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Teachers' Perceptions Towards Formative Assessment In The K- 3 Classroom In Sweden

Lärarnas uppfattning om formativ bedömning i F-3 klassrummet i Sverige

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to learn about teachers' perceptions towards formative assessment in K-3 classrooms in Sweden. Previous studies showed that teachers' understanding of formative assessment is one important factor when implementing it. It was also found that every teacher applies formative assessment differently in a way that works with their students. This degree project aims to get an overview of the teachers' perceptions of formative assessment and how they implement it in their classrooms. A mixed-method approach was inducted in the form of a digital questionnaire.

The research participants consisted of 6 female teachers out of 140 schools throughout Skåne County who were willing to participate in this study. The participants were asked about their perceptions of formative assessment and the use of it in the K-3 classrooms and how this assessment impacts the learning process for the students' learning. Findings show teachers positive perceptions towards formative assessment even though they use FA differently in their classes the outcome is positive according to all teachers. Challenges such as students' learning processes, teachers' perceptions, and ideas about formative assessment differ from one another, and time constraints were also identified.

Feedback from teachers to their students is an important tool and combining it with open communication with different learning tools provided by the teachers is of great importance. Useful feedback on students' work should cause thinking to take place and function as guidance that directs students' independent learning.

Preface

Two students from Malmö University in Sweden wrote this degree project in the K-3 teacher education program. The students of this paper wrote about the teachers' perceptions of formative assessment in Sweden in K-3 classes and how they use different types of assessment. We would like to give special thanks to our supervisor, Djuddah Leijen, for his comments, ideas, solutions, examples and guidance throughout the process, which made this paper/degree project possible.

Individual contribution

We, Julia Henning and Ali Abed Ali, hereby certify that all parts of this paper reflect the equal participation of both signatories below;

- Brainstorming, planning, preparing, and organizing
- Deciding the research question
- Planning the writing and searching process
- Searching for reliable and relevant literature
- Deciding on the design and structure of the paper
- Constructing and designing the questionnaire
- Sending a digital form to schools and Facebook groups
- Analyzing the data collected
- Presentation of findings, discussion, and conclusion
- The last decisions regarding this study

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1. Introduction

Formative assessment is essential for fostering the development of young learners and customizing instruction to meet their needs in K-3 classrooms. The focus on formative assessment is vital for the teaching and learning processes because it delivers real-time information to help current teaching and learning in individual classrooms. Thus Takele and Melese (2022), describe classroom assessment as part of the teaching-learning process, which includes all assessment that happens within the classroom regardless of its purpose and it helps teachers to make sound decisions on the students' progress. Hence, teachers' approach to using their classroom assessments as learning tools is both to provide students with feedback on their learning progress and to guide the correction of errors.

For teachers to teach students in an effective way, they have to know what students can and cannot do in their education. Thus, knowledge and belief regarding assessment work is a basis for the conception of assessment. Knowledge about the purpose of assessment, techniques of assessment, and the content of the assessment work are crucial in constructing the teachers' conception of assessment. More specifically, the authors highlighted the slightly higher relationship between teachers' school accountability conception of assessment and assessment for learning than other assessment types. This indicates that teachers who practice providing task-based activities that allow knowledge and learning formation more frequently allow students to monitor their learning and give personal feedback. The relationship between teachers' improvement of assessment indicates that teachers who believe in the use of formative assessment, such as providing feedback and adapting instruction, often enact this more than other assessment types, such as summative assessments (Takele & Melese, 2022).

How teachers give responses and communicate with the students is a big part of formative assessment. The Swedish curriculum, Skolverket (2022), states that formative assessment is an approach of great complexity and mostly revolves around the teacher's teaching philosophy and how to enact and communicate it. In alignment with this, the assessment of students shall be made to increase students' learning. Teachers must work on their outlook on learning and the curriculum and be made aware of their teaching and the culture around their assessments' effects and consequences for the students. In line with what is stated by Skolverket (2022), for both teachers and students to be able to improve teaching as well as learning, formative

assessment comes in handy as it is an active practice where both parties obtain data on students' learning. For the assessment to be formative, this data must be processed in order to enhance both the learning and the teaching process.

Effective learning occurs when teachers engage with students and utilize appropriate teaching strategies to assess their understanding and address any gaps in their knowledge through formative assessment. Vygotsky believed that knowledge and understanding are influenced by cultural tools and symbols present in the environment, especially through interactions within a community and the guidance of a higher educated individual. He also noted that human behavior changes when it is influenced by and linked to an individual's social and cultural context (Ramollo & Kanjee 2023). In a relationship between a teacher and a student, the teacher is mostly deemed to be the higher educated one, meaning the teacher's perception towards formative assessment will likely affect the outcome for the students. Teachers' perception of formative assessment is deemed crucial in the process of implementing this kind of assessment in the classroom (Akoyt, 2024).

Teachers' perception of assessment for learning is complex in many ways, one being the fact that there may be conflict in the understanding of what makes the assessment formative, which in itself can cause tension during its execution. The more appreciative teachers' perception of formative assessment is, the more they are likely to incorporate it; thus, better results will be taken from it (Akoyt, 2024). Following the Swedish Curriculum, Skolverket's (2022) statement about the way teachers communicate with students, their perception of formative assessment plays a pivotal role in how students will benefit from the assessment and if the assessment enacted is even formative at all. Vygotsky believed that knowledge and understanding are influenced by cultural tools and symbols present in the environment, especially through interactions within a community and the guidance of a higher educated individual. He also noted that human behavior changes when it is influenced by and linked to an individual's social and cultural context (Ramollo & Kanjee, 2023).

There seem to be many factors influencing formative assessment and its usefulness in a learning environment. Aspects like time, students' attitudes, school management, and the belief that formative assessment may work against the use of grades are a few relevant ones. In Saudi Arabia, a study was conducted by Alotaibi (2019) around factors that influenced teachers' perception and implementation of formative assessment. The aspect of students' attitudes towards formative assessment seemed to be of great influence on the teachers' enactment of

this assessment form. A big part of formative assessment is the cooperation between students and teachers; in their communication, the assessment is meant to both advance student learning and improve the teaching methods. However, the teachers of the study felt obligated to focus more on the grades as this was the expectation from students. For the formative assessment to be useful, teachers must obtain the right skills to operate it and make it understandable to the students. Formative assessment is not meant to be counterproductive towards the use of grades but instead fosters students' accountability for their learning process and what makes them learn and improve their learning. This will on its own, improve their grades. Formative assessment is meant to prepare students for a lifelong journey of learning without the guidance of a teacher.

Formative assessment is intended to help teachers obtain information about students' learning processes; when knowledge around this is collected, the assessment will be very valuable. Time concerning the school management expectations seems to be of the essence here as these are necessary factors in the process. Teachers feel obligated to give students concrete results as this is proclaimed by the management, although the benefits of formative assessment are also implemented by the management to be of great importance. This can, without a doubt, be a time-consuming process when teachers are supposed to gather information in regards to every student's learning process to improve their teaching and enact formative assessment. The results from the study conducted in Saudi Arabia show that teachers need sufficient knowledge of formative assessment for their positive attitudes to correlate with the implementation and, therefore, make the process less time-consuming and a more natural part of their assessment practices. The necessity of formative assessment and its positive outcomes for student lifelong learning needs to be proven to all who are affected by it so we are not always as reliant on absolute results and grades (Alotaibi, 2019).

2. Aim and Research Question

This study will focus on teachers' own different experiences regarding the use of formative assessment and why they use it in a k-3 classroom. In the lower grades, it is more natural to assess formatively due to the lack of tests that would assess summatively, however, it is unclear whether the teachers are fully aware of the assessment being formative and if enacting formative assessment is an active choice. Through a digital questionnaire, we aim to understand teachers' perceptions towards formative assessment and how or if they implement it in their elementary classrooms. To complement our research, the investigation of existing research articles about the subject will also be included. We want to analyze our own data along with what previous articles have found about this topic as well as what the Swedish curriculum states. To address our aim, the following research question has been formulated:

Q1: What are the factors that influence K-3 teachers' perceptions and practices of formative assessment in Sweden?

3. Theoretical Background

This chapter will give an overview of the terminology, learning theories, curriculum justification, and literature review used in our study. In this section, we will elaborate on teacher perception and beliefs around formative assessment, the factors that influence the implementation of FA as well as the impact of FA on learning. By focusing on theories such as Vygotsky's social-cultural theory, Jean Piaget's constructivist approach and variation theory we will gain an in-depth knowledge of the origin of formative assessment.

3.1 Terminology

Assessment is one of the teacher's most important tasks, and the last 20 years have seen an unprecedented interest in and a growing concern about the alignment of assessment and learning, assessment commonly referred to as “formative assessment” or “Assessment for Learning” (AfL). The researchers noticed contradictions between teachers’ continuing practice of product-oriented writing assessment versus formative assessment. Teachers’ understanding of formative assessment proved to be crucial for the implementation of it. In FA in oral classroom interactions, focused on either studying students or teachers, little research has been conducted on FA of writing where both students and teachers are studied. Nevertheless, the teachers repeatedly acknowledge the importance of self-assessment but do not necessarily include it in their assessment practices. They also agree that self-assessment may be problematic for the youngest students (Burner, 2016).

3.2 Learning Theories

In a learning session built on constructivism, students are encouraged to try their thoughts and ideas in an environment where there are many justifiable answers and alternatives. Psychologists Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget are big names in the world of education today, as their theories revolving around education are preparing teachers all around the globe for what it means to learn. Piaget's thinking around constructivism provides us with knowledge of how children learn, and that their intellectual and moral autonomy should be cherished and

developed. In line with sociocultural theory, Vygotsky proclaims that learning becomes enriched when different cultures meet and the right amount of scaffolding is provided by teachers for students to attain more knowledge than they could themselves. Piaget proclaims that in a learning community such as a school, students should be encouraged to reevaluate their answers and thinking in order to move forward in their learning process (Sharkins, et al, 2017). Sociocultural theories, according to Purwanti and Hatmanto (2019) focus on individual learning and development being attached to social events and happen as a result of people's interactions with other people, objects, or events in their community (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, social-cultural theories appear effective in explaining EFL teachers' development caused by their interaction during a lesson study activity. An environment embossed by constructivism and sociocultural thinking emphasizes student-centered methods that can enhance formative assessment.

The social interaction between an individual and his/her community is mediated by psychological symbols such as language, numbers, arts, and technical tools such as books and a calculator. Vygotsky (1978) believes that knowledge construction includes both a social and cognitive process. According to him, community plays a central role in the social process of individual knowledge development. Thus, how people develop their knowledge and how they get meaning from their knowledge are created in social contexts. Among these symbols, Vygotsky puts more emphasis on language as one of the social interaction mediations. Though there are many forms of language, such as symbols, gestures, or motions, the most common type of language, verbal language, is mostly used among the participants in the study because that type of language can make sense of complex and abstract thoughts. Therefore, Vygotsky believed that language is the most important tool for accessing this social knowledge. Thus, teacher learning in the study is mediated by language (Purwanti & Hatmanto, 2019).

Variation theory explains how a learner gains understanding of the world by recognizing the various qualitative ways of experiencing it. There are four aspects to consider when understanding variation theory. The first one is contrast, encountering something and comparing it to the original. The second one is generalization, to encounter something in multiple forms to distinguish it from the non-essential characteristics. The third one is separation, to perceive "a specific facet of something" and "isolate this facet from others, ensuring it changes while other facets remain constant". The fourth aspect is fusion, elements

of something need to be mixed to allow for simultaneous experiences of these elements (Preston, 2022).

3.3 Curriculum Justification

The curriculum for compulsory school states that “teaching should be adapted to each student’s circumstances and needs. It should promote students continued learning and knowledge development based on the students’ background, previous experiences, language and knowledge” (Skolverket 2022). These assessments can be related to assessment for the purpose of developing teaching, that is the formative purpose of assessments. However, there may be a risk that the assessment of students’ knowledge at the individual level takes precedence and that assessment, from the aspect of developing teaching at a group and organizational level, ends up in the shadows. Planning as well as implementation of teaching should of course be based on the students’ knowledge in the relevant area (individual level), but it is also important to plan for how this knowledge can be expressed and developed in the specific student group (group level) (Skolverket, 2023).

The purpose of both formal and informal assessment of younger students' knowledge is primarily to support student learning. The teacher needs to identify the students' strengths and development needs in order to determine whether the students and the teaching are on the right track. The assessments therefore primarily have a formative purpose. It is advantageous to see assessment, in younger school-aged children, not as something teachers do either before or after they teach, but rather as a constantly ongoing part of teaching. This can be described as small micro-assessments that the teacher makes at the moment. When the teacher decides which children should form pairs when students are to collaborate, the teacher makes an assessment of which pair constellations give the students the best conditions in relation to the planned activity.

The common denominator in assessment situations, in the younger school years, is the aim of planning teaching that meets and enables knowledge development for all students in the direction of criteria for assessing knowledge in grade 3. In order for such informal assessment

and observation of knowledge to permeate the teaching, the teacher needs to plan what, when and how assessment will be done (Skolverket, 2023).

Each assessment is a snapshot of a student's or a group of students' knowledges, where the questions why, what and how are guiding the teacher. The snapshot should focus on both the students' strengths and development need and form the basis for teaching that promotes the knowledge development of all students. In order to support the knowledge development of all students in parallel, the teacher needs to identify the students' strengths and development needs in order to determine whether the students and the teaching are on the right track (Skolverket, 2023).

3.4 Literature Review

Teachers may have difficulty designing assessment formats that elicit evidence of complex skills, understanding, or creative thinking and may instead primarily design tasks that elicit evidence of factual knowledge or trained skills. They must be self-aware and reflective, and they must question their beliefs about the students, about the instructions, and about the social context of instructions. They must also be aware of the composition of their classes and consider which assessment strategies will be suitable for students from particular cultural backgrounds. Educational assessment can be viewed as promoting individualism by focusing on assessing individual students. This is related to formative assessment by providing individual students with feedback to enhance future learning. One might, therefore, argue that this scenario is also especially important to consider when designing tasks for students with cultural and linguistic backgrounds and prior knowledge that differ from the background of the majority of students (Nortvedt et al., 2020).

The assessment part of teaching is meant to provide the educators with the tools they need to assess and improve their own teaching in order for the students to move forward in their learning. Formative assessment means just that, assessment for learning or dynamic assessment. This kind of assessment is an ongoing process that mainly concerns the improvement of students' educational process in which encouraging self-reflection is designed to stimulate student attainment. Büyükkarci (2014) claims that assessment holds a pivotal role

in the teaching process, during which teachers gather information about the whereabouts of students in the learning process. When assessing, teachers may find students need more motivation and be more independent in their learning, or the assessment helps measure students' weaknesses as well as strengths. In alignment with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, formative assessment is a proceeding operation in which pupils are assumed to transition from their existing knowledge to new knowledge by supportive teachers and in cooperation with their peers. In the zone of proximal development, formative assessment levels the plain field between lower achievers and higher achievers by raising all achievements and therefore closing the gaps between students' learning. Overall, a formative assessment will contribute to an environment where every student, no matter the differences in educational level, will move forward.

No matter in what context when it comes to learning, formative assessment is significant in enhancing future learning. During the pandemic, meeting students' needs became harder in many countries due to virtual learning. In a study conducted by Jones and Porter (2023) in Sunnyside Unified School District in Tucson, Arizona, they figured this was a time to improve hybrid learning and make it more consequential. By implementing the six dimensions of formative assessment, “Student Peer Feedback, Student Self-Assessment, Collaborative Culture of Learning, Questioning Strategies that Elicit Evidence of Student Learning, Tasks and Activities that Elicit Evidence of Student Learning, Extended Thinking through Discourse” (p. 2), teachers began training to become more confident in their knowledge and use formative assessment. The teachers who took part in this study worked in lab classrooms that were observed by trained site leaders, as well as participating in monthly meetings to work through what had transpired. The findings disclose that teachers need this kind of training to better understand the different dimensions of formative assessment in order to build the confidence they need to implement it on a regular basis. Teachers must fully understand the concept in order for the assessment to benefit the students in every aspect of the learning process.

When enacting formative assessment, the communication between teachers and students is of vital importance. In order for the learning to move forward, both parties need to understand what may need remodeling in the process for this to happen. In a classroom influenced by constructivism, the children are meant to feel safe and have the courage to try their thoughts

and ideas without the fear of judgment. In a study conducted by Sharkins et al., (2017) teachers explain that they try to encourage students to discuss things that they detect by using questions like, “I wonder what will happen next in this story? What can you tell me about this picture? What might they be doing?” (p. 12). These questions are to help students observe and become aware of their own thinking and to elaborate on their responses.

Teachers must be conversant with the importance of communication between them and their pupils when assessing future learning. Kao (2024) argues around the controversy that is assessment, especially when it comes to assessing language skills, as there are no official guidelines or specific research on this matter. Assessment is taking part in so many different contexts that consistency may be an issue and, therefore, the lack of effective use. By removing themselves from asking perpetual questions and moving to asking more open-ended questions or questions that provide more information as well as provide room for problem-solving, teachers will shape formative assessment to become much more beneficial to students. To make this transition between different types of questions, educators must provide adequate wait time for students to articulate their thoughts and engage in discussions about their understanding. One effective strategy to enhance student responses is to have them brainstorm ideas in pairs for two to three minutes before sharing them with the entire class. This will empower students to become an active part of their own learning, which is an essential part of formative assessment.

4. Method

In this section, we have focused on a qualitative method in the form of a digital questionnaire. The method section will be divided into five subsections: qualitative method, participants, digital questionnaire, procedure and analysis of the data, and ethical considerations. In the digital questionnaire section, we formulate questions about teachers' perspectives on the subject. The following questions we asked the teachers in the digital questionnaire include: “How do you define formative assessment, forms of strategies, ideas, and activities? Are the strategies and activities that they use for formative assessment, according to the teacher's perception towards formative assessment? Different types/strategies of formative assessment”

Research: Teachers' perceptions on formative assessment in K-3 classrooms in Sweden.

This survey is a part of our degree project. The aim of this survey is for English teachers in Sweden, specifically in grades K-3. The questionnaire takes approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. All the information you share will be anonymized, and then we will contact some of the teachers who have responded to this survey. We would also like to complement your responses with in-depth interviews that will help us learn more about the teachers' perceptions of formative assessment if you want to participate in it.

4.1 Mixed Method

Mixed methods research (MMR), which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, is a potentially valuable tool. A mixed method approach refers to the integration that allows researchers to leverage the distinct advantages and objectives of both quantitative and qualitative research. This method not only tests the limits of each approach but also fosters the generation of new insights that go beyond what can be achieved through a single research methodology. Two integration strategies were adopted that embody a qualitatively driven approach. In these strategies, researchers employ quantitative variables or findings as a preliminary coding framework to analyze qualitative data. Nonetheless, the quantitative measures and data did not dictate or restrict the collection of qualitative information. (Love et al., 2023).

According to Christoffersen and Johannessen (2015), Qualitative methods are more flexible in that they allow a greater degree of spontaneity and adaptation in interaction between the researcher and the participant. Qualitative methods have open-ended questions, and the way the questions are asked can vary from participant to participant. In the case of open questions, the participants can freely answer the questions in their own words (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015). According to the authors, how to reflect on what information we want to ask for, to assess how phenomena can be operationalized, and to make the practical design. Ask as concrete questions as possible; it makes it easier to answer and provides detailed information, which in turn makes it easier to interpret the data. An advantage of using questions from other questionnaires, according to the authors, is that you can compare your results with results from other surveys. It must be strongly structured, i.e., have given answer options for all questions, and can also be open questions where the respondents can write down the answer on their own. semi-structured questionnaires (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2015).

4.2 Participants

The participants that we want to focus on in this project are K-3 teachers in elementary schools in Sweden. We are interested in their opinions, thoughts, and strategies about formative assessment in their classroom and why they implement it. From all the answers that we have gathered, there are teachers that have worked between 2 to 22 years. All the participating teachers are females from six different schools, throughout Skåne county, out of the 140 schools that received the questionnaire. These six teachers were not chosen, they were the only answers we received; therefore, we are aware the results maybe could have been different if some of the participants were male teachers with different experiences.

The amount of detailed answers differs amongst the participants. One of the six teachers that have worked on and off for six years have provided especially detailed answers around her experiences when enacting formative assessment. Her general perception is positive although she was the only teacher connecting difficulties around formative assessment when working with kids with special needs. The remaining five teachers did not provide as many details around their thoughts on FA. Despite this, the answers still provide a positive perception towards formative assessment.

4.3 Digital questionnaire

We decided to use a digital questionnaire in our project because it is more effective and less time-consuming to send to teachers and from them to answer in a digital form. The 17 questions consist of alternative, selective, multiple-choice questions and open questions, and optional answers from the teachers will provide us insights about our research question on formative assessment for elementary school teachers in Sweden. When we sent the digital questionnaire in the Facebook pages, we wrote that the questions were in English so we would appreciate it if you are willing to answer in English because it will be much easier for us to analyse and to study. But despite that we were clear about that, there was one of the teachers who decided to answer in Swedish despite the fact.

4.4 Procedure and analysis of the data

When it came to making the research questions, we started constructing the digital questionnaire in the form of a Google survey form. A questionnaire documenting straightforward information was an easier way for more people to participate. The questionnaire alternated between closed multiple-choice questions and open questions that needed to be answered in writing.

The digital questionnaire, with its description of the area of focus, research questions, and how we would handle the data, was sent out digitally. It was sent out via email to colleagues and schools we work or have worked at. A link to a digital questionnaire (Appendix 1) was sent to principals and teachers at 140 elementary schools in Skåne County in the southernmost part of Sweden with a focus on K-3 classroom teachers' perceptions of formative assessment and its implementation in their classrooms. The questionnaire was also sent to a Facebook group called Network for English Teachers and another group called Grades K-3 Tips and Ideas for Teachers and Students Only (our translation). Some of the schools that we sent the mail to said “Unfortunately we are not able to set aside time for those of you who do not practice with us”, “Hello, and thank you for your request to participate in the survey. We currently have many people contacting us with similar requests and unfortunately cannot accommodate your requests”.

The digital questionnaire was available online for four weeks due to the time constraint. During this time we only received six answers, these answers have been analyzed and stated in the result section. Since we only gathered a small amount of answers we are aware this does not reflect on reality in a justified way. Due to these six answers at most we can not draw conclusion around the experience of female teachers in general when it comes to their perception on formative assessment.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The ethical guidelines of Vetenskapsrådet (2017) were followed when conducting the research. Before participating in the study, the participants were informed of its purpose, content, and use. By consenting to participate, their personal data were processed lawfully according to the GDPR, Handling of Personal Data during degree projects (European Parliament & Council of Europe, 2016). All participants are anonymous, and they can at any time choose not to continue the participation and answer the questions if they don't want to. Additionally, we hope that the participants are legitimate when we send the digital questionnaire link in teacher-related groups on Facebook for elementary school teachers as well as to the principals of around 140 schools. The confidentiality requirement implies that all research data, including people, should be handled with confidentiality to the greatest extent possible, and any personal details should be stored safely without access for unauthorized people.

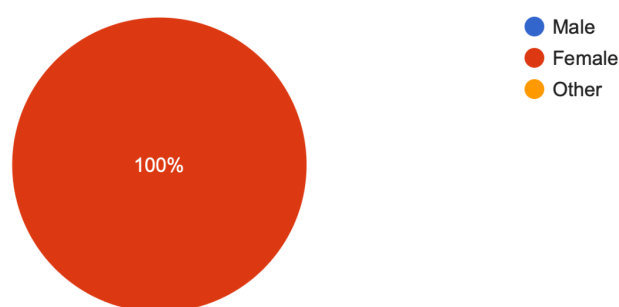
5. Results

This section will present the results and analysis of the digital questionnaire questions. The purpose of this result section is to analyze the participating teachers' answers to better answer our research question. The questions that were included in the digital questionnaire will be sorted into subheadings to get a clearer understanding of the results. From all the answers that we have gathered, there are teachers, all from kindergarten to third-class teachers, that have worked between 2 to 22 years. When we reviewed the results, we found four factors that impact teachers' enactment of formative assessment. Those factors are, teachers' perceptions, communication, the young age of students and time. These are the most common factors, according to the teachers' own perceptions on the topic.

5.1 Gender (Man, Women, Other)

Figure 1

Gender
6 svar



Out of the 140 schools throughout Skåne County, we have received 6 answers, and they are all from female teachers.

5.2 How do you define FA?

This is another question that was included in the questionnaire that got sent out, our explanation of formative assessment was included in the questionnaire at it is as follows;

Formative assessment refers to tools that identify misconceptions, struggles, and learning gaps along the way and assess how to close those gaps. According to Skolverket (2022) how teachers give responses and communicate with the students is also a big part of formative assessment.

The teachers have different explanations as to what formative assessment means for the teaching and learning process. The results reveal that the participating teachers believe that formative assessment is a way for the students to move forward in their learning process and for the teachers to be able to analyze the students' learning capacity. Communication between teachers and students is also vital for the learning process to move forward. One of the five participating teachers connects the Variation theory to formative assessment, this is what she said;

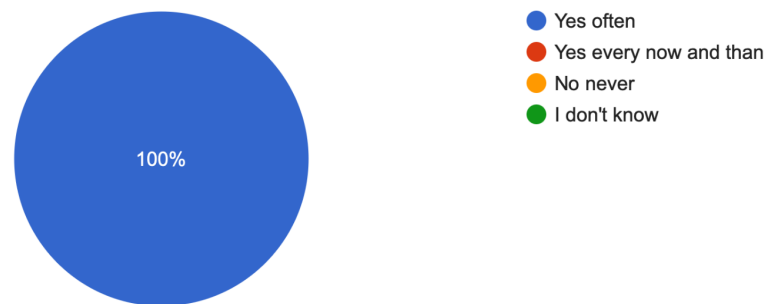
To assess how much the children both individually and as a group know in regard to the material being taught. In this theory 'gap' is a term used to highlight what the children don't know. If a gap appears the first time during a lesson, then the teacher should take note of it and plan the following lesson so she can close that gap. It's basically an analytical tool for the teacher to understand what the children have understood or not and to help with lesson planning.

5.3 Have you ever used FA in your classroom?

Figure 2

Have you ever used formative assessment in your classroom?

6 svar



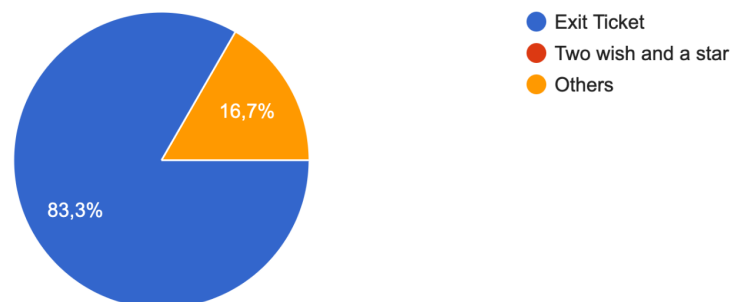
According to the figure above, when it comes to the teachers enacting formative assessment in their classrooms, they all apply it to their teaching regularly. This figure does not say anything else around the use of formative assessment.

5.4 What form of FA have you used?

Figure 3

If you answered yes to question 4. What form of formative assessment have you used? you can choose more than one option

6 svar



In this figure, the teachers use mostly exit tickets as a form of formative assessment when teaching in their classrooms. The figure also shows that they use other forms of formative assessment; however, what other types of formative assessment methods they practice is not shown in the figure.

5.5 Why do you use FA in your classroom?

The results show that teachers find it important to let students know where they are in the learning process as well as how to move forward and evolve. When they have established where the pupils are in their learning process, this type of assessment will then help them, as teachers, remodel their teaching to meet students' needs. When teachers incorporate FA into their teaching they allow room for students to take an active part in their learning process. The students themselves will be able to understand what is being taught as well as assessed in order for them to move forward in their learning. The material being taught will become visible not only for the teachers but for the students as well. FA also makes the next step in the learning process visible for both parties. Therefore, FA is a great tool to enhance communication with the students in order to make them an active part in the lessons and what is being learnt moving forward.

5.6 If you don't use FA in your classroom, how would you assess your students?

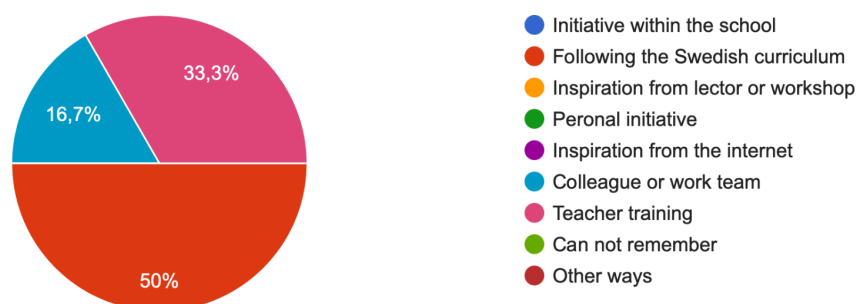
The findings reveal that all but one of the participating teachers use formative assessment and have therefore not explained any different teaching methods of importance. The sixth participant did not understand the question and has therefore not been able to answer. Since this question revolves more around other types of assessment methods apart from FA there is no data to analyze since they all enact FA. The statement from the participating teacher who did not understand the question becomes irrelevant for the outcome of the result since they did not answer.

5.7 What prompted you to use FA methods?

Figure 4

If you answered yes to question 4, What promoted you to use formative assessment methods?

6 svar



When it comes to what promotes formative assessment methods, the teachers had multiple choices to choose from, as you can see in the figure above. Two out of the six answers that we have received so far suggest that the teacher training encouraged them to apply formative assessment in their classrooms. Two of the remaining three answers inform us that they promoted the enactment of it according to what is stated in the Swedish curriculum. The last participant was promoted to use formative assessment from collaboration with colleagues and work teams.

5.8 Describe briefly how you use FA in your classroom

According to the results, some teachers use formative assessment in their classrooms every day and in all their lessons. Formative assessments like “Exit tickets, commenting on their work, two stars and a wish, looking at work done in the class and looking for "the good things " and" what could be improved (in the group)” are all methods that are being used. In a recent question that you can find the results of in 5.4 the teachers were asked what form of FA they used, none of the teachers answered two stars and a wish however when asked to briefly describe how they use FA in their classroom two stars and a wish is mentioned. The instructions said to use

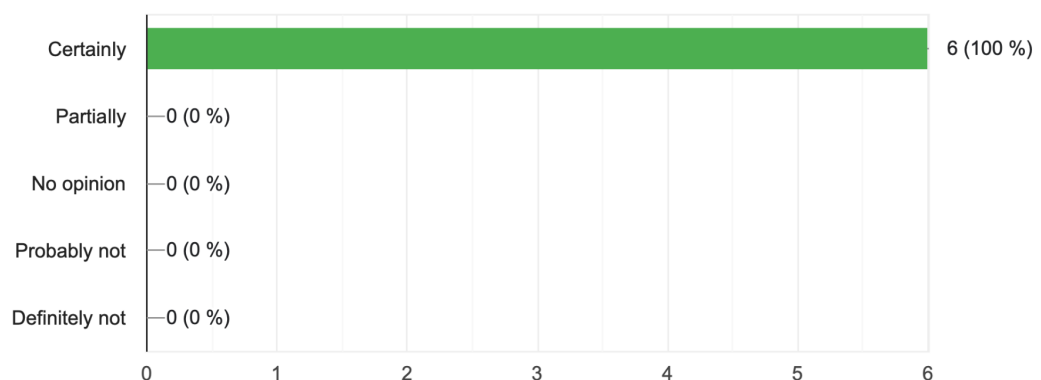
more than one option for the question around what form of FA they enact however drawn from the results this must not have been clear enough.

One of the teachers used variation theory during a math lesson when teaching symmetry. The teacher noticed that the students didn't know the term symmetry, but they knew the concept of it. The formative assessment worked so that the teacher identified the gaps, which in this case was about the lack of understanding around the term symmetry. The next lesson was then planned around this to improve students' knowledge about the term and not just the concept. The assessment was formative in a way that the teacher identified where the students were in their learning process in order to develop their teaching accordingly to help students move forward.

5.9 To what extent do you believe that FA, in K-3, promotes students' learning?

Figure 5

To what extent do you believe that formative assessment in K-3 promotes students' learning?
6 svar



This diagram shows that all the teachers participating believe that formative assessment promotes students learning to 100 percent. None of the teachers see any doubts when it comes

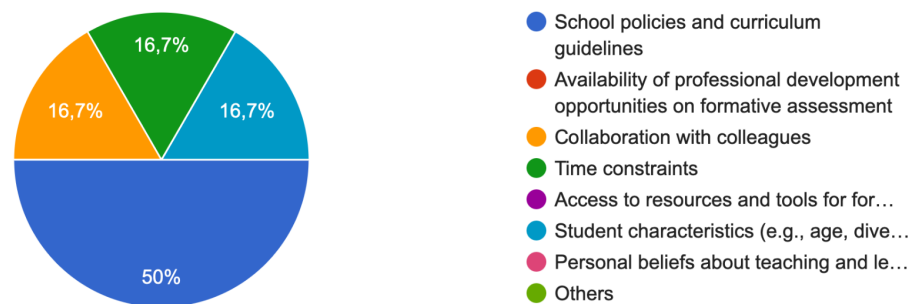
to the relevance of enacting FA since they firmly believe it to have a positive impact on the students' learning process, therefore the result you see in the diagram.

5.10 To what extent do the following factors influence your use of FA?

Figure 6

To what extent do the following factors influence your use of formative assessment?

6 svar



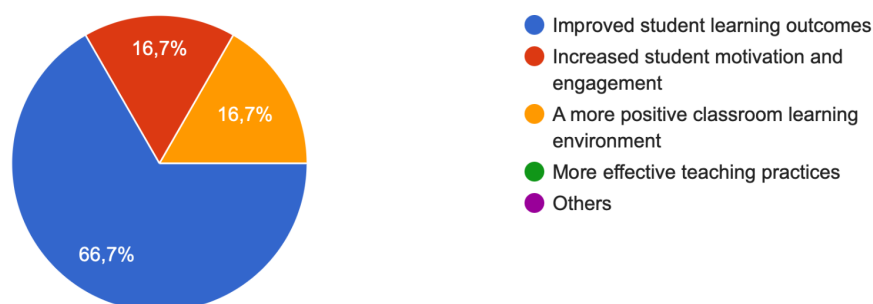
50 percent (three answers) reveal that the teachers work with formative assessment as it is declared in School policies and curriculum guidelines. While the other 50.1 percent are divided between time constraints, student characteristics, and collaboration with colleagues. 16.7 percent (1 participant) of the participants feel as though time constraints may influence the enactment of formative assessment badly, leading them to not apply it as much. 16.7 percent replied that students' age and diverse learning needs influence the use of formative assessment. 16.7 percent answered that the use of formative assessment is influenced by the collaboration with colleagues.

5.11 To what extent do you believe FA contributes to the following?

Figure 7

To what extent do you believe formative assessment contributes to the following?

6 svar



The improvement of student learning outcomes seems to be the biggest contributing factor as to why teachers utilize formative assessment, as 66.7 percent of the participants answered this. The other factors are a more positive classroom learning environment 16.7 percent of the answers and increased student motivation and engagement 16.7 percent of the answers.

5.12 What advantages/benefits and challenges/risks arose in the classroom when promoting FA?

The results show that all the participating teachers see the advantage in using formative assessment when it comes to navigating where students are in their learning process and, therefore, improve their teaching to meet students' needs. When analyzing the data for this question, the teacher gives more detailed answers around challenges/risk than around advantages/benefits therefore the results focus more on that. The disadvantages stated are around the student's age when it comes to the communication around what formative assessment is. For the formative assessment to work, there needs to be clear communication between students and teachers, this is harder with younger students. One other barrier is that

sometimes it is hard to know if the students truly understand a concept or if they just copy their classmates, for example, when participating in a group exercise. It can also be hard for some students to speak in the classroom; this makes it harder for the teacher to recognize their struggle as well as their strength and therefore make the formative assessment harder to apply. The results also indicate that all but one of the participating teachers see both benefits and risks with this kind of assessment; however, what risks, and benefits are not identified. One of the teachers only sees benefits because she believes in creating a safe space where the students can feel safe to speak about things concerning school as well as things outside of school. The use of different teaching methods is only seen as something positive, according to this one teacher.

5.13 How confident do you feel in your ability to implement FA effectively?

When examining the results around this question, it becomes clear that the majority of the teachers participating feel relatively confident when implementing formative assessment. They feel as though the positive results driven by the assessment make them feel more confident in implementing it successfully. Concluded from the statements, made by the teachers, can be that teachers' confidence in enacting FA have a strong correlation to the fact that the results driven are mainly positive. These positive results encourage teachers to build confidence and rely on that confidence, around the concept of FA, in order to maintain the positive effect, it has upon students continuing learning.

5.14 What are the biggest challenges you face when using FA in your K-3 classroom?

One of the biggest challenges that teachers are facing in the lower classes, the answers from the participant samples, is around the age of the students and the time to plan for the individual students. This becomes even harder when you have students with special needs who may need extra planning time. Another challenge can be seen around the fact that some students imitate others when answering the questions and therefore lack understanding among the students. When it comes to group work, the shy students' strengths and weaknesses tend to disappear amongst the students that take more place in the classroom. This makes it challenging for the teachers to notice these students and therefore construct the teaching according to their need.

6. Discussion

This section will compare this study's results to previous research and explore its research questions about the Teachers' perceptions of formative assessment. The four topics established when reviewing the result will be discussed in this section. The first topic is communication between the students and the teachers in the classroom influenced by Vygotsky's cultural theory and Piaget. The second topic is younger students, the young age of the students which could be a factor that can impact the implementation of formative assessment. The third is the time for teachers to plan and implement the formative assessment in the K-3 classes in Sweden. The last topic that will be discussed is limitations and future investigations.

Teachers' perception towards formative assessment

When examining the results of this study, conclusions around the positive perception towards formative assessment can be made directly as it is unanimous amongst the participating teachers. The teachers all believe that this assessment type is vital when it comes to students moving forward in their learning process and that communication is a key component. In line with Piaget's thinking around constructivism, as explained in the theoretical section, formative assessment in the light of constructivism offers insight into how children learn, emphasizing the importance of valuing and nurturing their intellectual and moral independence (Sharkins et al., 2017). The participating teachers overall feel confident enough to conduct formative assessment due to the positive results driven from situations when this assessment was being applied. In accordance with sociocultural theory, where learning is thought to happen in the relationship between individuals in this case, both between students and between teachers and students, a formative assessment acts as the tool for this type of learning situation to appear (Sharkins et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that the teachers in this study seem to have understood the importance of establishing good communication between themselves and their students.

Using assessment for formative purposes relies not only on the teacher's understanding of assessment, but also on the student's (Burner, 2016). Mutual understanding is important to make assessment useful and meaningful. The goal of formative assessment is according to Burner (2016) to facilitate the transition from feedback to self-monitoring. Teachers are predominantly positive towards the new emphasis on formative assessment, their subject knowledge seems to be an important factor for their assessment competency. The lower grades have reached furthest in formative assessment practices, such as self-assessment and student involvement. In discussing the term 'formative assessment', that teachers should provide feedback to students on the correctness of their work and should provide a link to performance standards to facilitate learning; students should also be provided with strategies for reaching these standards, Nortvedt et al., (2020) proclaims.

6.1 Communication

Communication is, as mentioned above, a key component for the enactment of formative assessment to be successful. The participants elaborated on the importance of establishing a safe environment where the students feel confident sharing their thoughts and ideas without the fear of judgment. Formative assessment is also thought to be, as mentioned by one of the teachers, a different kind of teaching tool that helps both students and teachers see what needs to be remodeled in order for the learner to reach the next level. If communication is lacking when trying to enact formative assessment, the results will not be useful; in fact, it may actually be negative since the situation will not be assessed at all even though it was the intention. This can be connected to when Sunnyside Unified School District (SUSD) in Tucson, Arizona, decided this would be a great opportunity for the entire school to start leaning into the formative assessment paradigm. For this to be possible, there had to be a unified front; all areas of the school, the establishment, all the programs, students, teachers, parents, etc, had to communicate with one another for this change to be successful (Jones & Porter, 2023).

Communication is something that happens between people when they interact; nevertheless, this does not mean it is always successful. When striving to implement formative assessment

to your teaching the communication needs to be successful; otherwise, there will be no assessment, and teachers and students will leave a learning situation with nothing to take from it. Both parties taking part in the assessment must be aware of the importance of positive communication. In a formative assessment situation, the teacher gathers information about the students and around their knowledge for the sake of improving their teaching to meet the students' needs (Büyükkarci, 2014). This has to be communicated to the students for it to be successful. The participating teachers proclaim that communication is essential, however, they focus more on them seeing where the students are in their learning process and what they as teachers need to remodel, more than the importance of this being communicated most successfully. Teacher-student interaction through assessment tasks and communication could and should promote students' language learning and cognitive development in content-oriented classrooms, promote students' metacognition and social learning (Kao, 2024).

6. 2 Younger Students

As discussed in the paragraphs above, it has been established that the teachers taking part in this study have a positive perception towards formative assessment and believe that this is the most vital form of assessment to prompt successful learning. When asked what type of assessment they would use if not formative assessment, the majority said they only use formative assessment; however, when asked about the challenges when enacting it, things like the students being so young and therefore not fully understanding the process of formative assessment was established. The results of the two questions can be found to contradict one another. Furthermore, the teachers explain that the young age makes it harder to communicate the assessment so the students understand they are being assessed to move forward. The obstacle of students imitating each other during pair/group activities, which makes it hard for teachers to know whether the student actually understands, is another contributing factor. Skolverket (2022) states that formative assessment is a highly complex approach that largely depends on the teacher's educational philosophy and the methods used to implement and convey it. The teachers proclaim that they almost only use formative assessment; however, can the assessment be considered formative when the students do not fully understand the concept and that they are being assessed?

Children are naturally curious about new things, leaving them eager to learn; this process naturally leads them to learning situations. This is what Vygotsky proclaims to be learning through social exchange between children and more knowledgeable individuals (Purwanti & Hatmanto, 2019). In the pursuit of formative assessment, children's curiosity should be taken into consideration when establishing meaningful communication and mutual understanding of the concept that is formative assessment. Teachers' positive perception towards formative assessment needs to align with the young students' understanding of it for it to be triumphant. Treat formative assessment as a concept that the children will want to learn, and hopefully, the process will be even more fortunate. In addition, the communication between students and teachers regarding this matter will evolve into something to strive for.

6.3 Time

The time for planning and implementing formative assessment is another factor that has impacted teachers' perceptions and opinions on formative assessment and the use of it. The teachers that took part in this study mentioned that planning for feedback in their lessons is important and that it can sometimes feel challenging due to the lack of time and resources. They also raise concerns about the special needs kids and that the lack of resources and the lack of time could impact their learning capacity negatively. Time is one of the most impactful factors for teachers to have/not have when conducting formative assessments in their classrooms. Time Management skills are of essence for teachers, this is a skill that needs to be nurtured and invested in for future planning. The loss of time must be viewed with utmost care as the reduction of it needs to be minimalized (El Warfali & Yusoff, 2014). When connecting feedback from the teacher to their students, the time factor plays a major role in the development and the communication between not only the teachers/students but also between the students themselves when they give feedback to each other.

Given that these are essential components of the process, time appears to be of the utmost significance regarding the expectations of the school management. Teachers feel compelled to provide students with tangible outcomes since this is what management has declared, even when the management also believes that formative evaluation is very important. When teachers are expected to collect data on each student's learning process to enhance their instruction and

implement formative assessment, this may undoubtedly be a time-consuming procedure. Teachers need to work on their approach towards learning and their view of knowledge. Analyzing their own teaching and practices takes time as well as examining the consequences for the students (Skolverket, 2022).

Educational assessment should be based on a set of scientific principles and philosophical assumptions that are grounded in an understanding or theory about how people learn, what they know, and how knowledge and understanding develop. Any assessment should be designed based on knowledge or theoretical assumptions about which kinds of tasks are most suitable for eliciting demonstrations of important knowledge and skills from students. (Nortvedt et al., 2020). This can be seen as a time-consuming process when showing what type of assessment to use in their classroom even though the participating teachers claim that they have a positive perception towards formative assessment.

6.4 Limitations and future investigations

When we started this degree project, our hope was to gather enough answers to make a more general conclusion as to what teachers' perception towards formative assessment is and how it impacts their enactment of it. The participation of teachers in this study is crucial for us because they themselves could impact and influence the study of this paper. The more answers the more data we would have to collect, analyse and summarize, to give us an insight on the teachers' perspectives on formative assessment, its importance and its usage in their classes. We were thinking about the comparison between theory and reality when it came to the teacher's own perceptions on formative assessment in the Swedish context.

On Monday the 10th of February 2025, questions were prepared around the topic of FA, a digital link in Google-form was then made and sent to principals of 140 schools around Skåne County and uploaded onto multiple pages on Facebook, Nätverk för lärare i engelska (Network for teachers in English) and Årskurs F-3 Tips och idéer (endast för pedagoger och studenter), (Grade F-3 Tips and ideas (for educators and students only)).

After two weeks with no answers from either one we decided to once again upload to the Facebook groups and contact the schools. This led to receiving six answers from teachers working at the schools we contacted but still no reply from the Facebook groups. After another two weeks with still only six answers, we had to shut down the digital link due to the lack of time and the study needed to be conducted around these six participants.

When analyzing the results from the participating teachers, some questions arose: why did only these six teachers from more than 140 schools throughout Skåne County answer the digital questionnaire that we sent to them? Is it because only they had the time to fill in the survey? Is it because the six participating teachers are interested in the topic of formative assessment? Is it because they use formative assessment in their classes? On the other hand, why did not all the other teachers want to participate. Is it because they are not interested in formative assessment? That they don't use it in their classes? Or maybe they quite simply don't want to fill the survey due to the lack of time.

These are all interesting questions that impact this study, however the questions regarding the teachers not participating, we do not have the time and resources to investigate further. If we would have received more answers from more teachers, it could impact this thesis tremendously because we could have had more data to analyze that could impact the results on this study and on the topic of formative assessment. The topic of teachers' perception towards formative assessment needs to be investigated further in the future since this study only focused on the 6 participants' answers. This is not much data to build a study around and therefore no generalized claims can be made.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to find out teachers' perception towards formative assessment. The teachers who participated in this study, work in K-3 classrooms, all proclaim to have a positive perception and that formative assessment is the most enacted form of assessment throughout their lessons. They believe that the positive results driven from operating under formative assessment methods is what encourages them to keep applying it. However, concerns around the age of the students as well as time have been frequent obstacles. Young students may not always understand the use of formative assessment leading to the assessment not being as productive since it relies on the understanding and communication between both students and teachers. Time also seemed to be an issue when planning and executing formative assessment. The participating teachers are afraid there won't be enough time to individually plan this kind of dynamic assessment for each student.

One thing being fundamental when working with formative assessment frequently in the teaching and learning process is communication. There needs to be successful relationships between students and teachers, where the communication is mutually beneficial to both parties. The assessment is meant to enlighten and make students' knowledge clear to them and for teachers to evolve their teaching in accordance with this. The participating teachers revealed their concern around students' understanding of formative assessment, therefore their part in the process. Nevertheless, the teachers still claimed that formative assessment is the most frequent form of assessment enacted, even though students' understanding of FA is an essential part. It seems as though the communication between students and teachers is not as positive as it could be and therefore does not contribute to formative assessment as effectively.

The focus group of the study was meant to be teachers from all over Skåne, the questionnaire was sent out to around 140 schools as well as posted in Facebook groups for teachers. Nevertheless, after we gave it about 4 weeks, we only received 6 answers and due to the limitation of time the study had to be conducted around these six teachers, even though this is not ideal when gathering data. The study only included female teachers since only female teachers answered the questionnaire, this is another factor not ideal to the study, would the results have differed if some of the participating teachers were male. We are aware of the factors that may implement the studies' relevance and accuracy nonetheless this study can be

treated as a test study to a bigger study around teachers' perception towards formative assessment.

Further research could be done around the matter of perception after presenting these findings to a different set of teachers, making them aware of the issue around K-3 students' understanding of formative assessment found in recent studies. Conducting a study where students are the focus group, and where the study investigates their perception and understanding of formative assessment could also be of relevance in future studies.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfw9piOq-pHCibw4lAQzfZWF2QwEbG9oVUh-OX9iQmv3gVXmA/viewform?usp=header>

1. **Your Email Address**
2. **Gender (Man, Women, Other)**
3. **How many years have you worked as a teacher?**
4. **How do you define formative assessment?**
5. **Have you ever used formative assessment in your classroom?**
6. **If you answered yes to question 4. What form of formative assessment have you used? you can choose more than one option**
7. **Why do you use formative assessment in your classroom?**
8. **If you don't use formative assessment in your classroom, how would you assess your students?**
9. **If you answered yes to question 4, What prompted you to use formative assessment methods? (Initiative within the school, Following the Swedish curriculum, Inspiration from lector or workshop, Personal initiative, Inspiration from the internet, Colleague or work team, Teacher training, Can not remember, Other ways)**
10. **To what extent do you believe that formative assessment in K-3 promotes students' learning? (Certainly, Partially, No opinion, Probably not, Definitely not)**
11. **Describe briefly how you use formative assessment in your classroom. Feel free to provide some examples**
12. **What advantages and challenges arose in the classroom when promoting formative assessment?**

13. Do you see any benefits/risks regarding the use of formative assessment in your classroom or in general?

14. To what extent do the following factors influence your use of formative assessment? (School policies and curriculum guidelines, Availability of professional development opportunities on formative assessment, Collaboration with colleagues, Time constraints, Access to resources and tools for formative assessment, Student characteristics (e.g., age, diverse learning needs), Personal beliefs about teaching and learning, Others)

15. How confident do you feel in your ability to implement formative assessment effectively?

16. What are the biggest challenges you face when using formative assessment in your K-3 class

17. To what extent do you believe formative assessment contributes to the following? (Improved student learning outcomes, Improved student learning outcomes, A more positive classroom learning environment, More effective teaching practices, Others)