions like:

- Do all students in the class understand well the learning concept?
- Have they mastered the necessary skills?
- How do individual students perform?
- Is appropriate progress being made toward yearly learning goals?
- How teaching approach can be adjusted to address a particular learning problem [57].

A qualitative rubric should fulfil the following criteria:

### 7.1 Clear criteria

A good rubric exhibits clear grading criteria to clarify what students are expected to produce and the targeted achievement. In addition, each performance level should be comprehensive enough to avoid any confusion which can be raised during its implementation [42].

### 7.2 Rich and comprehensive descriptive language

The rubric must be written in a reasonable and understandable language that every user can understand. In addition, a rubric should continuously describe every level of performance in accurate and comprehensive terms in each

descriptor [21]. A good description of rubrics assists students in attaining skills and attitudes towards chemistry learning. It also helps the students pay attention to the learning concepts and empowers the instruction process.

### 7.3 Emphasis on progressive achievement

A good rubric should emphasise the positive accomplishment of the anticipated performance. It also has to consider the utilization of understandable terminology in describing the levels of achievement in order to make learning concepts more comprehensible [10].

### 7.4 The distinction between performance, product and effort

The qualitative rubric measures the desired achievement like problem-solving and oral communication; it also helps grade essay writing and laboratory works. Thus, the performance standards and recognizable descriptors on every level of achievement should not confuse the readers [51].

### 7.5 Complete validity and reliability

A well-designed rubric must be easy for both teachers and students to interpret, as they should be capable of using the rubric during instruction, self-learning, assessment, and evaluation [12, 34]. Thus, a rubric has to measure what it is expected to measure, and it should be consistent in measurement for avoiding bias in the scoring process [34]. A useful rubric assesses the needed aspects for quality of achievement, while a reliable rubric produces stable results for users. A rubric has to be understandable to all students at every academic level [28, 48]. The above arguments support this systematic review because they identify the good quality of rubrics recommended for teaching and learning chemistry. The usage of rubrics that fulfil these qualities enhances students' learning of chemistry and facilitates students to retain the knowledge and skills needed in this twenty-first century, like critical thinking skills, self-learning skills, self-assessment, and innovative learning. Innovative learning can be created, as the students can look at what teachers expect from them by looking at the provided rubrics and invent their learning opportunities.

## 8 Progress in the application of rubrics materials in teaching and learning chemistry during the 21st century

The application of rubrics materials in teaching and learning chemistry has various benefits, such as clarifying and communicating the teachers' expectations from the students' works, helping students understand the learning concepts, and helping the students understand chemistry subjects.

### 8.1 Benefits of teaching and learning by using rubrics for both teachers and students

The effective use of rubrics in teaching and learning chemistry promotes students' understanding of chemistry learning concepts. For that reason, the chemistry teachers and lecturers are advised to integrate rubrics into their teaching to improve students' and students' understanding of chemistry subjects. It helps to clarify and communicate their expectations during the instruction process [31]. The reported studies revealed that rubrics inspire the students' positive learning and facilitate the potential comprehension of chemistry subjects due to their applicability in laboratory reports, assignments, quizzes, and exams. Measuring these tasks offers a method for teachers to attain positive alignment between the anticipated outcomes and the assessments [46]. The application of rubric materials in Chemistry teaching and students' learning enhancement during the twenty-first century are also shown by the following items as identified by Whittaker et al. [57]:

- Making teachers' expectations perfect,
- The precision of the standards needed for accomplishment in learning tasks,
- Improving the metacognitive or thinking skills by checking students' learning,
- Motivating the students to enhance their self-assessment skills and become well-informed about the criteria required for the good achievement,

- Enhancing students to use the rubric for checking their work before submission.

The benefits of rubrics are well-identified in improving students' learning, self-assessment, and knowledge and skills retention as needed in this twenty-first century.

## 8.2 Application of rubrics materials in teaching and learning chemistry

The study conducted by Chen et al. [11] on the development and application of a scoring rubric for evaluating students' practical skills in organic chemistry revealed that the utilization of rubric materials help to identify the students' weakness and strengths in the performance of chemical experiment [11]. The use of rubrics helps to monitor the students' chemistry laboratory skills. Refining the rubric with explanations of regular operations and different levels of performance offers a suitable, efficient, and effective way to support the students' skills [11].

The use of rubrics allows monitoring of the students' work and advances their perception of their roles in the science laboratory, including chemistry laboratory experiments [11]. However, Chemistry was identified as a problematic subject. Jong et al. [26] stressed that students have difficulties in chemistry and it is a big challenge for their chemistry teachers, even though some new teachers face the same challenge. The study conducted by Fay et al. [18] on a rubric to characterize inquiry in the undergraduate chemistry laboratory revealed that regular use of the inquiry rubric to direct choices in chemistry laboratory teaching facilitates chemists' change from selecting laboratory experiments. This is because rubrics offer an easy way to follow directions toward choosing laboratory experiments, and they provide sensibly shaped opportunities for chemistry students to be involved in the inquiry. Thus, the rubrics offer a roadmap to direct meaningful data-driven change. It also showed that this inquiry rubric's potential usages embrace the opportunity to train chemists with a quantitative means of comparing and discussing the levels of inquiry. Finally, its findings added that rubric help chemists to plan curriculum and seek to improve students learning of chemistry and shade students experience [14].

A study conducted by Davidowitz et al. [14] on developing and applying a rubric for analysis of novice students' laboratory flow diagrams. It showed that rubrics allow a comprehensive change of styles and interpretation of the content to suit the students instead of conforming to the inflexible format of the concept map where certain relations would be effective. The results from this study revealed that it is possible to use a rubric for successfully assessing the students' understanding of the laboratory manual and experiments and outlining the development of flow diagrams as the students progress through the course [14]. A study measuring beyond content showed that the use of rubric materials significantly assists students' comprehension of the chemistry subject goals and enhances students' learning [27]. Furthermore, rubrics supported the more reliable assessment of the learning skills across chemistry and biology [27]. The rubric development procedure helped improve instructional practices, and formative assessment, and encouraged assessment as a way of chemistry learning [27].

The research conducted on writing instruction in chemistry classes also revealed that generating a rubric and reviewing it helps the chemistry teachers to clarify and communicate their expectations for students' writing, a first phase in planning meaningful writing instruction [31]. The other research conducted by Delgado & Fonseca-Mora [16] on the use of collaborative work and rubrics in developing competencies for chemical engineering students in Spain showed an investigation of competencies needed by students. The students were able to develop competencies through cooperative learning where students were given precise evaluation rubrics to know what was anticipated. This study revealed that rubrics were useful in directing students' learning progress. The use of rubrics was found to be an excellent teaching and evaluation strategy to improve students' success in chemical engineering [16].

The study on a three-tier evaluation rubric for assessing group projects in chemical engineering design courses showed that regular use of grading rubrics raises the consistency and fairness of project assessments. Three-tier rubrics promote extreme students' success that successfully accounted for a single student's successful performance within a group project setting. However, it isn't easy to evaluate individual contributions within group work [52]. The above literature showed that rubrics are crucial teaching and learning tools that facilitate students' success and performance in chemistry. This literature also mentioned that applying rubrics in the instruction process improves the teaching and learning of chemistry.

## 9 Conclusion and recommendation

This systematic review confirms that rubrics materials enhance the teaching and learning of chemistry at all education levels when both chemistry teachers and students correctly apply them.



Rubrics clarify what to be learned, and how to understand, assess, and grade students' works. The authors recommended that chemistry teachers of the twenty-first century use rubrics in teaching and learning chemistry to help students understand the chemistry learning concepts well. The students' performance is enhanced when they are motivated and engaged in designing the rubrics for their studies. The integration of rubrics in teaching and learning chemistry has a powerful positive effect on students' chemistry learning. The rubrics materials are the powerful teaching and learning tools that facilitate the students to acquire skills and knowledge needed in the twenty-first century through self-assessment and self-learning. The instruction process is also enhanced by applying rubrics during teaching and learning.

This systematic review contributes to the existing literature and body of scholarship because it provides great information on the application of rubric materials in Chemistry teaching and learning. And the other researchers will get the needed literature for their further studies. Hence, the researcher recommends chemistry teachers use rubrics as it helps them communicate their expectations to students, assess student work reasonably and efficiently, and allow students to be informed on the feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. Prompt students to reflect on their work and offer the required skills needed in this twenty-first century. The authors recommend that a significant number of educational institutes should use rubrics in chemistry instructions because it makes the process of teaching and learning more active.

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**Author contributions** EN has developed the manuscript and revised it. , AI, JPN have checked the typography and revised the manuscript. JM has supervised the manuscript, EK, TN have corrected the grammatic and typing errors of the manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

#### Declarations

**Competing interests** The authors affirm that they have no potential conflict to disclose.

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