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# The use of learning rubrics in English as a foreign language primary school classrooms in Sweden

*Användandet av lärandematriser i engelska som främmande språk i  
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# Preface

In this degree project, the researchers have been equally involved throughout the working process. The reading of the theoretical composition, the creation of the survey, the interview guidelines and the execution of them have been divided between the two.

We are grateful for all the support and guidance that we have received from our supervisor Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang during this degree project and we want to give an additional thanks to all of the participants to this study. Donna and Doris, thank you for being the driving forces behind our motivation.

The researchers hereby confirm their equal contribution to this work.

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# Abstract

Learning rubrics are adapted to the students' understanding, and contain a clear focus of what they are supposed to learn. Teachers' knowledge about them seems to be limited, and assessment rubrics are a more common tool for teachers' assessment practices (Alm, 2015).

Even though the Swedish school curriculum encourages teachers to use formative assessment as an active part of their teaching, due to its beneficial factors for students learning development, studies have shown that summative assessment is a preferred practice among teachers.

This paper analyzes the teachers use of learning rubrics in English as a foreign language classroom in the Swedish primary schools. The focus lays on finding out teachers experiences and beliefs about using learning rubrics as a formative assessment tool.

According to theories and findings within formative assessment a certain set of criteria must be met, something which learning rubrics do. In order to fulfill this papers purpose, we combined a quantitative study that was carried out on 55 teachers, and a qualitative study that was centered around interviewing 5 teachers. Our results showed that 38 % of the 4-6 EFL teachers used a continuous formative assessment, which occurred during lessons or over a longer span of time. In regards to the use of learning rubrics only 3% used learning rubrics for a formative purpose.

Results also revealed that a combination of learning rubrics, and assessment rubrics are more commonly used rather than only the use of learning rubrics in the language classroom. Through the combination of these two types of rubrics it helped in clarifying what was assessed and in what way it was assessed. It would also be used to make teachers' arguments visible both for the students and the caretakers at home. However, if teachers do not apply the necessary adaptations to the formative process, the benefits are not obtained.

Keywords: EFL, formative assessment, language development, learning rubrics, teacher practices

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# 1. Introduction

Learning rubrics are a type of assessment tool that have derived from assessment rubrics and are not as well-known as assessment rubrics are (Alm, 2015). Assessment rubrics contains criteria and descriptions of qualitative levels that supports teachers in their assessment practice (Panadero & Jönsson, 2013). Unlike assessment rubrics, learning rubrics contain a language that is adapted to the students understanding, and contain a clear focus on what the students are supposed to learn. The idea behind learning rubrics is that teachers create them with their students in mind, and that they facilitate or translate the curriculum's knowledge requirements in a way so that their students can understand them (Alm, 2015). In a study that investigated students perspectives on the use of rubrics, findings showed that students benefited from using rubrics both through improving their work and grades (Andrade & Du, 2005). According to Wiliam and Leahy (2015) clear and understandable learning goals are key aspects for students' learning development and are the foundation for formative assessment.

In the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2011), under the section for assessment and grades, the school goals of developing students that are increasingly responsible for their studies, and able to assess their own and peers results are made evident. According to Wiliam and Leahy (2015) the practice of formative assessment in everyday teaching does assist teachers in developing these habits among their students. Despite the benefits that formative assessment offers, teachers seem to prefer summative assessment in their assessment practices for language teaching (Hasselgreen, 2005; Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014). The contributing factors for these findings were explained as due to lack of time and lack of assessment training.

When teachers start working, they have a professional responsibility to summative assess their students before a performance review, which in Swedish schools occur either once per semester, or once per year. At the present-day teachers start grading their students at the end of year 6 (Korp, 2011). In order to support teachers in grade assessment, subject specific knowledge requirements exist for the different grades in the Swedish school curriculum (Skolverket, 2011). According to Alm (2015) teachers are accustomed to use assessment rubrics, which are composed by the knowledge requirements from the Swedish curriculum. Some teachers use these same assessment rubrics in their formative assessment practice. The downside of this is that it

does not always contribute to young learners' understanding of what is to be learned, because the language is not adapted for them. Apart from the mentioned downside, the assessment rubrics focus mainly on what a student has achieved after completing an assignment or a specific subject area (Alm, 2015). Something which has been found to be less effective in a previous study (Schneider, 2006). Therefore it can be argued that assessments rubrics are intended for teachers and not for helping students in improving their learning. Learning rubrics on the other hand contribute to a transparent assessment practice, through their understandable language, which reduces performance anxiety and transforms students into more self-secure individuals (Skolverket, 2019).

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers use of learning rubrics in English as a foreign language classroom in Swedish primary schools and what they know about them. Further, we want to examine how teachers implement learning rubrics as a formative assessment tool, and to seek out their beliefs on how learning rubrics have contributed in a positive or negative way. We believe that teachers' positive experiences and practices could lead in encouraging other teachers to use it, and as well to encourage principals in investing in employee training that focuses on the use of learning rubrics for formative assessment. This would help teachers to develop self-sufficient learners that would develop a goal-oriented focus on what they are supposed to learn.

## **2. Aim and research question**

The scientific intention of this degree project is to investigate how 4-6 EFL teachers use learning rubrics formatively in the English as a foreign language classroom. Our goal in this study is to show findings on how teachers in Swedish primary schools implement learning rubrics as a formative tool. Further, we intend to find out what teachers believe are the benefits from using learning rubrics and what possible downsides that can occur when implementing them. Our aim is to compare the findings of this degree project with other previous research findings within the same area. We will be searching for correlations and differences that either support, or contradict the use of learning rubrics.

### **2.1 Research questions**

1. What are teachers' formative assessment practices in the foreign language classroom, in grades 4-6?
2. What do teachers know about learning rubrics?
3. What are the benefits and the downsides of using learning rubrics in a formative assessment?

# 3. Background

## 3.1 Assessment in language education

Referring to assessment in the context of language learning, the Council of Europe (2020) illustrates assessment as having two different functions: one, to measure a learner's language proficiency in general, or the second, to measure a performance in relation to a set criterion within a specific program of learning.

The learning criteria are terms of reference that guide and form the teaching in school which leads to an influence on the students' work performance. Skolverket (2011) highlights the importance of assessing a student's different knowledge based on the students work performance. The work performance can be considered as a reaction or a response to the different assignments in different assessment situations. The work performance itself, separated from the reaction, could either be a *product* which indicates to the final result, or a *process* which means how the work progresses. When Skolverket (2011) discusses assessment, in this case, they refer to the observations and gathering of information. Korp (2011) raises this as an ongoing process regarding the students work performance, also known as continuous assessment (Cambridge, 2020), which in the end is interpreted to lead to some form of decision and consequence. On the other hand Shepard (2000) argues that on-going assessment should be moved into the middle of the students' learning to scaffold the students in reaching the next step. Korp (2011) also sees the potential that on-going assessment carries in regards to aiding teachers to take decisions regarding their students' abilities and knowledge. Teachers will use this either to compile a grade, which are labeled as high stakes assessment or to function as results, communicated between the teacher and the student, with the purpose to be used in the continued educational work and is therefore classified as low stakes assessment (Korp, 2011).

Considering the significance of the assessment for teaching and for the individual that is being assessed, it is important for the teacher to fulfill two of the fundamental aspects for the assessment to reflect a trustworthy level of quality. The quality is obtained through the teachers consistent work with validity and reliability. Validity includes that what is to be assessed, has been assessed and nothing else, as well as if the assessment has been built upon a diverse and relevant material (Korp, 2011). According to Grettve et. al., (2014) through the collection of



comprehensive material, teachers secure an assessment practice that is fair. Reliability entails the exclusion of incorrect influential factors which need to be excluded in the assessment practice, so that the assessment reflects the precise knowledge of each individual (Korp, 2011).

The reasons why teachers' need to be capable assessors is made clear by Korp (2011), but in Hasselgreen's (2005) study, where she looked into how assessment practices are adapted to younger language learners in the context of Europe, she found that teachers lacked training in language assessment. In Hasselgreen's study the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was used alongside with the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and applied in two separate projects involving 9-10-year-old primary school children and 12-13-year-old. The first project included the development of portfolio assessment material that were compatible with the ELP. Self- assessment forms, profiling forms and observation forms were added to the project to aid both students' and teachers' assessment practices and the intention of the project was to give the students concrete feedback on their ability in the receptive skills and the productive skills. The project started in Bergen and was first a local county-based project, but it soon developed into a Nordic/Baltic project. The second project was construed by a national testing of English and applied the different levels within the CEFR so that the students and teachers were aware of what the students were capable of doing and what they needed to learn in order to continue their progression. Through Hasselgreen's study she shows to the survey carried out by the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment that revealed the need of specialist training in language teaching among primary school teachers and training in assessment.

These findings are coherent with the ones from another study (Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014), where the teachers' perceptions of the challenges that occur in teaching English to young learners were examined. Most of the challenges addressed in this were localized. These challenges included the size of the class, teachers confidence and skills in the English language and the constant pressure of time. This research project, conducted by Copland, Garton & Burns (2014), focused on the challenges teachers face when teaching English to young language learners. To find results a different mix of methods were used to collect data, this included a survey which was in the end completed by 4,459 teachers all over the world. The researchers also used case studies, including observations and interviews with teachers, in five different primary schools in five different countries. It was concluded that the primary challenges for teachers were partly by

lack of training, partly by lack of knowledge, and partly by lack of resources. This is the results from that the government policy does not priorities this and instead the time is wasted on introducing the teachers to temporary approaches advocated in literature, which according to Copland, Garton & Burns (2014) does not provide the teachers with enough skills to improve their assessment practice.

## **3.2 Formative assessment**

According to the Assessment reform Group (2002), the purpose of assessment for learning is to make the learners aware of where they are in their learning, and where they need to go and how they can get there (Erickson & Sebestyén, 2019). The definition from Skolverket (2019) states that formative assessment includes information regarding where every student is in relation to the goals of teaching. This helps the student to keep a clear focus on their studies, and the teachers to adapt their teaching towards the goals.

According to an article about classroom assessment written by Shepard (2000) the role of on-going assessment plays a more useful role if the assessment is moved into the middle of the students' learning. Through this practice teachers can scaffold the students, and help them in reaching the next step as part of the assessment practice. Skolverket (2019) develops formative assessment further by distributing the importance of the information between the student and the teacher for different purposes. The students use the information to find focus in their studies, and the teacher uses the information to adapt their teaching to the students' levels. Three important standing points of formative assessment involve: (1) information about what the goals of the teaching are: (2) where the student is in relation to the goals and: (3) which feedback that can be provided to help the student move forward in their learning (Skolverket, 2019).

William and Leahy (2015) concretize the essence of the three standing points (Skolverket, 2019) of formative assessment through five strategies: clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria: eliciting evidence of learners' achievement: providing feedback that moves learning forward: activating students as instructional resources for one another: and activating students as owners of their own learning.

*Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria:* The most important factor is, according to Wiliam and Leahy (2015), that the students understand what they are meant to do and learn in class. The teacher needs to provide the students with the criteria that they will use to evaluate the work at the end of any work unit. Teachers should always make sure that their students understand the objectivity behind each activity they execute in class, and what actually counts as quality work.

*Eliciting evidence of learners' achievement:* In order for teachers to find evidence of their learners achievements, they need to know what it is they are looking for. Teachers also need to create a safe classroom environment that facilitates the students' willingness to share their thoughts and notes. Wiliam and Leahy (2015) advocates enquiring techniques where teachers decide which student will answer, instead of letting the students answer when they know the answer to what has been asked.

*Providing feedback that moves learning forward:* According to research done by Wiliam and Leahy (2015), teachers today more commonly use counterproductive feedback which impacts the students' performance negatively. The overall conclusion drawn from the studies shown in this chapter (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015) is that feedback should cause thinking. In agreement with Lundahl (2019), the most efficient form of feedback should always give the students an opportunity to answer, "Where am I going?", "How am I going?" and "Where to next?". This is consistent with the findings from an experimental study on teachers' written feedback on students homework and its impact on students performances. This study showed that the students who received constructive written feedback from their teachers would learn twice as fast as the test groups. Wiliam and Leahy (2015) highlight that an effective feedback focuses on what comes next in the learning process, rather than how good or bad the student performed on the work he or she already completed. Feedback has the potential to make the students owners of their own learning, when used in an effective way to improve their development within learning. In order for the feedback to be of high quality, it needs to concentrate on specific comments on errors and suggest on how improvements can be carried out, as well that it should contain positive remarks (Wiliam, 2013).

*Activating students as instructional resources for one another:* Cooperative learning is something that teachers carry the responsibility of creating in a well-structured learning situation. The definition of cooperative learning from Johnson et al., (1998) explains the phenomena as something that occurs when students work together towards a common learning goal. Through cooperative learning the students can develop the ability to identify specific questions about improving their fellow peers' work, and learn how to give effective feedback that leads to the progression of further learning.

*Activating students as owners of their own learning:* Research has shown that by getting students involved in their own learning, gives the potential to develop extraordinary improvements in each individual's achievements. The most important aspect when it comes to self-assessment, presented by Wiliam and Leahy (2015), is self-regulation. This term involves the combining of the students' cognitive resources, with both the emotions and actions, to be able to carry out the learning goals. In the end, the quality of how good the learner manages its own learning, the more they will be able to learn.

These five strategies for formative assessment were made visible in a qualitative study that utilized focus groups, where fourteen undergraduate students were invited to share and discuss their perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment. In the discussions the students explained in what ways the rubrics helped them to plan how they would execute an assignment. Among the topics that arouse from the discussions in the focus groups, the students highlighted how rubrics helped them to focus their efforts and produce work of higher quality, which influenced in improving their grades. Through the use of rubrics the students could check their work toward a set criterion which would help them in reflecting when receiving feedback from others. This also resulted in students experiencing less anxiety (Andrade & Du, 2005).

Wiliam and Leahy (2015) emphasize that by implementing some of these formative assessment techniques, teachers are able to help their students in becoming owners of their own learning. Teachers should consider while implementing these strategies to concentrate on one or two of them at a time, so that it becomes part of their common repertoire before moving on to an additional strategy.

### 3.3 Skolverket- How assessment is regulated

The curriculum for elementary school (Skolverket, 2011) talks about a learning that prepares students to live and work in the community, on enduring knowledge, on skills and methods to acquire new knowledge in various subjects and critically examine facts and circumstances. According to Skolverket (2011) this is the learning that should be promoted in teaching and through assessment. The school has a stated knowledge assignment that the assessment should be related to. This assignment rests on a view of knowledge that is expressed in the schools' governing documents. Skolverket (2011) states that there are different forms of knowledge, for example facts, understanding, skill and familiarity, which are required to interact with each other. In education, these forms of knowledge should be balanced so that they form a completeness for the students. Skolverket (2011) suggest that teachers achieve this balance by using five key strategies for their formative assessment. The first key strategy includes information about what the student should learn. In the course and subject plans the goals for the education equals the different abilities which the students should evolve and these are concluded under the section *purpose*. The long-term goals are expressed in the teaching around parts from the core content, which is planned and executed by the teacher. The students need to understand the purpose of the education, and the goals need to be clear and relevant to the teaching situation.

For the formative assessment to function, teachers need to know what their students' previous knowledge is and how to move forward. The formative assessment is a part of the teaching, and there is an importance of designing the teaching so both the teachers and the students see how and to what extent the students have learned or understood, and where they find themselves in relation to the goals created. The quality of both the assignments and the questions asked by the teacher decides if the students get an opportunity to display their knowledge, and therefore determines what information the teacher gets access to.

With the help of the data and information that teachers collect regarding their students, Skolverket (2011) argues that teachers can change their approach, which will lead to a teaching that is more suitable to meet the students' needs and their own individual premises. There are several approaches to use with the goal to help the student move forward in their knowledge. The teacher, but also the student himself and other students, give each other feedback to make the teaching move forward. The feedback will function when it contributes to the

purpose for the students' own progression in their learning. The process of feedback can be a part of strengthening the dialogue between students and teachers to inform the student on how to approach the goals.

Even though the teacher provides feedback to the students throughout their entire schooling, Skolverket (2011) states that students need to be able to test their own ability in assessing each other. When students are given the opportunity to assess and give each other feedback, they will not only receive the knowledge on how assignments of different quality can be revealed, but their ability to assess themselves can be strengthened. Further on, the students' own ability to take responsibility for and control their own learning can be empowered throughout the possibility to assess their own work.

### **3.4 Learning rubrics**

According to Alm (2015) learning rubrics are a development of assessment rubrics that contain a new perspective. The main idea behind learning rubrics is to help the students in advance to understand what they are supposed to learn (Alm, 2015). Hattie and Timperley (2007) highlight the importance of students understanding ongoing assessment otherwise it may be a threat to the students instead. The primary function of learning rubrics is thus for students, and not for aiding teachers in assessment, in contrast to assessment rubrics (Alm, 2015). Jönsson and Svingby (2007) shows the potential that learning rubrics can provide, by making the criteria explicit for the learners and promoting learning by improving instructions. By applying explicit criteria teachers scaffold the students in developing new skills, knowledge and new terms that helps them to reach a new level of understanding (Gibbons, 2015). An additional study that was carried out by Jönsson (2014) showed how students experienced the use of rubrics in assessment practices. The students felt they were helped from knowing the assessment expectations beforehand, and that it resulted in them producing a work of higher quality, as well as feeling less anxious about the assignments. Another study that investigated how students experience the usefulness of rubrics after an assignment and before completing an assignment in 55 community college revealed that 88% of the students experienced positive effects of using rubrics before a task or an assignment was handed in. The study showed that only 10% of the students found it meaningful to use rubrics after the assignment was completed (Schneider, 2006).

The theoretical foundation for learning rubrics is a combination of variation theory and design for learning theory. Each of these theories are based on questions such as, why and what for the variation theory and how for the design for learning theory (Alm, 2015). In accordance with Alm (2015), the terms learning rubrics and variation theory can be connected to each other through the basic concept, taken from Ference Marton. Meaning, that when you learn new aspects of a learning object, such as the concept of learning rubrics, you build up new layers of and create your own understanding regarding this concept. This is coherent with the definition of variation theory where Bussey, Orgill and Crippen (2012) states that this is a theory of learning and experience, which explains how a learner might understand, see or experience a given phenomenon. Pursuant to Marton (as cited in Alm, 2015), this is learning in agreement with the variation theory. Variation theory explains how learning takes place. The importance to understand how learning is conducted through the variation theory, is that the summation of it all is that each and every individual understands new aspects of a selected knowledge area, that you didn't know existed regarding a specific learning object. Each and every individual concept with their own characteristics in reach of the variation theory are the critical aspects of it all. When these critical aspects or subjects get emphasized, the mind is constructed to sort out what is important and less important. In an article written by Bussey et. al., (2012), their purpose is to show the reader that the variation theory is (1) a very useful mindset for instructors to have about students' learning, and (2) a powerful theoretical framework to manage chemical education research. The definition of the variation theory conducted in this article (2012), the variation theory suggests that there are just a limited number of features of any given phenomenon that we can pay attention to at any given time (Bussey et. al., 2012).

The other foundation for learning rubrics, design for learning, is a concept focused on designing your teaching for your students to be able to reach the set goals for a specific assignment and this is where your teaching will become the most efficient (Alm, 2015). One important term around the concept of design for learning is multimodality. This means that each individual student learns best through different modules, communication channels, such as pictures, sound, texts and sometimes through their own bodies. An important aspect to keep in mind here is that there is no existing hierarchy between all of these different modules, it is just important to remember all of their pros and cons and then design your lessons based on them (Alm, 2015).

According to another source (Kempe & Selander, 2008), that describes the aspect of multimodal communication as significantly more complex and ambiguous than what we communicate through speaking and writing. This creates an importance regarding our understanding of how to design our teaching. In conclusion with both Alm (2015) and Kempe and Selander (2008), multimodality is one important aspect to keep in mind when you design for learning, because each individual learns through different modules, and this must be an important part of how you design your learning.

## **4. Method**

Under this section, the choice of methods and selection of participants will be described as well as how both the qualitative and quantitative data collection was planned and conducted with all of the participants. The ethical considerations together with both validity and reliability will be reported. The data collection process is divided into two parts, a quantitative study and qualitative interviews. The intention with the survey was to collect information about teachers' views and knowledge regarding formative assessment and learning rubrics. The gathered data would then be able to be used to give a general overview of teachers' views and knowledge about the subjects. Opening up for the possibility to inspire other teachers to educate themselves about learning rubrics and the benefits they entail. The interviews for this study cover the qualitative aspect, and provide in-depth information about the gathered data (Fekjær, 2016). The chosen research methods for this study have been selected in order to enable data triangulation. By combining several different data collection methods such as qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey, a more complex picture of the empirical phenomena is possible to be obtained (Alvehus, 2013).

The study's data collection is limited to the southern part of Sweden, more specifically, Skåne. The collection of data from this region is deemed to be representative for the rest of Sweden. The following sections provide a descriptive content behind the chosen methods for this study.

### **4.1 Participants**

The total number of participants for this study is 60 language teachers. 55 of them answered the survey and the remaining five of them were interviewed. The teachers that answered the survey



have been working as 4-6 grade EFL teachers from 0,5 year - 26 years, and their average year of experience was calculated to be 12,5 years. The teachers that were interviewed had been actively working for 0,5 year - 24 years, their average time as working as teachers was calculated to be 22 years. Four of them were working as 4-6 grade EFL teachers, the fifth teacher that was interviewed worked as a Spanish foreign language teacher in the 7-9 grades. All of the teachers work in Skåne.

We chose to utilize random selection for the survey's population from a list of primary schools in Skåne's region (Skollistan.se, 2015). Random selection is a common practice among researchers performing a quantitative study, since it allows them to generalize the collected data (Alvehus, 2013). The schools that were contacted were all public primary schools, the private schools and international schools were excluded so that we would be able to collect data from schools with similar conditions. We came to the conclusion that private schools and international schools may not be teaching English as a foreign language, but rather other types of English. That is why we deemed the participant of the survey to be representative of the general population.

In regards to the qualitative interviews the selection of the population for the study has been combined by different categories. One common denominator for four of the interviewed teachers is that they constitute a homogeneous selection as they are all English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher for the primary years. As mentioned above the fifth teacher that was interviewed is a Spanish foreign language teacher in the 7-9 grades. This teacher uses learning rubrics as an active part of his formative assessment practice, and has therefore been selected to participate in the interviews. We deemed that this teacher's participation would not be influential enough to change the perspective of this degree project considering that his deviation is connected to the language and age-group. He is included due to his knowledge about using learning rubrics when teaching in a foreign language.

The combination of the above selections is a conscious choice from our part as the intention with the interviews and the survey, are to highlight differences and similarities between the teachers and their assessment practices (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015). The division among the participants into different categories are as follows. One of the teachers', here called Pia, has held a lecture in formative assessment and its practical use in the classroom at Malmö University

during the fall semester 2019 for the English study and education course and has been actively working with formative assessment for 24 years. Therefore this teacher can be categorized as an extreme selection in this study as the data collected from this teacher can be classified as deviant data in comparison to the other teachers (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015). Two additional teachers, here named Kalle and Pär, can be put into the same category, as both of them have participated in a workshop with Johan Alm regarding learning rubrics. Kalle is a English teacher for the years 4-6 and has been teaching for four years. Pär is a Spanish teacher for foreign language teaching in the years 7-9 and has been teaching for three and a half years. The two remaining teachers' are Sara and Anna, who are both EFL teachers in the years 4-6, and have been teaching for a half year, respectively twelve years.

## **4.2 Materials**

### **4.2.1 Survey**

For this study a quantitative data collection was conducted by creating a digital questionnaire. The digital questionnaire was created through the platform Sunet Survey provided by Malmö University, which meets the requirements for protecting individuals personal information (GDPR) (Datainspektionen, 2018). Our selection of questions and the design of the study were adapted from Wenemark (2017). The survey was sent out to 250 primary schools in Skåne, Sweden, and was directed toward English foreign language teachers actively working with younger English foreign language learners. Through the teachers' collaboration and participation of the survey the results provided by the quantitative data will be able to say something reliable about the larger group of English as foreign language teachers in southern Sweden (Fekjær, 2016).

The survey was composed of thirteen questions which covered background information about the teachers' level of education as well as their level of English proficiency, two of these questions were follow-up questions that will be presented as additional information in written form. The reference for English levels is taken from Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). Further questions covered the teachers' assessment practices and their knowledge about learning rubrics (see Appendix B).

## **4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The research method interview was chosen due to its flexibility in the data collection process. Interviews offer the perspective of teachers' personal experiences and thoughts in a more descriptive and ample way than other methods do (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews were prepared through an interview guide containing open questions without any predefined answers. These questions were standardized so that all the participants would be answering the same questions and the answers would be comparable. The questions were divided into themes about (1) knowledge background, (2) assessment in their teaching and (3) knowledge about the differences between learning and scoring rubrics (see Appendix C). The first theme contains four questions whose purpose is to gather information about the teachers' education and their experience within the profession. Level of assessment training can be a contributing factor to the inclination of using formative assessment (Hasselgreen, 2005). The second theme that covers five questions about assessment practices involves our underlying focus of assessment. The third theme is our main focus, connected to both the aim and research question, which is represented through three questions about learning rubrics. We had agreed upon the importance of paying attention to the prospect of follow-up questions and therefore some of the acquired answers vary from the participants.

## **4.4 Procedure**

The preparations for both the survey and the interviews started with identifying which questions would be relevant for our study. According to Hasselgreen (2005), an influential factor for less successful learning outcomes in the English language classroom, is due to the lack of proper assessment training among English teachers. That is why we wanted to investigate foreign language teachers assessment knowledge and training.

In the survey, teachers' knowledge of formative assessment is summed up in the question "What does formative assessment entail?" It was a multiple-choice question and the teachers could choose between the following options: Assessment that can be used both formative and summative: Assessment for learning: Assessment that can be used to support the students learning and develops the teachers teaching: Teachers that are aware of what they want the children to learn: Teachers give feedback to the students so that they can improve their learning:

It signifies that a learning culture is sought as well as a teaching climate where the students can learn and get the opportunity to learn about learning and it signifies information about where a student is at in relation to teaching goals.

The different explanations to formative assessment were selected for different reasons. The first one being: a common misconception among teachers is that formative assessment cannot be used for summative purposes (Hasselgreen, 2005), and due to the lack of time, teachers prioritize summative assessment before formative (Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014). The next option, “Assessment for learning”, is sprung from the Assessment reform group (2002) definition which states, “make the learners aware of where they are in their learning, and where they need to go and how they can get there”, differentiating the term from the third option, “Assessment that can be used to support the students learning and develops the teachers teaching”, described by Skolverket (2019). The remaining options constitute the elements of the five strategies for formative assessment provided by Wiliam and Leahy (2015). After formulating the questions we created a survey through the platform Sunet Survey provided by Malmö University. The survey was composed of 13 questions and once it was finished we sent the link of the survey to one of our supervisors of teacher students vocational training. The reason for doing so was so that we could get some feedback on the survey before sharing it with a wider audience. After receiving feedback the survey was revised a last time before it was activated. The survey was activated the fifth of February and closed the 20th of February. In order to establish the contact information, we searched for Grundskola Skåne län in the Google search engine and found a European Union list of primary schools of Skåne (Skollistan.se, 2015). The random email addresses to 250 schools were selected and we e-mailed the schools to inform about the degree project as well as to share the survey link. Therefore, the participants for this part are categorized as random selection (Alvehus, 2013).

Before the interviews could take place we contacted three teachers that we had previously been in contact with for other school assignments in the English subject. An additional two other teachers from one of our vocational training schools were contacted as well and a teacher that had held a seminary about goal-oriented formative assessment with the help of assessment rubrics at Malmö university. From these first contacted teachers only two of them consented to participate in the study. That is why we contacted the three last possible candidates that accepted to participate in

the study. Two of them had been suggested by one of our supervisors of teacher students vocational training and the third teacher was an acquaintance. The interview guide and the consent form with the degree projects background information was sent out to the teachers that were going to be interviewed by mail. Our purpose behind this was to facilitate the teachers preparation before the interviews and also to inform them about the fact that the interviews would be recorded with a dictaphone (See Appendix A). This is a recommendation that (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015) deems to be more suitable when executing qualitative interviews if the interviewer is only interested in documenting speech. Through the consent form the teachers were informed about the data storage, which were saved through Malmö University's database/cloud storage. This storage is accessed through any of the University computers, and is reached as a unit: M. The participants were also informed that they were able to withdraw their participation at any time (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015). The location, time and date for the interviews was determined by each of the participants. Two of the five interviews were held in the classroom studies allocated at the teachers' school. One of the interviews was held at one of the teacher's homes, and the two last interviews were held at a café. The duration of the interviews was between 13-35 minutes long.

## **4.5 Ethical considerations**

The conducted research is in line with the guidelines set forth by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). All participants were contacted via email with a consent form attached to it (see Appendix A). The main purpose and aim for our degree project were explained, including our main selection criteria (we needed to find teachers in year 4-6 teaching English). The participants for the interviews were informed that we were specifically interested in how they use formative assessment in the EFL classroom and if they use learning rubrics in their teaching.

Further on, the participants for the interview which were accomplished by teachers teaching English in year 4-6, were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any moment according to the autonomy principle that is about the right to self-determination (Wenemark, 2017). They were also informed that the information that would be collected, during their interviews would be confidential and that their

names would be substituted with a fictional one and that all the data would be used for this particular degree project. These terms, for the teachers, were presented through a consent form provided by Malmö University (see Appendix A).

## **4.6 Analysis of the data**

Through the survey a wide range of answers were covered and composed our statistical data collection (Fekjær, 2016). Each of the basic questions (eleven questions) were compiled into separate bar charts through Microsoft Excel. The follow-up questions answers that were given, were written down along with the bar charts compilation in the survey's order (see Appendix D).

For the qualitative interviews data collection, we transcribed the voice recordings after the interviews ended. During each of the interviews we did minor annotations of factors that were consistent with read theory from other studies, and the details closely connected to the research question was taken into careful account. The data was first analyzed after all the interviews were completed. The encoding used in the transcriptions are written as follows: the names of the interviewers and the teachers were abbreviated by using (interviewer = I) and the teachers initials (Kalle = K), the conversations were transcribed and the long pauses were presented by using dots and parentheses, as such (...).

## 5. Results and discussion

The data gathered from the survey with 55 respondents and the semi structured interviews conducted with five foreign language teachers, (whereof four of them were EFL teachers), will be presented in this section. In order to answer our study's research questions: (1) What are teachers' formative assessment practices in the foreign language classroom, in grades 4-6?

(2.) What do teachers know about learning rubrics?

(3) What are the benefits and the downsides of using learning rubrics in a formative assessment?

We deemed the following three categories as relevant aspects to be disguised further. Under each category we have summarized and presented the quantitative data and the qualitative data that is relevant for the section.

### 5.1 Teachers formative assessment practices in the foreign language classroom, in grades 4-6

In below graph the data for the question: "What does formative assessment entail?" is distributed as follows: 7 of the teachers (12,7 %) considered that formative assessment is described by all the options, 33 of the teachers ( 60 %) have chosen to combine different answers. The remaining participants preferred explaining formative assessment by only one option. Two of the teachers (0,3 %) considered that "Assessment for learning" is the best option to describe formative assessment, seven of the participators (12, 7%), thought that the questions was best answered by choosing "Assessment that can be used to support the students learning and develops the teachers teaching". The options, "You as a teacher are aware of what you want the children to learn" and "Teachers give feedback to the students so that they can improve their learning" were selected one time each. The two last options: "It signifies that a learning culture is sought as well as a teaching climate where the students can learn and get the opportunity to learn about learning" and "It signifies information about where a student is at in relation to teaching goals" were chosen by two teachers each.

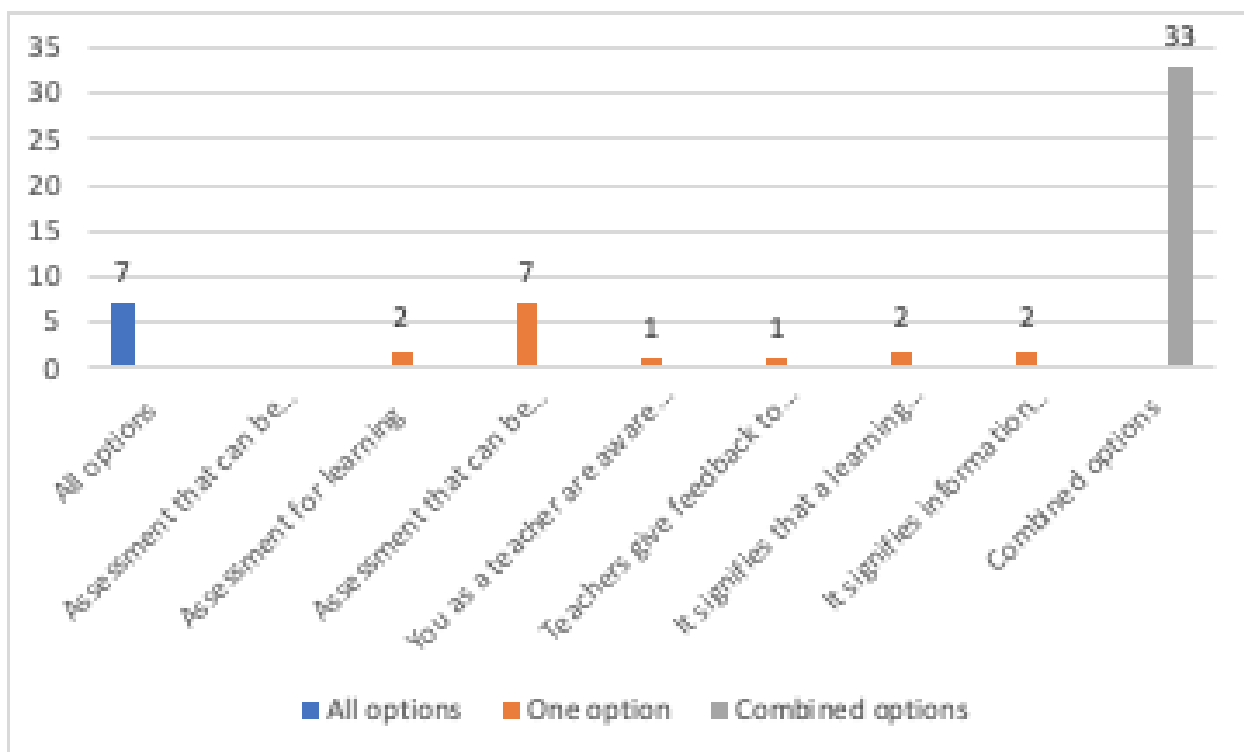


Figure 1. A multiple-choice question with the purpose to see teachers' understanding of the concept of formative assessment and what it entails.

The distribution among the answers about what formative assessment entails, makes the spread of teachers' understanding of the concept visible. Through this varied understanding of the concept, the ideas from Hasselgreen's (2005) study were deemed to be relevant. Teachers that lack proper assessment training are not aware of its full meaning, and that would be one of the explanations to such varied data.

With the intention to deepen the aspect of the formative practices in a foreign language classroom we wanted to investigate the following question through the interviews:

“Which occasion do you find formative assessment as being a more adequate method?”

Many of the answers showed that teachers had a preference to use formative assessment continuously as it helped the young learners to progress in their learning.

A: I think that the formative is to be used all the time. That is the point of the learning. You give them comments, think about this, this you did good. So that they can see the next step all the time and so that they can develop further.

(Anna, 02.03.2020)



For the same question Pär answered:

My opinions are that nothing is as good and as effective as the formative assessment. The summative assessment, I feel is not as equivalent, it is not as attainable in the same way, that is how I feel. Then it is unfortunately that our knowledge requirements are for the summative assessment, so it is very hard to be formative at the end of a semester, but then it is my opinion that formative assessment is the best assessment.

(Pär, 06.03.2020)

According to Shepard (2000) the role of on-going assessment plays a more useful role if the assessment is moved into the middle of the students' learning. Through this practice teachers can scaffold the students and help them in reaching the next step as part of the assessment practice. On the other hand if the ongoing assessment is provided when the students are not understanding, it may be a threat to the students instead (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Jönsson (2014) also raises the importance of the assessments transparency, if students do not understand what criteria they are being assessed against the on-going assessment does not improve students' performances. By reviewing the included literature from this study we could distinguish a relevance, of how teachers' assessment training and knowledge impacted their assessment practices through conscious decisions. The results from the interviews showed a common denominator among them, it was their opinion that formative assessment should be part of the everyday practice. Thereby, the following question was examined through the survey: "Which type of formative assessment do you use in your classroom?"

In regards to when assessment is used, teachers showed a higher tendency (65%) of using assessment after finishing an assignment or focus area and 50 % of the answers also referred to the option "Other" (See graph below).

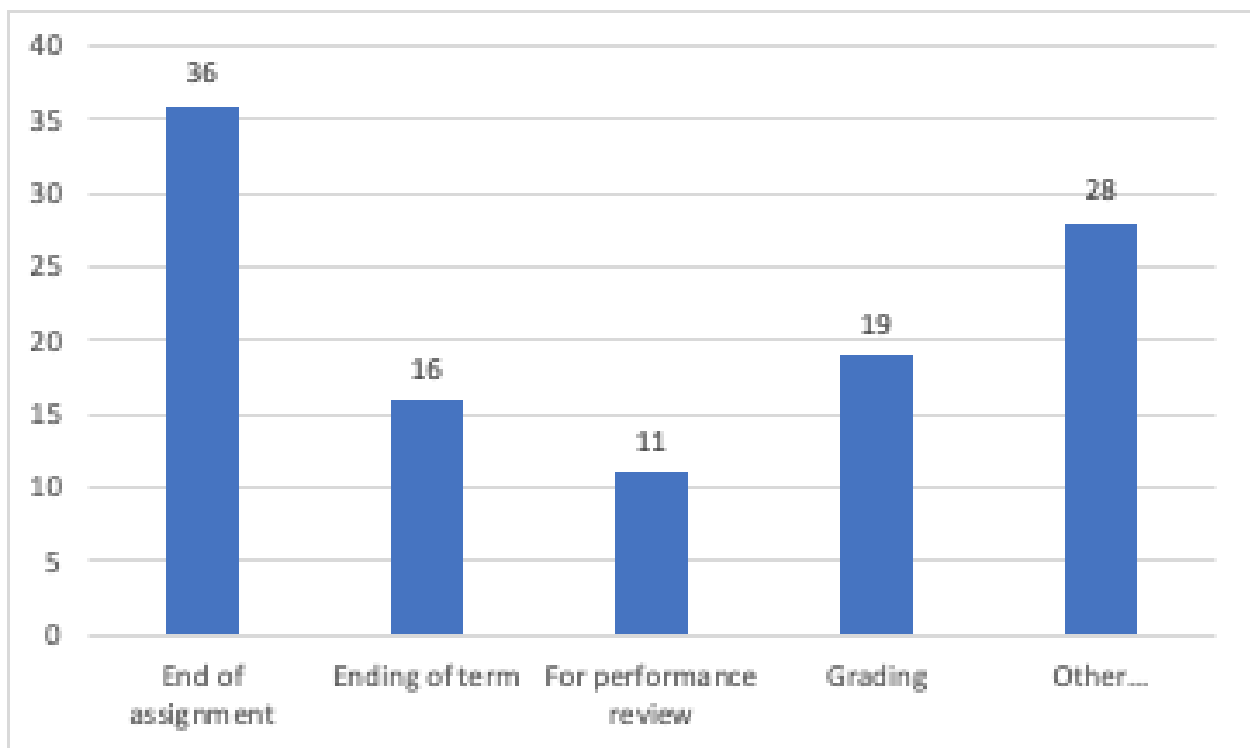


Figure 2. A multiple-choice question which was asked to get an overview on when teachers choose to assess their students.

Due to the fact that this question was formed as a multiple-choice question and a new data analysis was made to provide clarity among the distribution of teachers assessment practice. From the collected data it was investigated how many of the teachers had only chosen one option and came to the conclusion that 29 teachers (52%) had chosen one option in the survey, which in the graph are separated in the blue color. 13 teachers (23 %) use assessment only at the end of an assignment, only one of them (1,8%) uses assessment at the end of term, two of the teachers (3,6 %) use assessment at the time of grading, and 13 teachers (23%) chose the option “Other”.

For this question, the teachers that selected the option “other”, their answers have been written down and summarized in an Appendix (See Appendix E). These comments, from the teachers who filled in the option “other, can be summarized by looking at their common denominator. These teachers describe their assessment as continuously done on their students during or after a lesson/field of work, an ongoing process during every lesson, that assessment is everything that happens in the classroom, and that the assessment may function as a basis for continued planning of teaching, grades, individual adaptations, etc.

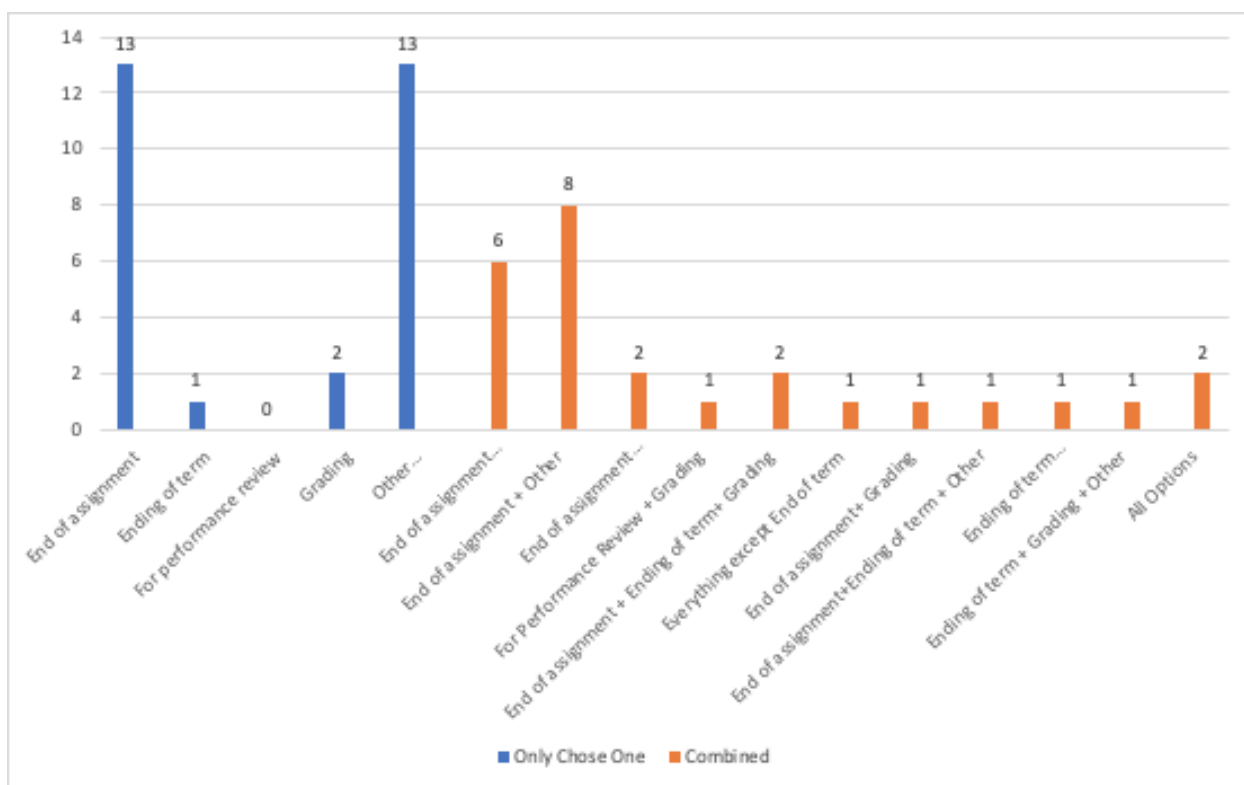


Figure 3. Examples on how the participants combined their answers for this question, where the blue indicates choosing one and orange on a combination of answers.

For the teachers that combined several assessment occasions (color orange in graph) the highest percentage, 14% (8 teachers) was found among the teachers that would assess their students at “End of Assignment” and “Other”. 6 teachers (10%) would assess at the “End of an assignment”, “Ending of term”, “For performance review” and “Grading”. Two teachers (3,6%) assessed their students at the “End of assignment”, “Ending of term”, “Grading” and “Other”.

One teacher (1,8%) assesses his/her students “For Performance Review” and “Grading”. Two teachers (3,6%) had the custom to assess their students at the “End of assignment”, “Ending of term” and “Grading”. One teacher (1,8 %) who chose everything except “End of term”. One teacher (1,8%) who assesses at the “End of assignment” and “Grading”. One teacher (1,8 %) who assesses at the “End of assignment”, “Ending of term” and “Other”. One teacher (1,8%) who assesses at the “Ending of term”, “For performance review” and “Grading”. One teacher (1,8) assesses at the “Ending of term”, “Grading” and “Other”. Two teachers (3,6%) answered that they would assess their students through all the occasions.

28 teachers selected “Other” either as the only option or in combination with other options. All of them were asked to explain their choice. 21 teachers (38 %) explained that their assessment practice is a continuous type that occurs during lessons and over a longer span of time. These results were consistent with the answers provided by the teachers that were interviewed, as they explained that they use assessment as continuous practice in their foreign language teaching, when asked the question: At what occasion do you use assessment?

S: In my teaching?

I: yes

S: I use it continuously

(Sara, 18.02.2020)

P: The daily assessment, I do it all the time. It can be driven by a goal that I wrote on the board. I often use lesson goals, after this, you should be able to know this. It can be about a term, or an ability, it can be about something that you actually are supposed to know.

(Pia, 28.02.2020)

Through the survey it became clear that teachers assessment practices vary from one another. 21 teachers (38 %) of the teachers showed that they used continuous assessment independently from their other assessment occasions, something that is not representative with the results gathered from the interviews, who all of them practiced continuous assessment.

Continuous assessment is when teachers assessment practices are based on students’ work by various pieces or occasions instead of assessing their students’ performances through one final exam (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Teachers carry the responsibility of executing an assessment practice that secures fairness. The only way for teachers to do this is through the collection of comprehensive material (Grettve et. al., 2014). In the Swedish curriculum, under the guidelines for assessment and grading, it is stated that teachers need to ”comprehensively” evaluate each student's knowledge development, orally and in writing, on the basis of the requirements of the syllabus (Skolverket, 2011).

Even though a continuous assessment does give teachers the opportunity to collect varied and comprehensive material, it is still of interest to investigate in what form the formative assessment

is implemented in the classroom. That is why the question “Which type of formative assessment do you use in your classroom?” was asked. The survey demonstrated that 18 teachers (33%) answered that they execute formative assessment mainly through oral feedback, the other most common practice of teachers’ (18 participants, 33%) formative assessment was through written and oral feedback (see graph below).

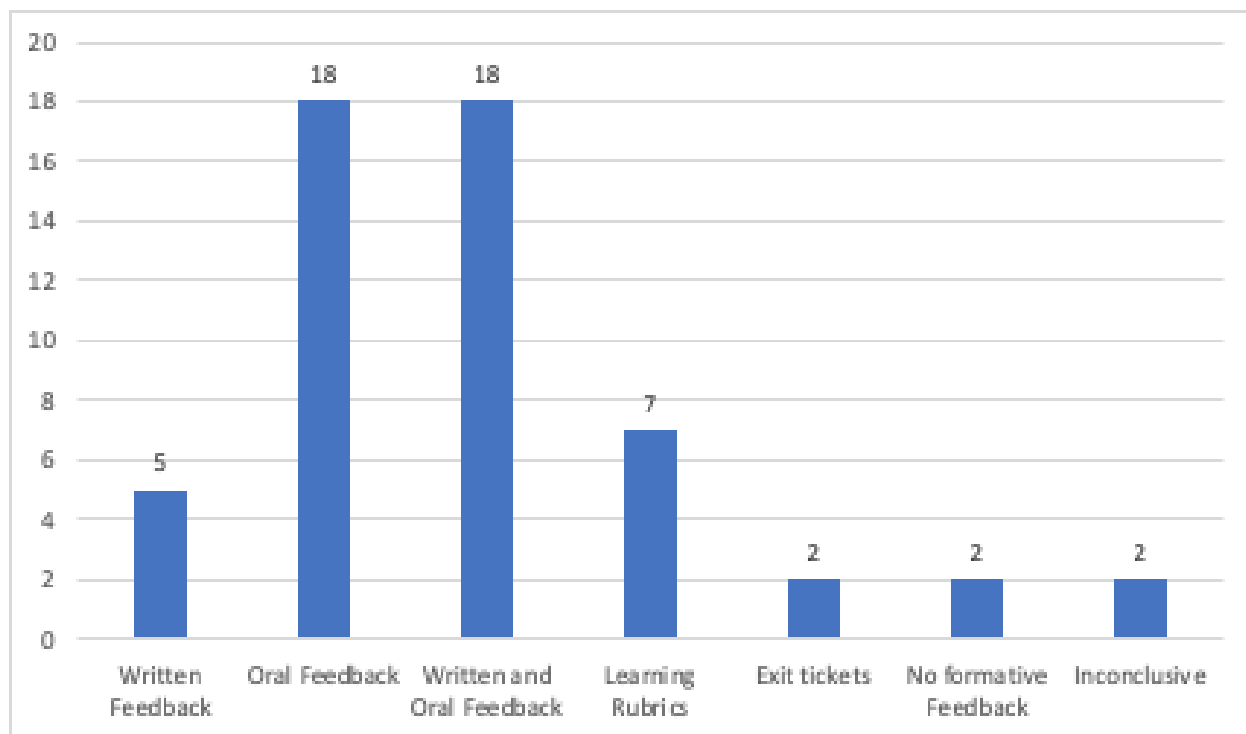


Figure 4. A question where the participants were asked to explain, in their own words, which type of formative assessment they prefer to use.

These findings were conclusive with the majority of the answers from the interviews. Pär, Sara, Anna, Kalle and Pia, who utilized oral feedback as an active part of their teaching and gave written responses when the learners had a written assignment.

S: then it is an assessment situation where I go around and listen to the students ..

I: yes

S: and in that case, I am able to help and give them tips on, yes okay, how do you pronounce this? So this way, (...)

S: ehh, another assessment situation is, for example, if they have written something, written a text and that they are given clear instructions how to write the text and that before they have gone through some strategies on how to write the text

I: mm

R: eeeh .. and to create a vocabulary as well, but then also when they think they have finished writing a text that one give them a feedback or a response that helps them forward, so that they can by themselves, correct the text, a little more , self-going.

(Sara, 18.02.2020)

The most important part of formative assessment is the feedback provided by the teacher. For it to be effective, it should affect the students and answer the questions of “Where am I going?”, “How am I going?” and “Where to next?”. Even though explicit feedback has shown to affect the uptake of a new language, there is no consensus on which type of feedback is better to use, that is why teachers should use different types of feedback (Lundahl, 2019). The key aspect of feedback is that it should be of high quality, that involves feedback which concentrates on specific comments on errors and suggests on how improvements can be made, as well that it should contain positive remarks (Wiliam, 2013). In the study conducted by Andrade and Du (2005) students shared their perspectives on how rubrics had improved their academic achievements through the clear goals that rubrics provided them with.

## **5.2 Teachers knowledge about learning rubrics**

As presented earlier in this degree project’s introduction Jönsson (as cited in Alm, 2016) highlights that teachers use assessment rubrics more commonly for summative purposes, instead of formative purposes. We were curious about the reason why this was. With the background on teachers language knowledge and previous assessment training as influential factors that led to poorer assessment practices (Copland et. al., 2014, Hasselgreen, 2005). In order to get an overview on teachers’ knowledge in relation to the term learning rubrics, a question of teachers’ use of rubrics was asked. In the survey each category was explained so that the teachers could choose the rubric that corresponded to the one they used. That is why the question “Which type of rubrics do you use in your teaching?” was included in the survey of this degree project. The compiled results from the survey showed that a mixture of both a learning- and assessment rubric, is most commonly used by teachers in year 4-6 (29 participants, 52 % ). Through the results it also became evident that teachers who only use learning rubrics in their teaching were not many (nine teachers, (16%) out of 55 respondents, see graph below).

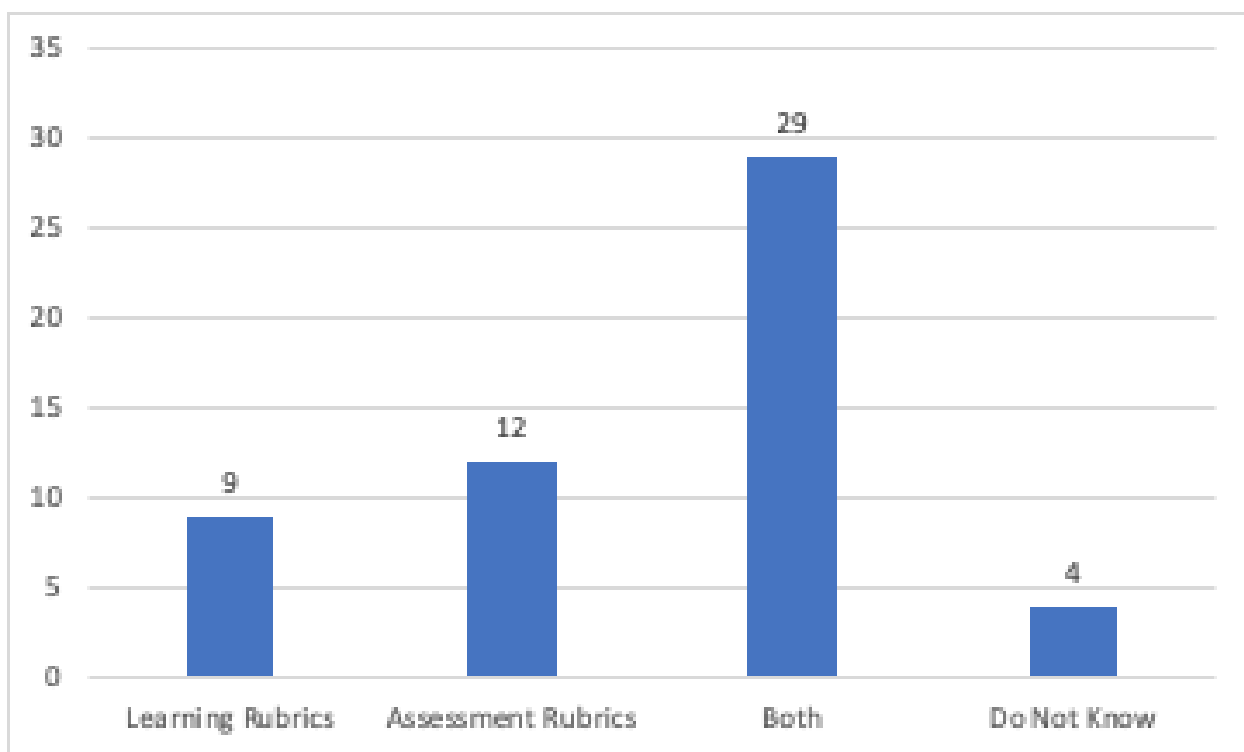


Figure 5. Answers from the survey that shows which type of rubrics the teachers use in their teaching.

Among the interviewed teachers only two of the five teachers were accustomed to use learning rubrics as an active tool within their foreign language teaching. These teachers were Pär and Kalle. Both of them had participated in workshops by Johan Alm, conducted in respective schools.

I: Which thoughts arise when we say the word "learning rubric"? P: that a learning rubric, helps, forms and facilitates for you and the student to reach a certain level of an ability. An assessment rubric is a catastrophe, I can't expect a student that is 13 years old will be able to say what a well-developed and well-built argument means. The aspects that they highlight are fuzzy, they are interpretable, that is why it is easier to simplify them in a learning rubric. That is the way to work on, but I had added a fourth and a fifth level to the rubric, otherwise it is easy to think A-C, instead of level 1-5. You have to be willing to work with this, you have to be clear on what 1 means E, but you also have to be clear on that it does not represent your summative grade, but rather your development and the progression that happens under your learning. Then there are some teachers that use learning rubric with the knowledge requirements, you have to be willing to take what is

written in the knowledge requirements and rewrite them. Simplify them and write them with examples so that the students can really understand, so that it is on their level.

(Pär, 06.03.2020)

The second teacher that worked with learning rubrics explained the pattern of thought that helps him in creating the learning rubric and explains how he uses it only as a formative tool.

K: with assessment, I usually work, so, firstly, to concretize. What do I want them to learn and how to learn. And there, I mean, that is where this with learning rubric comes in, that it becomes clearer to the students.

K: And there I feel it has helped the students to understand what they need to know, how to get there too.

K: so the formative part in learning rubrics is what I use the most, since I don't use it for summative purposes, as often learning rubrics in that way, but there will be more assessment rubrics for my part. Although the learning rubric for the students becomes a kind of summative assessment for them as they make a cross "where I have ended up.

(Kalle, 05.03.2020)

Except from Pär and Kalle, another teacher explained her assessment practices and the creation of her own assessment rubrics that she co-creates with the students by viewing the curriculum.

Pia has always, since she started working with learning rubrics, created her own form of rubric. She considers the most positive aspect of creating her own rubric, is that it does not contain a lot of text and is concretized and adapted for her students. The creation process of the rubrics always involves her students. Together they look at what both Skolverket and the curriculum, core content states, and simplify/ concretizes the abilities expressed. This results in a creation of an assessment rubric, with learning goals and levels of knowledge that are understandable for the students, as they have been involved in the co-creation of it. The key for this process is to always keep the students involved through the entire process.

P: In English it is always the abilities, which is much easier. You put something in from the curriculum, core content from for instance writing goals. I believe that by doing this, my knowledge regarding my students becomes much better. Because the key I, if you

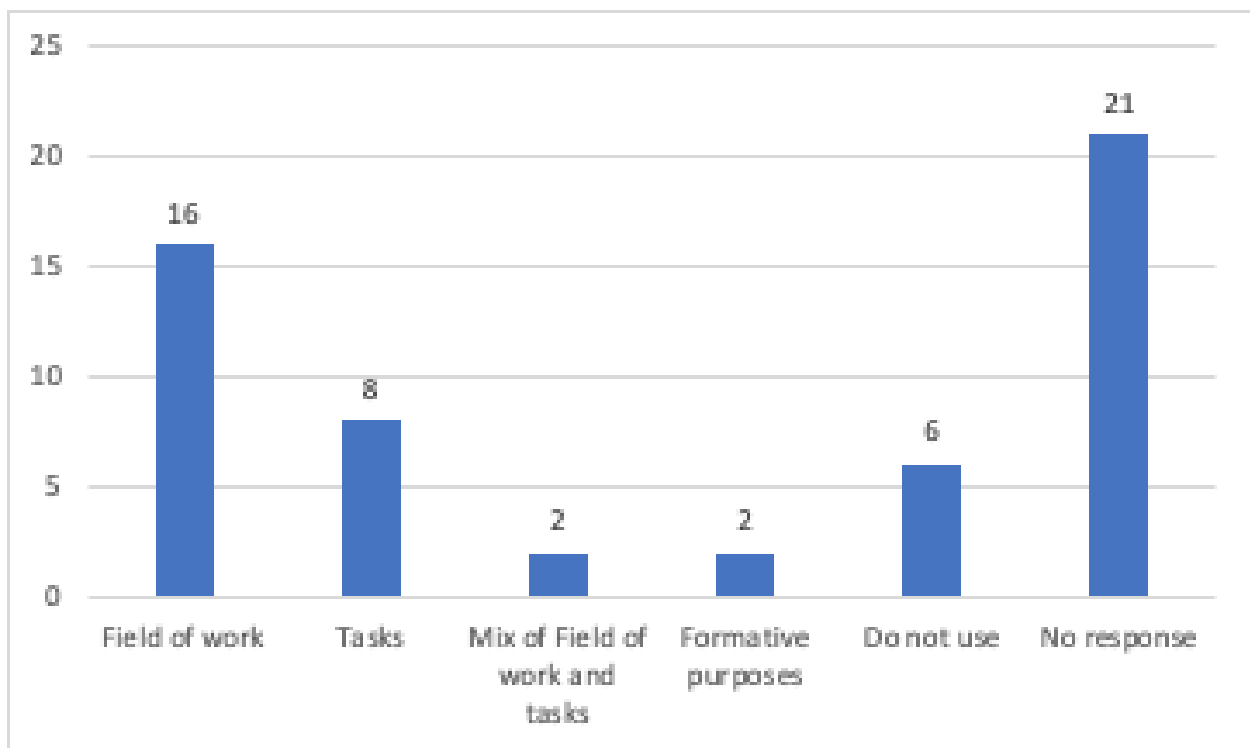


want to know what your students need to learn, you need to know what they already know.

(Pia, 28.02.2020)

The three teachers that either have worked with learning rubrics or their own personalized rubrics are mentioned earlier in this degree project under participants, as an extreme selection. This is due to their knowledge about rubrics in a formative matter, and therefore we are aware that the data collected from these teachers can be different from the rest of the interviewed participants. The remaining teachers did not work with learning rubrics at all, supporting the criticism given by Alm (2015), about teachers' lack of use of learning rubrics in their assessment practices. Despite this, the results from the interviews showed the same structure as the survey did, more teachers are willing to use a combination of both learning- and assessment rubrics.

To further investigate teachers' use of learning rubrics we asked the teachers to answer in which context they use learning rubrics. Answers found in the survey, showed that teachers in some cases lack time to create learning rubrics for certain tasks and/or fields of work. The graph also shows that only two out of 55 respondents (3%), use the learning rubrics, for a formative purpose. This is not in compliance with Skolverket (2019), which indicates that by using rubrics in a formative matter the students are made aware of what they are supposed to learn and it reduces their performance anxiety.



*Figure 6.* Examples of different contexts were teachers decided that learning rubrics will function as the best support for their students.

One of the interviewed teachers, Kalle, who stated that his primary goal for using formative assessment and learning rubrics is to concretize the purpose of every teaching moment so the students understand what they are supposed to learn and how. Kalle explains this:

(...) we may have a task, where I present a learning rubric. They then work according to the circle model. They then have to assess themselves, process their text with either feedback from me or from a classmate, whatever is appropriate for the situation. After that, they process the text, submit it and then I assess the text. This is where you include the formative part to.

(Kalle, 05.03.2020)

In conclusion we can say that teachers often use a combination of learning rubrics to help the students understand their learning process, and that learning rubrics meet the criteria for formative purposes due to the clarification of what is to be learned. An additional fact that becomes recurrent through the interviews, is that assessment rubrics are more difficult for

children to comprehend due to its language. Assessment rubrics are a tool that aid teachers in taking summative decisions.

### **5.3 The benefits and the downsides of using learning rubrics in a formative assessment**

Under the theoretical framework of this degree project Wiliam and Leahy (2015) five key strategies for achieving a successful formative assessment process was highlighted. The importance of clarifying what the learners are to learn, sharing this with them through explicit learning goals and asking the students to show their achievements, were a crucial part. Jönsson and Svingby (2007) shows the potential that learning rubrics can provide, by making the criteria explicit for the learners and promote learning by improving instructions. The teachers need to focus on giving feedback that moves learning forward and using the students to become supporting of each other in the learning process, transforming them to independent learners (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015). In the study that investigated how students experienced the usefulness of rubrics before and after an assignment, it was concluded that 88% of the students experienced positive effects of using rubrics before completing an assignment (Schneider, 2006).

Formative assessment forms part of developing the young learners' metacognition, the ability to think about their own thinking. Aiding the students in monitoring their own learning, increases their sense of responsibility and motivation (Lepareur & Grangeat, 2018). That is why we were interested in investigating how teachers experienced their learners reaction toward formative assessment practices. The question "How did your students react to your use of formative assessment? Which effects did you see?", was asked and the answers from the survey were concluded.

42 teachers (76%) saw positive effects such as their students portraying a consciousness about their learning that aided in their development. Students looked forward to receiving feedback from their teachers and held a positive attitude towards it. Four teachers (7%), on the other hand either did not use formative assessment or highlighted that the learners were not aware of the assessment being made since they were well accustomed with receiving feedback all the time. Another teacher simply replied that the students hadn't taken it all that well. Nine of the teachers

(16%) answered that they could see mixed effects among their students. Some students seemed not to be mature enough to understand the feedback that they received at the age of 10-12. Other teachers raised that some of the students could be discouraged by the high requirement some grades consisted of and seemed to be out of their reach, creating stress. Some teachers could also notice that students didn't make much of the feedback and others were helped by it and developed their learning process considerably. (See graph below).

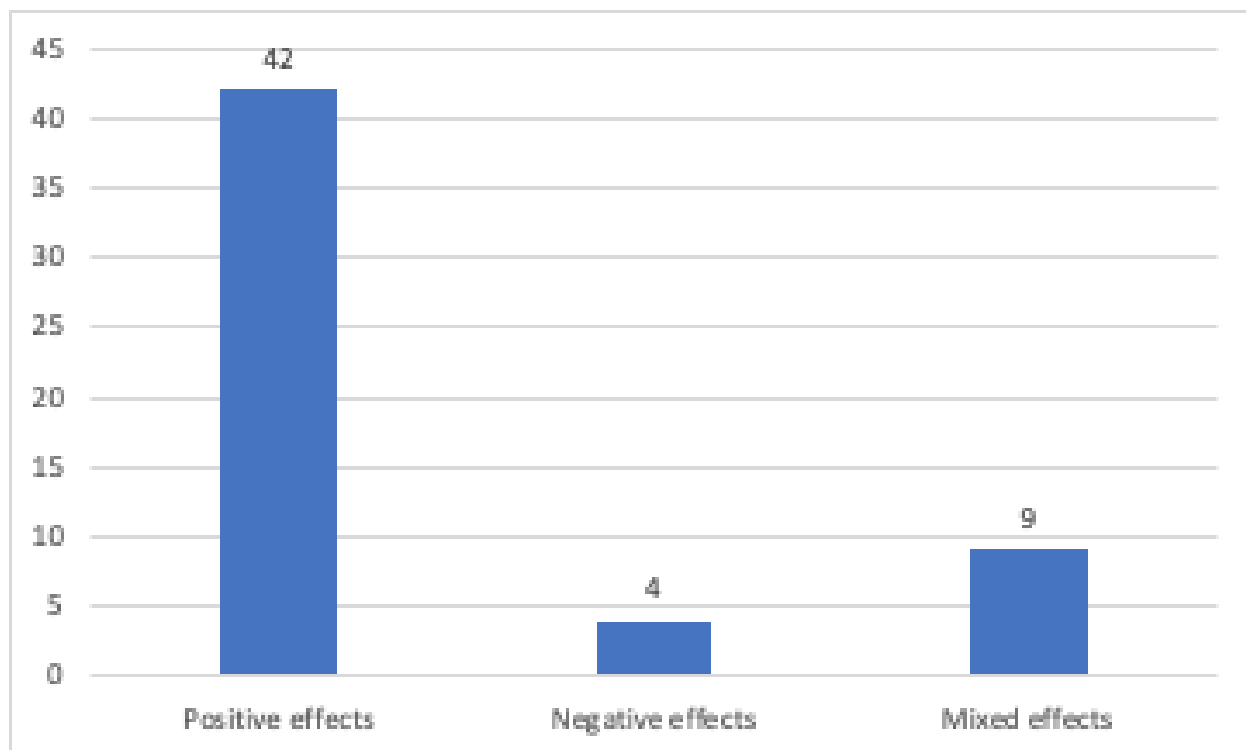


Figure 7. A figure that shows the teachers perceptions on effects of their formative assessment use.

One of the teachers from the interview said that she could not possibly use any form of rubric due to the big distribution among her students' capacity levels. If she would use them, her students would not be able to cope with it, harming their linguistic self-confidence.

S: they, they, they, my students in English had closed themselves, way too much, I have very high highs and I have very low lows

I: yes

S: So there is an extreme difference in English. Those who are on high highs, they could have succeeded, that is, they can, now I judge after grade five, but they can reach them, just as well as the knowledge requirements in grade six, without any problems. Those who are at low lows, they are scraping themselves to barely an E-level

I: yes

S: an assessment rubrics, for them had been devastating

I: yes

S: I can obviously adapt it

I: yes

S: but eh..if you have no eh... .if they have nothing, then they must just work up their linguistic self-confidence and their knowledge of their English, an assessment rubrics is then not the right way for them.

(Sara, 18.02.2020)

From Kalle's interview, two additional benefits from the usage of the learning rubrics in his teaching were brought up. The first one had to do with, before he had started using learning rubrics he had not been as successful in his formative assessment practice. With the help of them, he was also able to develop his students in becoming prominent peer-assessors. Peer-assessment was an element of assessment that Kalle had included in his teaching, but the students had previously not been capable of assessing each other accurately. This is consistent with the evidence from Alm (2015), who raises that students do not have the knowledge about what they are supposed to assess in each other's text. The results, without help from a rubric, is a meaningless assessment with generalizations like for example "it was great" or "you have a good handwriting" (Alm, 2015). Kalle stated that thanks to the learning rubrics the students could clearly see what they were supposed to look at and give constructive feedback on how something could be improved, as opposed to the previous negative comments that the students would practice on each other.

K: Before I used learning rubrics, then, then, it didn't feel like I was succeeding as well as I do with learning rubrics now, then it often became a classic that they were just trying to find errors, so they, they, don't become that constructive, but instead it becomes, you ehm, you have missed this, you forgot this

I: Hmm ...:

K: This was not good, so only negative things. With the learning rubrics I can formulate myself. What should you look for, how many things do I want them to include. And it will be easier for them to just count or get a clear wording that this is good and this I want you

to develop. Almost like for example, Two stars and a wish, but in a different form and so a little more specific to the task.

(Kalle, 05.03.2020)

The second benefit that Kalle gave an example of was the importance of combining learning rubrics with assessment rubrics before a performance review or in connection with a task that was assessed summative. It helped in clarifying why he assessed something in the way he did, and he could also use rubrics to make his arguments visible both for the students and the caretakers at home.

K:... and now it is actually a lot I think about in regards to assessment, then I think of parents too..eeh. I think that, my assessment must be easy to understand for the parents, now we use Infomentor here and there they take them (assessment rubrics) directly from the curriculum and it can be quite tricky for parents to understand and then you can get quite a lot of questions on it, so sometimes there will be an assessment, designed in a different way for the students to be able to go home and show mom and dad and it should be clear what it is about

I: mm

K: and what they have received and why they have received it, and there, I think that a combination of the two learning rubrics and assessment rubrics, that the student comes home with a learning rubrics, where they have ticked at what level they are and then they get an assessment rubrics, where I've put what they've got, and it's made it easier, I think ...ehm ... What they are supposed to show.

(Kalle, 05.03.2020)

In conclusion both the survey and the interviews have shown some of the benefits and the downsides of formative assessment. The teachers have observed improvements in the learning of their learners, and other students have shown that they have experience stressed in relation to the knowledge requirements for higher grades. Kalle, since the implementation of learning rubrics , saw a change in his students ability to give constructive feedback, something that Elawar and Corno (1985) proved to give twice as good results in comparison to the control group of their study that had either only received points or had received a combination of both feedback and points. Through Kalle's shared reflections other beneficial aspects of learning rubrics were brought to our attention, the aspect of clarifying the students performances not only for the students understanding but for the caretakers as well.

In the context of that Kalle, who in this degree project is considered to be an expert within the usage of learning rubrics (due to his previous training), he has raised the fact that even though his workplace has received proper training in using it, he still considers it to be a difficult task to be successful in.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the reading of research literature on learning second- and foreign language, challenges in assessment practices became evident. Therefore this degree project was set out to find the answer on "How do year 4-6 EFL teachers in Southern Sweden approach learning rubrics as a form of formative assessment?". Research done by Copland, Garton and Burns, (2014) and Hasselgreen (2005) identifies hindrances in teachers' professions such as a low English level, proper assessment training and that their time is limited. Assessment is a professional responsibility that teachers execute, at least at the end of a term, before a performance review and at the moment of grading in the years 4-6 (Korp, 2011). The formative aspect of assessment is concluded in the Swedish school curriculum (2011) through the demand that teachers should help students in becoming increasingly competent in self-assessment and helping them understand what knowledge requirements that are to be met (Skolverket, 2011). This is coherent with the study conducted by Jönsson (2014), which showed that if the criteria in the rubrics are in alignment with the assignments they will function as guides for the students to improve their performance. Finally, the rubrics will function as a tool to improve the students self-assessment and reflection skills. The usage of assessment rubrics formatively have been studied and found beneficial, due to the transparency it renders for the learners. It has been proven that the formative use of assessment rubrics reduces the learners performance anxiety, and helps them in becoming independent learners (Skolverket, 2019). Even though research shows the many gains the teaching gets from the formative use of assessment rubrics, Jönsson (as cited in Alm, 2015) shows that assessment rubrics are used for the most cases with a summative purpose.

In order to get a clear picture of the approach of year 4-6 EFL teachers in southern Sweden on learning rubrics as a form of formative assessment the following categories were created.

The category *Teachers formative assessment practices in the foreign language classroom, in grades 4-6* showed that teachers had different opinions on what formative assessment entailed but a dominating opinion among the teachers was that a continuous assessment practice is beneficial for their students' progression of learning. Many of the teachers used oral feedback and written feedback as an active part of their assessment practice. Teachers' opinions on when to assess were varied. Our conclusion is that there is an inclination toward formative assessment practices in the foreign language classroom among teachers in southern Sweden. In contrast to the obtained



results from previously done research presented in this degree projects literature. The second category, *Teachers' knowledge about learning rubrics*, shows a dominant opinion among teachers that a combination of learning rubrics and assessment rubrics will provide the most help for their students' progression in learning a foreign language. There seems to be a consensus among the teachers that an assessment rubric contains difficult language that are not aimed for students nor caretakers. It is our opinion that teachers tend to use a combination of both learning rubrics and assessment rubrics, because teachers show an awareness of the profits from them. The third category, *The benefits and the downsides of using learning rubrics in a formative assessment*, show that formative assessment does affect the learners and their learning process in a positive way. Teachers can point to the development of students' ability to give constructive feedback as well as being conscious of what is required from them. Improving their performances and knowledge about language, and at the same time helping their peers toward the same direction. By using learning rubrics, teachers can clarify the students performances not only for students but for caretakers as well. On the other hand, teachers have also experienced that their learners are too young to understand how they are to implement the feedback given to them. Ending in stressed young learners trying to achieve knowledge requirements that are out of their reach. For this degree project it is inevitable to disregard the overwhelming positive benefits from the formative use of learning rubrics. The combination of learning rubrics and assessment rubrics creates a connection between the teacher, the student and the caretakers.

The overall conclusion from this study is that 40 teachers of 60 participants use learning rubrics in their foreign language teaching. A smaller amount of them use only learning rubrics, while the majority of them use a combination of learning rubrics and assessment rubrics. How teachers use the rubrics formatively become more evident through the interviews rather than through the data collected from the survey. The gathered data shows that teachers are confident in using formative assessment, something that is contradictory to previous obtained results through other studies. Teachers have through this study demonstrated their awareness about the benefits from using formative assessment and those who use learning rubrics as a formative tool, have pointed to the development of the young learners' learning. It is our conclusion that teachers who co-create their learning rubrics together with the students concretize and make the learning goals visible.

This study's execution has been affected by some limitations and we will discuss them in this section. When choosing research methodology Bartlett and Burton (2007) states that one needs to consider how much time that is invested in each method (Barlett & Burton, 2007). Combining quantitative methods and qualitative methods are time consuming and the degree projects course 10 weeks' time span credits for a time limitation. Additionally, many researchers lack the sufficient competence to combine the two methods (Fekjær, 2016), as in the case of this study which consists of the first conducted research study ever.

After transcribing interviews and analyzing quantitative data from the survey, it became clear that some variables are missing to conclude a complete picture on teachers' knowledge surrounding learning rubrics. An example of this is that the survey only contained two questions regarding learning rubrics. For one of the questions in the survey, "When do you use assessment?", we realized that a precise specification would have been obtained with a different phrasing, such as "summative assessment". That the data collected from this question can be viewed as inconclusive, since the question left space for interpretation. It would also be necessary to state that the data collected from our statistical survey is of descriptive nature and our findings are then limited to our study's population (Fekjær, 2016). An additional limitation of this study is the number of participants on the survey. 55 participants is an approved amount for this degree project but on a larger scale a quantitative study requires a higher rate of participants. This would lead to an opportunity to obtain generalizable results.

For future studies it would be interesting to investigate the correlation between the use of learning rubrics in a formative matter and compare them to the national test results.

Other research areas could involve the students reaction to use of learning rubrics and compare their experiences pre and after learning rubrics.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### LEARNING AND SOCIETY INSTITUTION

In the teacher training program at Malmö University, the students write a thesis at an advanced level. This work includes doing your own scientific study, based on a question that has come to engage the students during the course of the program. For the study, materials are often collected at schools, in the form of e.g. interviews and observations. The degree project corresponds to 15 higher education credits, and is carried out for a total of 10 weeks. Once the degree project has been approved, it is published in Malmö University's database MUEP.

(<http://dspace.mah.se/handle/2043/599>).

### **Consent to participation in student projects**

We are Louise Torgén and Angela Arias Morel, we are both two students in the teacher training and will be leaving semester 8 and in the summer of 2020 we will graduate. To be able to carry out this study, we have received approval from Malmö University and that is part of our education. This study aims to investigate how teachers in southern Sweden use formative assessment in their English teaching. We are interested in studying teachers' knowledge of the concept of learning matrices. During the interview, we will focus on how to use assessment in one's teaching, what form of assessment is appropriate at different times and how one believes that the formative assessment supports one's students. During the interview we will use a dictaphone belonging to the Malmö University site. All to ensure that all material collected is protected from falling into the hands of unauthorized persons. You who are interviewed will be labeled with a fictitious name and we will not under any circumstances use the actual personal data in the interview or in the analysis of the written thesis work. We will not, under any circumstances, use our private mobile phones during the observation or the teacher interview. All material collected will be stored at Malmö University in a specific storage cabinet that we have received for this study. People who see this material are Louise and Angela, as well as educators who work in teacher education. When we subsequently introduce data that we have obtained during our study in our written work, the material and personal data we have collected will also be stored on Malmö University's server during the work on the degree project. The consent forms are kept inaccessible at Malmö University.

We will start from the Swedish Research Council's research ethical principles, and to clarify which these are we also enter them in the consent form below:

- Participation is based on consent and this consent can be revoked at any time. Everyone who is asked is thus entitled to refuse to participate, or (if they first accept yes) the right to cancel their participation at any time, without any negative consequences.
- Participants will be de-identified in the completed work.
- The material will only be used for the current study and will be destroyed when it is examined.

.....  
Student's signature and name clarification Contact details for student (tel. No, e-mail):

.....  
Responsible supervisor at Malmö University:

.....  
Course coordinator at Malmö University:

.....  
Contact information Malmö University:  
www.mau.se 040-665 70 00

Information about Malmö University's processing of personal data Personal data manager Malmö University

Data Protection Officer [dataskyddsbud@mau.se](mailto:dataskyddsbud@mau.se)

Type of personal data- Name, note of learning situation, picture and / or film clips and your consent to Malmö University processing these personal data.

Purpose of the treatment - To enable teaching and examination situations in the school environment for students at Malmö University teacher education. Legal basis for processing Your consent.

Recipient- The personal data will only be used for educational purposes within the framework of teacher education at Malmö University and will not be passed on to any other recipient.

Storage time - Malmö University will store your personal data as long as they are needed for the purpose stated above or until you withdraw your consent. After the completed course / program, the personal data will be deleted. However, Malmö University may in some cases be obliged to archive and save personal data in accordance with the Archives Act and the National Archives regulations.

Your rights- You have the right to contact Malmö University to 1) get information about what information Malmö University has about you and 2) request correction of your information.

Further, and under the conditions specified in the Data Protection Legislation, you are entitled to

3) request deletion of your data, 4) request a transfer of your data (data portability), or 5) request that Malmö University limit the processing of your data.

When Malmö University processes personal data with the support of your consent, you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time through written notification to Malmö University. You have the right to lodge a complaint about Malmö University's processing of your personal data by contacting the Data Inspectorate, Box 8114, 104 20 Stockholm.

## **Consent**

I hereby agree to participate in the student projects described above, and confirm that I have taken note of the information on Malmö University's processing of personal data, and the Swedish Research Council's research ethical principles, which states that

- participation is based on consent and this consent can be revoked at any time. Everyone who is asked is thus entitled to refuse to participate, or (if they first accept yes) the right to cancel their participation at any time, without any negative consequences.
- the participants will be de-identified in the completed work.
- the material will only be used for the current study and will be destroyed when it is examined. 1

Name: .....

Name clarification: .....

Today's date: .....

You can read more about the research ethical principles in the Swedish Research Council's writing Research Ethical Principles in Humanities- 1

social science research (2002), which you can find here: <http://www.codex.vr.se/texts/HSEFR.pdf>



## Appendix B

1. Which grade do you teach in?	
2. How many years have you been working as a teacher?	
3. What is your education?	Secondary education <hr/> University Education <hr/> Vocational Training
4. If you have chosen vocational education in the above question, which vocation?	
5. What level of language proficiency in English do you feel you have? This is on the basis of CEFR's global scale with level A1-C2. An explanation of each level can be found in the comments section at the bottom.	<p><b>C2</b>          Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</p> <p><b>C1</b>          Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</p> <p><b>B2</b>          Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a</p>

	<p>degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</p> <p><b>B1</b> Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes &amp; ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p> <p><b>A2</b> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.</p> <p><b>A1</b> Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</p>
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<p>6. You, as a teacher, assess your students when ...</p>	<p>After each completed work area (eg grammar test in English)  End of term  Prior performance review  Grading  Other ... (write in the comment)</p>
<p>7. How do you interpret formative judgment?</p>	<p>An assessment that can be used both formatively and summatively</p> <hr/> <p>Assessment for learning</p> <hr/> <p>Assessment used to support the learner's learning and develop the teacher's teaching</p> <hr/> <p>You as a teacher are aware of what you want the children to learn</p> <hr/> <p>Teachers provide effective feedback to students so they can improve their learning</p> <hr/> <p>It means striving for a learning culture and a teaching climate where students want to learn and have the opportunity to learn to learn.</p> <hr/> <p>Formative assessment means that information about where a student is in relation to the teaching objectives</p>
<p>8. To what extent do you use formative judgment?</p>	<p>Always</p> <hr/> <p>Often</p> <hr/> <p><u>Rarely</u></p> <hr/> <p>Never</p>
<p>9. If you answered "rarely" or "never", why is it so?</p>	
<p>10. What kind of formative assessment do you use in your classroom?</p>	
<p>11. How did your students react to the formative assessment you used? What effects did it have?</p>	

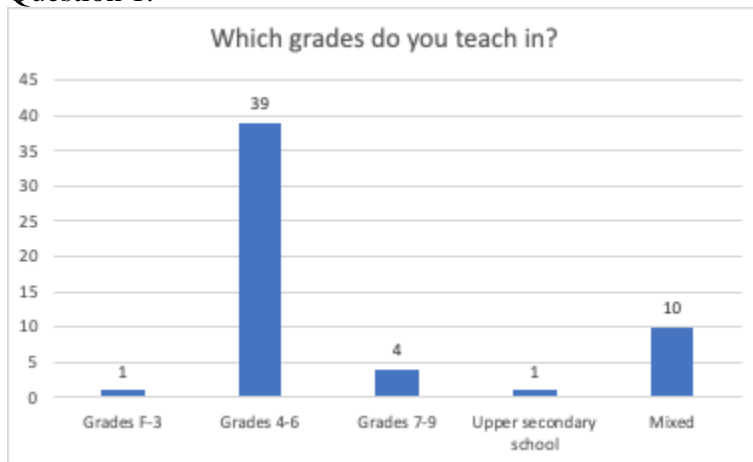
<p>12. A learning rubrics describes the goals to be achieved from the student's perspective, so understandable that they can assess their own and their peers' learning. Learning rubrics link goals, teaching and assessment in a single document in a language and way that is understandable to the students. Students must understand in advance what they should learn.</p> <p>An assessment rubric is meant for the teacher. It aims to work for the teacher when assessing the pupil afterwards. It works to get a grip on "see how it went". It is used to allow the teacher to ultimately grade the student, it is used to make an assessment.</p> <p>What type of rubric do you use in your teaching?</p>	<p>learning rubric</p> <hr/> <p>assessment rubric</p> <hr/> <p>both</p> <hr/> <p>do not know</p> <hr/>
<p>13. If you, as a teacher, use learning matrices, in what different contexts do you do it?</p>	



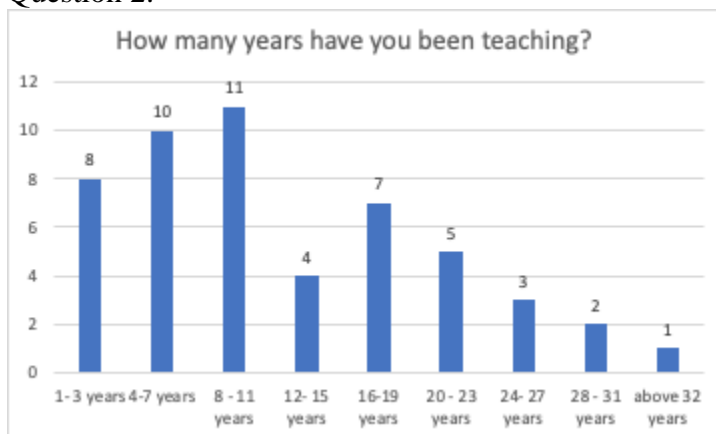
<p>Knowledge about differences between learning rubric and assessment rubric</p>	<p>What thoughts do you have when we say the word "learning rubric"?</p> <p>What thoughts do you have when we say the word "assessment rubric"?</p> <p>What advantages and disadvantages do you see with the use of "learning matrices" / what advantages and disadvantages do you see with the use of "assessment matrices"?</p>	<p>(Approaches to matrices and conceptual knowledge)</p>
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## Appendix D

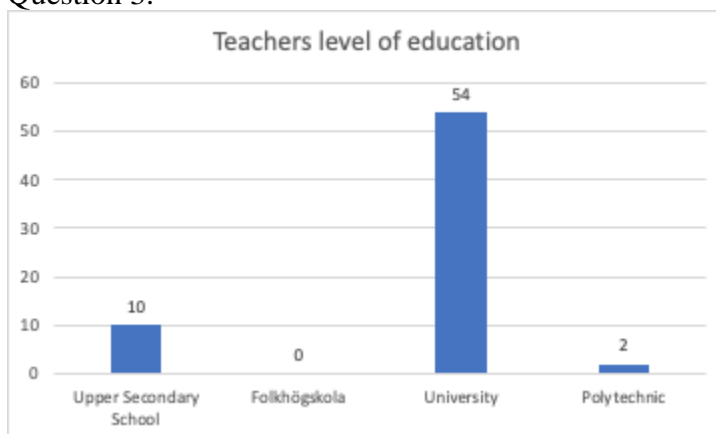
### Question 1.



### Question 2.

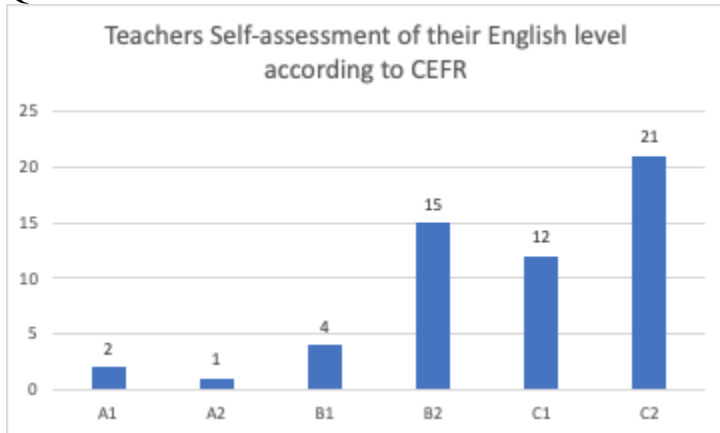


### Question 3.

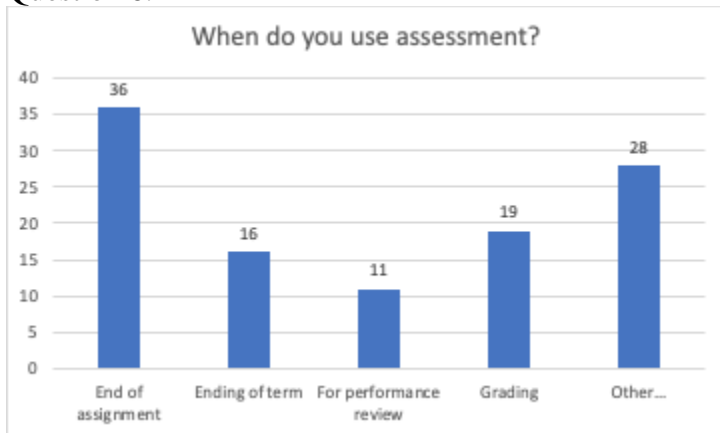


Question 4. is a follow-up question to the polytechnical choice of question 3. That is why there is no bar chart composed for this data.

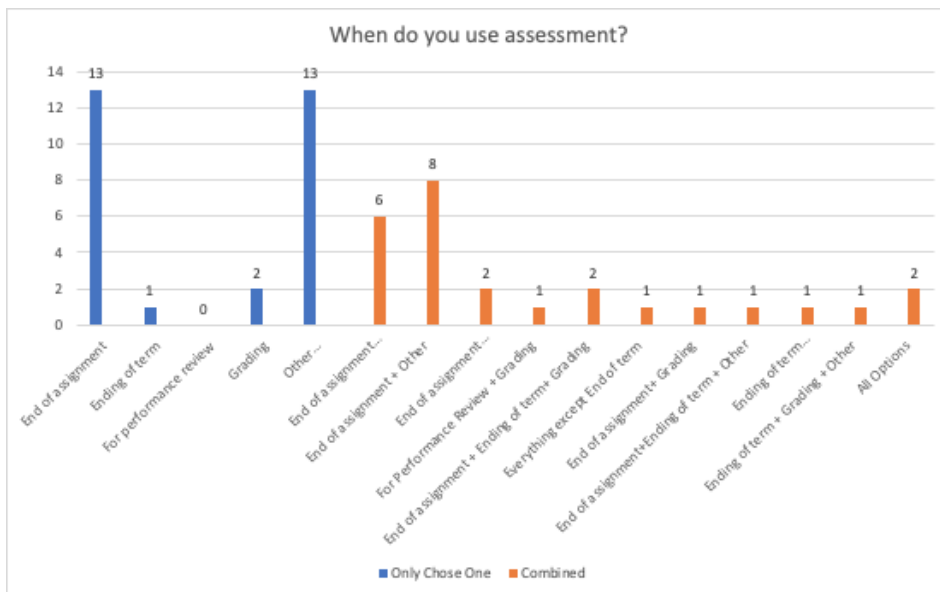
Question 5.



Question 6.

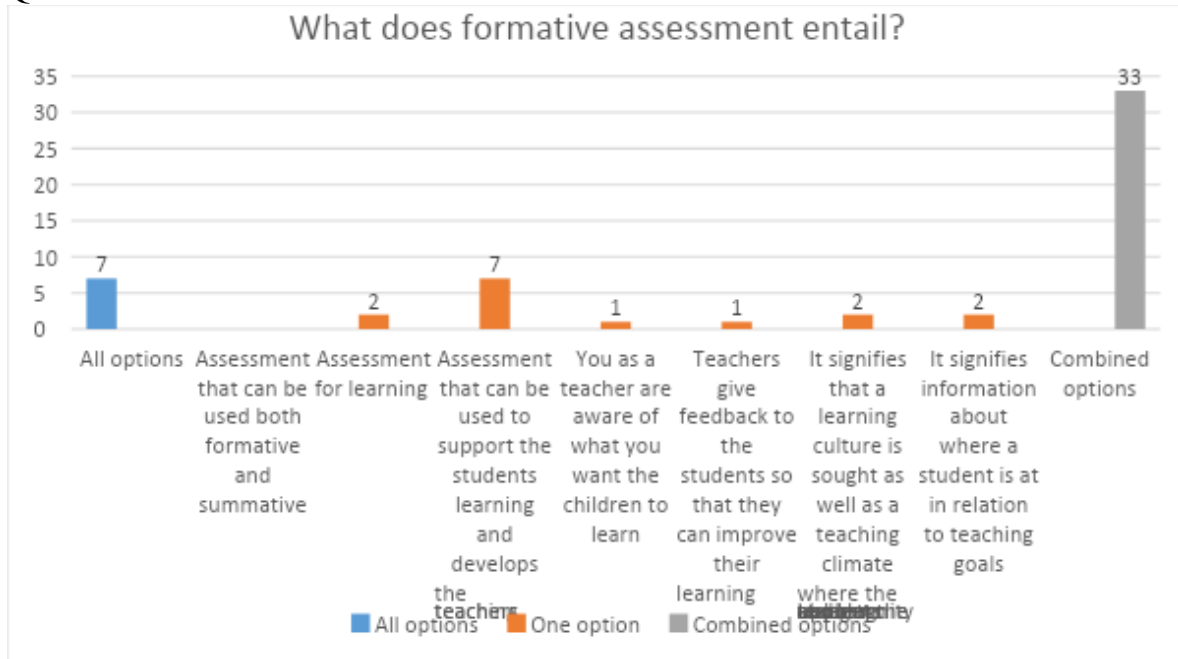


The distribution of teachers assessment practice from question 6.

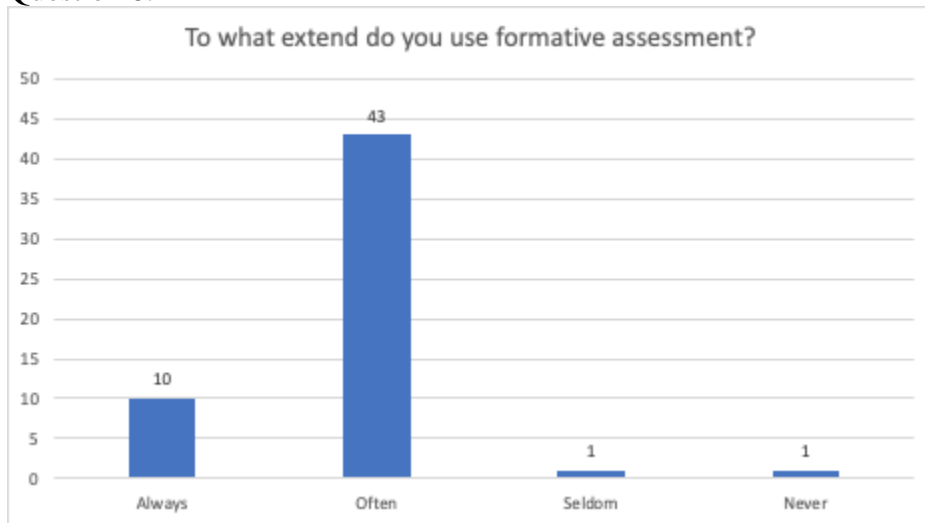




Question 7.

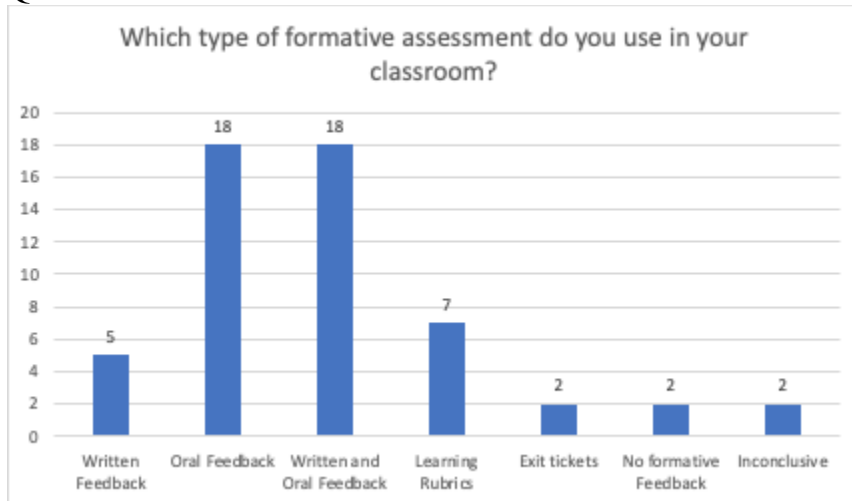


Question 8.

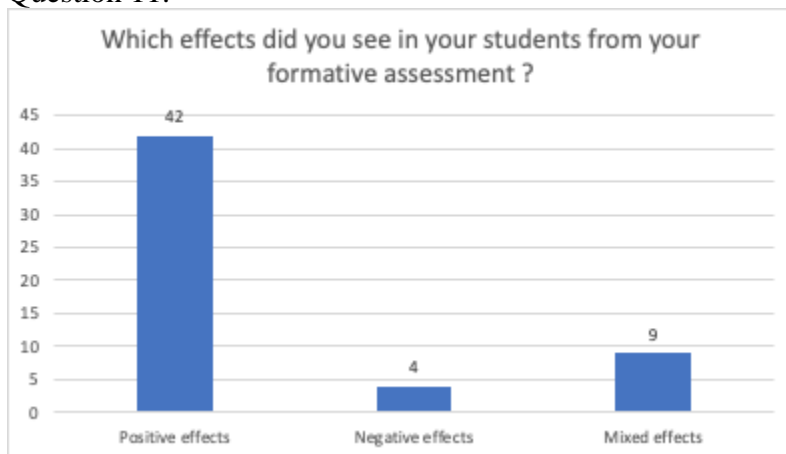


Question 9. A follow-up question to question 8. Those who answered seldom or never explained the reason behind seldom or never using formative assessment was due to the lack of time or that the teachers did not consider it as necessary.

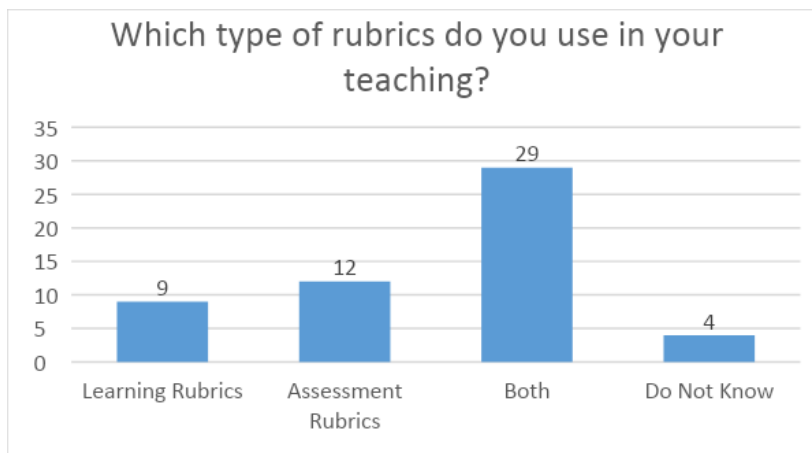
Question 10.



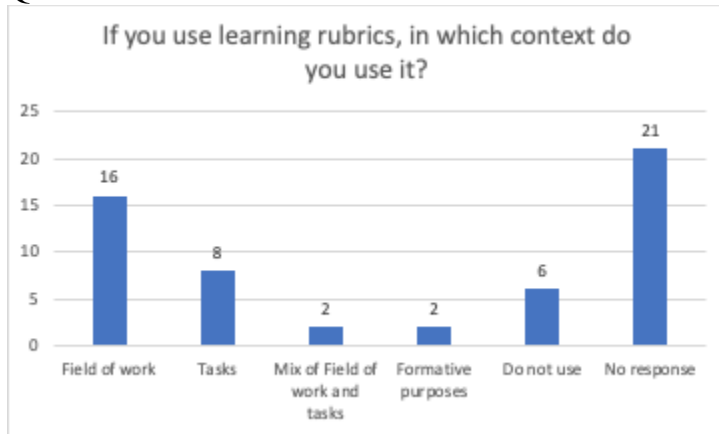
Question 11.



Question 12.



Question 13.



# Appendix E

## For teachers that only selected the option “Other” from the survey

<p>I judge my students all the time. However, I write formal reviews four times per academic year. Now in grade 6, we update the formal reviews on these four occasions and put forward grades for the term.</p>
<p>All the time during all lessons</p>
<p>It can be both at the end of a work area. But also in preparation for a performance review but also during the lesson.</p>
<p>Do one type of assessment at each lesson. Maybe not by everyone but that is my goal. Much assessment is ongoing. As you obviously know, there is "informal assessment" included as a possible form of assessment and, in most lessons, I can assess my students' abilities.</p>
<p>During the work</p>
<p>Throughout the entire work process</p>
<p>So often I am given the opportunity, on lessons, during tests</p>
<p>Equal assessment situations during the term.</p>
<p>For me, the assessment happens all the time in the classroom. The assessment in the classroom functions as a basis for continued planning of teaching, grades, individual adaptations, etc. Depending on the situation and the purposes of various tasks, I use the assessment in different ways. Sometimes to map the teaching, evaluate knowledge, feedback for learning, evaluate knowledge, etc. In this, I think it is important to remember that students need to be given the opportunity to practice their skills in various ways, especially in English education. But I do not think that assessment can be done at one time, for example tests or only at the end of the semester. It is a process that is constantly ongoing.</p>
<p>Every time we work orally or in writing, I do a kind of assessment of the student and his progress (in my head) and make sure to tell the student what they are getting better at all the time. When we work with grammar, for example, we first have common reviews, then practical exercises 2 &amp; 2 or in group, then often exercises in the computer and finally some form of written / oral assignment.</p>
<p>I assess my students continuously, both during their workflow and after each work area.</p>
<p>Continuously. Sometimes after a lesson, sometimes by work area, sometimes every week.</p>