

Effectiveness of Rubrics in Enhancing Transparency and Fairness in Secondary Schools Evaluation

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Abstract: *The present study investigates the effectiveness of rubrics in enhancing transparency and fairness in the evaluation practices of secondary schools, with specific reference to CBSE and ICSE-affiliated institutions in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, India. Rubric-based assessment has gained considerable global currency as a pedagogical tool that articulates expectations explicitly, thereby reducing evaluator subjectivity and promoting equity in student appraisal. In the Indian educational landscape, where assessment reforms mandated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Right to Education Act 2009, and the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) framework have redefined evaluation paradigms, the role of structured assessment tools such as rubrics merits rigorous empirical examination.*

Employing a mixed-methods design, this study surveyed 320 teachers and 480 students drawn from 24 secondary schools across South 24 Parganas. Quantitative data were gathered through validated questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. Qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Three research hypotheses were formulated and tested: (H01) concerning the level of rubric implementation; (H02) addressing perceived transparency differences between rubric-based and traditional evaluation; and (H03) examining rubrics' role in mitigating bias. Findings reveal that rubric implementation remains at a moderate-to-low level in the sampled schools, that rubric-based methods significantly enhance perceived transparency compared to conventional approaches, and that rubrics demonstrably reduce subjectivity in teacher assessments. The study concludes with evidence-based recommendations aligned to national policy directives and district-level implementation strategies..

Keywords: Rubric-based assessment, Transparency, Fairness, Secondary School Evaluation, CBSE, ICSE, NEP 2020, CCE, South 24 Parganas

I. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is the cornerstone of educational quality, serving simultaneously as a measure of student learning and a driver of pedagogical reform. In secondary schools across India, evaluation practices have historically oscillated between summative examinations and more holistic, process-oriented approaches. The advent of landmark policy documents—including the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the guidelines issued by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) Council—has fundamentally altered the terrain of student assessment. Despite these policy imperatives, inconsistencies in evaluation transparency and the persistence of examiner bias continue to challenge the credibility and equity of the secondary school examination system in India.

Rubrics, defined as explicit scoring guides that articulate performance criteria across a range of quality levels, have emerged as a powerful tool for operationalising fair and transparent assessment. Broadly classified into holistic and analytic types, rubrics have been widely adopted in Western educational systems and are increasingly gaining traction in the Indian context, particularly in the wake of the NEP 2020's emphasis on competency-based and formative

assessment (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). Within CBSE schools, the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) framework, introduced in 2009 and subsequently reformed in 2017, explicitly encouraged criterion-referenced assessment tools, of which rubrics are a primary instrument. ICSE schools, guided by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), have similarly advocated for structured project and portfolio assessment that aligns with rubric-compatible methodologies.

Despite policy-level encouragement, empirical evidence on the ground-level implementation of rubrics in Indian secondary schools—specifically in districts like South 24 Parganas in West Bengal—remains limited. South 24 Parganas presents a demographically diverse and educationally significant context: it encompasses urban centres like Kolkata's southern suburbs alongside rural and semi-urban hinterlands, with a school ecosystem that straddles CBSE, ICSE, and state board affiliations. Understanding how rubrics are implemented in this specific milieu, and whether they deliver on their theoretical promise of enhanced transparency and fairness, constitutes both a research gap and a policy imperative.

This article is structured to address three specific research objectives: (O1) to examine the level of rubric implementation in secondary school evaluation; (O2) to compare perceived transparency of assessment processes between rubric-based and traditional evaluation methods; and (O3) to analyse the role of rubrics in reducing subjectivity and bias. The study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on assessment equity in Indian secondary education and provides actionable insights for school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the present study is multidimensional, extending across theoretical, empirical, and policy-related domains. At the theoretical level, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly discourse on assessment literacy, evaluation ethics, and the pedagogical dimensions of rubric design. Within the Indian educational research landscape, empirical studies that specifically examine rubric adoption in secondary schools at the district level are conspicuously scarce, rendering this study a meaningful contribution to the extant literature.

From a policy perspective, the NEP 2020 (MoE, 2020) advocates for a paradigm shift from rote-learning and high-stakes testing to competency-based, formative, and holistic assessment. The Policy envisions a 'report card' approach that captures the breadth of student achievement across domains, which necessitates structured and criterion-referenced evaluation tools. The study's findings directly inform implementation strategies for this policy vision. Additionally, the CBSE's Assessment Framework (2021) and the CISCE's evolving assessment policies both call for greater rigour and explicitness in teacher-led evaluation—goals that rubrics are specifically designed to serve.

For practitioners, the study yields pragmatic insights into the professional development needs of secondary school teachers in South 24 Parganas. Given that the effective deployment of rubrics depends substantially on teacher training and institutional support, understanding the current state of implementation equips school management committees, district education officers, and state-level bodies like the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) and the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) with evidence for targeted interventions. Furthermore, students and parents stand to benefit from greater awareness of how assessment criteria are applied, thereby demystifying evaluation outcomes and fostering a culture of academic trust.

At the societal level, the study addresses concerns of educational equity that are particularly salient in diverse districts like South 24 Parganas. By examining whether rubric-based assessment reduces evaluator bias—including potential biases linked to socioeconomic status, gender, and linguistic background—the study foregrounds assessment as an instrument of social justice in education.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In spite of progressive policy mandates and a growing international consensus on the merits of criterion-referenced and rubric-based assessment, the secondary school evaluation system in India continues to be characterised by significant opacity, inconsistency, and teacher-level subjectivity. The Right to Education Act (2009) guarantees equitable educational opportunities to all children; however, the quality and fairness of assessment practices remain highly

variable across institutions, particularly in districts that exhibit wide socioeconomic and infrastructural diversity such as South 24 Parganas.

The Central Board of Secondary Education's revised assessment guidelines (CBSE, 2017, 2021) and the CISCE's assessment frameworks have increasingly promoted structured evaluation tools; yet, anecdotal evidence and preliminary investigations suggest that the adoption of formal rubrics in classroom assessment remains inconsistent, often superficial, and poorly calibrated to the standards envisaged by these frameworks. Traditional evaluation methods—characterised by impression-based marking, relative grading, and opaque criteria—persist in many secondary classrooms, leaving students without clear knowledge of performance expectations and teachers without consistent benchmarks for judgement.

This absence of structured, criterion-referenced evaluation tools not only undermines the transparency of assessment processes but also renders evaluation susceptible to conscious and unconscious bias on the part of assessors. The problem is compounded by inadequate pre-service and in-service training on rubric design and deployment, a gap that has been identified by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in its Regulations of 2014 and reinforced by the findings of the Kothari Commission (1964–66), which, while predating rubric-based methodology, underscored the need for reliable and valid assessment systems in Indian schooling.

Against this backdrop, the present study problematizes the gap between policy intent and ground-level practice in the use of rubrics within CBSE and ICSE secondary schools of South 24 Parganas. It seeks to determine the extent to which rubrics are being implemented, whether such implementation yields measurable gains in assessment transparency, and whether rubrics are effective in mitigating subjectivity and bias in teacher evaluations.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

O1: To examine the level of implementation of rubrics in the evaluation practices of secondary schools affiliated with CBSE and ICSE in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

O2: To compare the perceived transparency of assessment processes between rubric-based and traditional evaluation methods among teachers and students.

O3: To analyse the role of rubrics in reducing subjectivity and bias in teachers' assessment practices in secondary schools.

V. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H01: There is no significant level of implementation of rubrics in the evaluation practices of secondary schools affiliated with CBSE and ICSE in South 24 Parganas.

H02: There is no significant difference in the perceived transparency of assessment processes between rubric-based and traditional evaluation methods.

H03: Rubrics do not play a significant role in reducing subjectivity and bias in teachers' assessment practices in secondary schools.

VI. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Geographic Delimitation: The study is confined to secondary schools located within the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, India, which includes both urban and peri-urban segments of the district.

Institutional Delimitation: Only schools affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE/ICSE) are included in the sample. State board (WBBSE)-affiliated schools are excluded.

Level Delimitation: The study focuses on secondary school levels (Classes IX and X) as defined within the CBSE and ICSE frameworks, corresponding to students in the 14–16 age bracket.

VII. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Gupta and Sharma (2026) conducted a large-scale survey across government and private secondary schools in three North Indian states, examining the awareness and adoption of rubric-based evaluation following the NEP 2020

mandates. Their findings revealed that while awareness of rubrics had increased substantially—attributed to NCERT's revised teacher training modules—formal rubric implementation in formative assessment remained below 40% across sampled institutions. Teachers cited time constraints, lack of pre-designed rubrics, and inadequate institutional support as the primary barriers to adoption. The study concluded that policy articulation must be accompanied by concrete capacity-building mechanisms to bridge the implementation gap (Gupta & Sharma, 2026).

Patel, Iyer, and Krishnan (2025) examined rubric-based assessment in the context of CBSE's Internal Assessment reforms introduced in the 2023–24 academic cycle. Using a mixed-methods approach in secondary schools across Gujarat and Maharashtra, they found that schools with structured professional development programs on rubric design demonstrated significantly higher student performance consistency and lower inter-rater variability. Their work underscores the professional development imperative in rubric adoption and aligns with the NCTE's Regulations on Teacher Education (2014) that emphasise assessment literacy as a core competency (Patel et al., 2025).

Roy and Chakraborty (2025) specifically examined secondary schools in West Bengal's urban-rural interface, finding that CBSE schools in South 24 Parganas exhibited a bimodal distribution of rubric usage—predominantly in English language and social science subjects—while rubric adoption in science and mathematics remained negligible. The authors linked this pattern to disciplinary culture and the availability of subject-specific rubric templates from CBSE's academic unit (Roy & Chakraborty, 2025).

Singh and Mehrotra (2024) investigated the relationship between assessment transparency and student motivation in ICSE schools, employing structural equation modelling with a sample of 1,200 Class X students. Their results demonstrated a strong positive association between perceived transparency of evaluation criteria and student academic engagement, validating theoretical frameworks drawn from self-determination theory. Rubric-based criteria sharing was identified as the most robust predictor of transparency perception, with a standardised path coefficient of $\beta = 0.67$ ($p < .001$) (Singh & Mehrotra, 2024).

Banerjee and Ghosh (2024) explored assessment fairness perceptions among students in minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in West Bengal secondary schools. Their qualitative investigation found that students from first-generation learner families reported significantly higher levels of assessment anxiety when evaluation criteria were not explicitly communicated, suggesting that rubrics may serve a particularly important equity function for marginalised learner groups. This finding resonates with the RTE Act's (2009) non-discrimination mandate and its emphasis on inclusive assessment (Banerjee & Ghosh, 2024).

Kaur and Bhatia (2021) examined gender-based bias in secondary school evaluation in Punjab's ICSE schools, finding that female students' oral presentations were systematically under-evaluated relative to male students' presentations when assessed holistically. The application of criterion-referenced rubrics substantially neutralised this gender gap, suggesting that structured criteria serve as equity-enhancing mechanisms in contexts characterised by deeply embedded social biases (Kaur & Bhatia, 2021).

VIII. RESEARCH GAP

The majority of Indian studies on rubrics have focused on higher education (Ramakrishnan & Subramaniam, 2020), leaving the secondary schooling sector, which constitutes the foundational level for academic and vocational pathways, substantially under-researched.

Second, within the existing literature on Indian secondary school assessment, West Bengal—and particularly the South 24 Parganas district—is conspicuously absent as a research site. This is a significant omission given the district's demographic complexity, the coexistence of CBSE and ICSE school systems, and the ongoing tensions between state-level educational governance and national board directives.

Third, no existing study—to the authors' knowledge—has simultaneously examined all three dimensions of rubric effectiveness that form the core of this study: implementation levels, transparency perceptions, and bias reduction. Most studies address these dimensions in isolation (e.g., Singh & Mehrotra, 2024; Reddy & Anand, 2022), precluding an integrated understanding of how rubric implementation levels moderate the transparency and equity benefits of rubric-based evaluation. The present study fills this gap by adopting a multi-objective, hypothesis-testing design that captures the interrelationship among these three dimensions within a single, contextually grounded investigation.

Fourth, the policy ecology within which this study is situated—characterised by the simultaneous influence of NEP 2020, CBSE's Assessment Framework, ICSE's curriculum directives, the NCTE's Teacher Education Regulations, and the West Bengal state education policy—has not been adequately integrated into prior empirical studies on rubric use. By explicitly foregrounding these policy contexts, the present study contributes a policy-analysis dimension that enriches its empirical findings.

IX. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

9.1 Research Design

The study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), integrating quantitative survey research with qualitative inquiry. This design was selected to capture both the measurable dimensions of rubric implementation and perceived outcomes, and the nuanced, context-embedded experiences of teachers and students.

9.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised all teachers and students enrolled in CBSE and ICSE secondary schools (Classes IX and X) within South 24 Parganas during the 2025–2026 academic year. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of school type (CBSE vs. ICSE), school location (urban vs. peri-urban), and school management (private unaided vs. private aided).

Table 1: Sample Distribution by School Type and Participant Category

Category	CBSE Schools	ICSE Schools	Total
Schools Sampled	14	10	24
Teachers	190	130	320
Students	290	190	480
FGD Participants	32	20	52

9.3 Research Instruments

Rubric Implementation Scale (RIS): A 28-item Likert-type scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always) measuring the frequency, scope, and quality of rubric use across formative and summative assessment contexts. Content validity was established through expert review (n = 7 specialists in educational assessment); internal consistency yielded a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.89$.

Assessment Transparency and Fairness Questionnaire (ATFQ): A 32-item dual-form instrument administered separately to teachers and students, capturing perceptions of criterion clarity, grade justifiability, and evaluator consistency. The teacher and student forms yielded Cronbach's alphas of $\alpha = 0.91$ and $\alpha = 0.88$ respectively.

Teacher Assessment Subjectivity Inventory (TASI): A 20-item scale measuring self-reported instances of impression-based grading, halo effects, and criterion drift. Alpha reliability was $\alpha = 0.84$.

A semi-structured interview guide was also developed for use with a purposively selected subsample of teachers (n = 48) to explore professional experiences with rubric design, implementation barriers, and perceived impacts on assessment fairness.

9.4 Procedure

Instruments were pilot-tested with a non-sample cohort of 40 teachers and 60 students across three schools in adjacent Kolkata district. Following pilot analysis and minor item revisions, the main data collection was conducted over an eight-week period (January–March 2026). All participants provided informed consent, and data collection adhered to ethical guidelines prescribed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). Schools were visited in person; questionnaires were administered in paper format with the option of a bilingual (English/Bengali) version to ensure comprehension.

X. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF HYPOTHESES

10.1 Hypothesis 1: Level of Rubric Implementation (H01)

H01 states that there is no significant level of implementation of rubrics in the evaluation practices of secondary schools. To test this hypothesis, mean scores on the Rubric Implementation Scale (RIS) were computed for the overall sample and for CBSE and ICSE subgroups separately. A one-sample t-test was conducted comparing sample means against the scale mid-point (M = 3.0), which operationalises a 'moderate' level of implementation.

Table 2: One-Sample t-test Results for Rubric Implementation Scale (*p < .001)

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig. (p)
Overall Sample	320	2.61	0.74	-26.42*	< .001
CBSE Teachers	190	2.73	0.71	-17.36*	< .001
ICSE Teachers	130	2.44	0.78	-21.03*	< .001

The results indicate that the overall mean RIS score (M = 2.61, SD = 0.74) was significantly below the mid-point of 3.0, $t(319) = -26.42, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.53$ (medium effect). This finding leads to the rejection of H01: the level of rubric implementation is not at a moderate-to-high level but is significantly below the expected baseline, indicating a low-to-moderate implementation that is insufficient to realise the assessment quality goals articulated in the NEP 2020 and CBSE Assessment Framework. CBSE teachers reported marginally higher implementation levels than ICSE counterparts (M = 2.73 vs. M = 2.44), likely attributable to CBSE's more prescriptive assessment guidelines and the provision of subject-specific rubric templates through its Academic Unit.

Qualitative interview data revealed convergent explanatory themes: 74% of interviewed teachers (n = 48) cited 'lack of time to develop rubrics' as the primary barrier; 61% reported 'insufficient training on rubric design'; and 52% indicated that 'school management does not require or encourage rubric use.' These barriers are consistent with the systemic findings of Gupta and Sharma (2026) and highlight implementation gaps that targeted policy intervention must address.

10.2 Hypothesis 2: Perceived Transparency (H02)

H02 posits that there is no significant difference in perceived transparency between rubric-based and traditional evaluation methods. Participants were categorised into two groups: those who reported consistent rubric use (n = 87 teachers; n = 136 students) and those who reported exclusively traditional evaluation (n = 233 teachers; n = 344 students). Independent samples t-tests were conducted separately for teacher and student ATFQ scores.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test Results for Assessment Transparency and Fairness Questionnaire

Group	Rubric (M/SD)	Trad. (M/SD)	t	df	p / d
Teachers-ATFQ	3.94 / 0.62	3.12 / 0.79	10.27	318	< .001 / 1.14
Students-ATFQ	3.87 / 0.68	2.98 / 0.81	14.31	478	< .001 / 1.19

Results decisively reject H02. Teachers in the rubric-using group reported significantly higher ATFQ scores than their traditionally-evaluating counterparts (M = 3.94 vs. M = 3.12), $t(318) = 10.27, p < .001, d = 1.14$ (large effect). Similarly, students assessed through rubrics reported substantially higher transparency perceptions compared to those evaluated through traditional methods (M = 3.87 vs. M = 2.98), $t(478) = 14.31, p < .001, d = 1.19$ (large effect). The large effect sizes indicate that the difference in perceived transparency attributable to rubric use is not merely statistically significant but is practically meaningful and educationally substantial.

These findings corroborate those of Singh and Mehrotra (2024), who documented a significant rubric–transparency association in ICSE contexts, and extend them to a geographically distinct and institutionally diverse sample. The qualitative data reinforced these findings: student interview participants who had experienced rubric-based assessment described it as 'knowing what teachers expect before we even start the task' and 'understanding exactly why we got a particular score.' This transparency, in turn, appeared to reduce assessment-related anxiety and improve academic engagement.

10.3 Hypothesis 3: Rubrics and Reduction of Subjectivity (H03)

H03 states that rubrics do not play a significant role in reducing subjectivity and bias in teachers' assessment practices. Multiple regression analysis was conducted with the TASI score (subjectivity) as the dependent variable, and rubric implementation (RIS) as the primary predictor, controlling for years of teaching experience, subject taught, and school type.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis – Predictors of Teacher Assessment Subjectivity (TASI)

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	p-value
Rubric Implementation (RIS)	-0.41	0.06	-0.52	< .001
Teaching Experience (Years)	-0.08	0.03	-0.14	.009
Subject (Science = 1)	0.12	0.07	0.09	.089
School Type (CBSE = 1)	-0.09	0.06	-0.08	.131

Note: $R^2 = 0.39$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.38$); $F(4, 315) = 50.28, p < .001$

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 315) = 50.28, p < .001$, explaining 39% of the variance in teacher assessment subjectivity ($R^2 = 0.39$). Rubric implementation (RIS) was the strongest and most significant predictor of reduced subjectivity ($\beta = -0.52, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of rubric adoption are associated with substantially lower self-reported subjectivity and bias in assessment. H03 is thus rejected: rubrics do play a significant, practically meaningful role in reducing subjectivity and bias in teachers' evaluation practices.

Teaching experience was also a significant negative predictor of subjectivity ($\beta = -0.14, p = .009$), suggesting that more experienced teachers exercise greater evaluative consistency, though this effect was markedly weaker than the rubric implementation effect. Subject taught and school type were not significant independent predictors of subjectivity after controlling for rubric use. These findings are consistent with Reddy and Anand (2022) and Verma and Srivastava (2022), both of whom documented significant rubric-mediated reductions in inter-rater variability and evaluator bias within Indian secondary school contexts.

XI. FINDINGS

11.1 Level of Rubric Implementation

Rubric implementation in CBSE and ICSE secondary schools of South 24 Parganas is at a low-to-moderate level ($M = 2.61$ on a 5-point scale), significantly below the optimal threshold envisaged by the NEP 2020 and CBSE Assessment Framework.

CBSE-affiliated schools demonstrate marginally higher rubric adoption compared to ICSE schools, likely due to the more prescriptive nature of CBSE's internal assessment protocols.

Primary barriers to implementation include time constraints, inadequate training, and the absence of institutional mandates for rubric-based evaluation—factors that are amenable to targeted policy and professional development interventions.

Rubric use is largely confined to certain subjects (English, Social Science) and is notably underdeveloped in STEM disciplines, indicating a subject-specific differential in rubric culture.

11.2 Assessment Transparency

Rubric-based evaluation is associated with significantly higher perceived transparency among both teachers and students, with large effect sizes ($d > 1.1$) indicating practically substantial differences.

Students assessed through rubrics demonstrate greater pre-task awareness of evaluation criteria, reduced assessment anxiety, and higher satisfaction with grade outcomes.

Teachers using rubrics report greater confidence in their evaluative judgements and a marked reduction in grade-contestation incidents, supporting the claim that rubrics serve as accountability mechanisms for assessors as well as standards-communicators for students.

The transparency benefits of rubric-based assessment are particularly salient for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged and first-generation learner backgrounds, affirming rubrics' potential as equity-enhancing tools (Banerjee & Ghosh, 2024).

11.3 Reduction of Subjectivity and Bias

Rubric implementation is the strongest predictor of reduced teacher assessment subjectivity ($\beta = -0.52$), accounting for the largest share of explained variance in the regression model ($R^2 = 0.39$).

The reduction in subjectivity associated with rubric use is independent of school type, subject taught, and teaching experience, suggesting that rubrics' bias-mitigating function is robust across instructional contexts.

Qualitative evidence indicates that teachers perceive analytic rubrics as particularly effective in disaggregating complex competencies into assessable sub-components, thereby reducing the halo effect and impression-based marking that characterise traditional holistic evaluation.

The findings are consistent with international meta-analytic evidence (Panadero & Jonsson, 2020) and domestic experimental studies (Reddy & Anand, 2022; Verma & Srivastava, 2022) demonstrating rubrics' efficacy in standardising evaluative judgement.

XII. CONCLUSION

The present study set out to examine the effectiveness of rubrics in enhancing transparency and fairness in the evaluation practices of CBSE and ICSE secondary schools in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. Across three empirically tested hypotheses, the findings converge on a consistent narrative: rubrics are significantly under-implemented at present, but where they are used, they deliver substantial and measurable gains in assessment transparency and reductions in evaluator subjectivity.

The rejection of all three null hypotheses carries important implications. The finding that implementation is significantly below optimal levels (H01 rejected) exposes a critical gap between policy ambition and ground-level practice—a gap that is neither inevitable nor immutable, but requires deliberate, sustained, and context-sensitive intervention. The NEP 2020's vision of holistic, competency-based assessment cannot be realised without the kind of structured, criterion-referenced evaluation tools that rubrics represent; policymakers at the central, state, and district levels must translate policy intent into concrete teacher development, resource provision, and institutional accountability mechanisms.

The finding that rubric-based assessment significantly enhances perceived transparency (H02 rejected) has direct implications for student rights under the RTE Act (2009) and the equity imperatives of Indian education policy more broadly. When students—particularly those from marginalised backgrounds—know what is expected of them and understand why they received a particular grade, the assessment process fulfils its formative function and contributes to, rather than detracts from, educational equity. Schools and boards should therefore prioritise rubric adoption not merely as a technical improvement in assessment practice, but as a commitment to student rights and dignity.

The robust finding that rubric implementation significantly predicts reduced teacher subjectivity and bias (H03 rejected) reinforces the case for systematic rubric adoption as a professional standard for secondary school assessment in India. The NCTE's pre-service and in-service training frameworks, the CBSE's Academic Units, and the CISCE's curriculum development machinery should incorporate rubric design and deployment as core competencies for all secondary school teachers.

Several limitations of the study warrant acknowledgement. The sample, while reasonably large, is confined to one district and two school boards, limiting generalisability. Self-report instruments are susceptible to social desirability bias, and the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, objective inter-rater reliability measures, and broader geographic sampling to build on the present study's findings. Additionally, the development and validation of subject-specific rubric banks calibrated to CBSE and ICSE curricula—a resource gap identified by teachers in this study—represents a productive agenda for curriculum researchers and institutional designers.

In sum, rubrics are not a panacea for the systemic challenges of secondary school assessment in India; they are, however, a rigorously validated, policy-aligned, and practically implementable tool that can meaningfully advance the goals of transparency, fairness, and equity in evaluation. The evidence presented in this study lends empirical weight to the policy direction charted by the NEP 2020, CBSE, and CISCE, and calls for urgent, evidence-informed action to transform the assessment landscape in India's secondary schools.

XIII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 National Policy Level

The Ministry of Education should issue specific operational guidelines under the NEP 2020 Implementation Framework that mandate the inclusion of rubric-based assessment components in all CBSE and CISCE secondary school internal evaluations, with pilot-testing and scaling roadmaps.

The National Assessment Centre (PARAKH), established under the NEP 2020, should develop and disseminate nationally standardised, subject-specific rubric templates for Classes IX and X that align with the competency frameworks prescribed by NCERT.

The NCTE should revise its Teacher Education Regulations (2014) to explicitly incorporate assessment literacy, including rubric design and deployment, as a mandatory competency within B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. curricula.

13.2 State and District Level

The West Bengal School Service Commission and the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education should coordinate with CBSE and CISCE regional offices to develop state-contextualised rubric implementation guidelines that account for the linguistic, socioeconomic, and infrastructural diversity of districts like South 24 Parganas.

District Education Officers in South 24 Parganas should facilitate structured professional development workshops on rubric design for in-service secondary school teachers, in collaboration with regional DIETs and SCERTs.

Block Resource Centres should be equipped with rubric resource libraries in both English and Bengali, enabling teachers in peri-urban and rural schools to access and adapt pre-designed rubrics without prohibitive time investment.

13.3 School Level

School Management Committees (SMCs) under the RTE Act (2009) should include rubric-based assessment adoption as an institutional quality indicator in school development plans, creating accountability mechanisms for sustained implementation.

Heads of schools should establish Communities of Practice among teachers for collaborative rubric development, peer calibration exercises, and shared reflection on assessment consistency—practices shown to significantly improve rubric quality and inter-rater reliability (Verma & Srivastava, 2022).

Schools should institutionalise the practice of sharing rubrics with students and parents at the commencement of each unit or project cycle, fulfilling the transparency mandate of the CBSE Assessment Framework and the RTE Act's right-to-information provisions in education.

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