Teachers' Conception of Learner Self-assessment

A Qualitative Interview Study with seven Teachers of English in a Swedish Upper-secondary School

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to shed light on EFL teachers' perspective on learner self-assessment as the field is lacking teachers' voices regarding this research issue and non-existent in the Swedish context even if it is part of the Swedish curriculum of English and stated in the Swedish National Agency of Education. Teachers are the foundation of classroom learning, which makes this an important research area to explore. It can increase our understanding of why or why not learner self-assessment is used in the EFL classroom. Thus, this study investigates EFL teachers' conception of learner self-assessment to further student learning, and explore what teachers consider significant for the implementation of this activity. Although the current use of learner self-assessment varied among the teachers, the findings show that teachers' conception of learner self-assessment is overall following the definitions and purposes presented in the Swedish syllabi. Also, teachers suggest that learner self-assessment might be challenging to incorporate as learners' associate assessment with grading. Nevertheless, learner self-assessment could lead to autonomous learning and consensus between teachers and learners regarding grades if used as a continuous method. Finally, the study reveals some necessary requirements for implementing learner self-assessment which partly involve the importance of clarity regarding the purpose of the activity as well as the necessity of practice. The conclusion addresses the pedagogical implications of learner self-assessment and indicates that teachers should be provided with materials as this would facilitate the incorporation of learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom and prevent the issue of time constraints in teachers' everyday practice.

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1 Introduction

Upper-secondary school supposedly prepares students for the adult-world where new levels of responsibilities await, and self-reliance becomes a necessary trait. Hence, how do we make learners responsible for their own learning? In the author's experience, little attention has been drawn to how teachers can help students become autonomous learners, both at the school where the author conducted her teaching practice and at the teacher education programme. For learners to become responsible for their own learning, it is believed that learners need to be able to determine their current level in the learning process and assess their results to proceed autonomously (Skolverket, 2011a; Oscarson, 1997; Oscarson, 2013).

The Swedish National Agency for Education suggests that teachers in upper-secondary school should work towards the same goal, to help students grow into individuals that can plan their own studies through assessment of their own results and, therefore, take responsibility for their own learning, i.e. develop self-assessment and autonomous study skills (Skolverket, 2011b). However, there is no explicit guide that indicates how teachers could work with self-assessment except from the assessment support material (Skolverket, 2011a) which provides some basic advice when first addressing self-assessment with learners. The approach to developing learners' self-assessment skills will consequently vary from teacher to teacher.

Moreover, according to the Swedish curriculum, the English as a foreign language (EFL) courses should provide learners with knowledge of language awareness and how they can autonomously develop their language skills in and outside the classroom (Skolverket, 2011c). It is evident that Swedish teachers of English should teach some kind of self-directed learning strategies and accordingly, provide practice to plan and monitor students' own learning process.

The definition and purpose of self-assessment adopted in this paper are in accordance with the Swedish National Agency of Education (Skolverket, 2011a). Learner self-assessment involves student participation in assessment of their own language performances. The purpose is to make students reflect upon what abilities the performance shows and learn what quality entails. The reflection upon their performance should also be done in agreement with assessment course criteria to develop knowledge for what the aims should be and what is expected of them. Through this exercise, learners ought to know what to do better next time and improve their language usage through the awareness of quality, and practice more. In other words, students will move forward in their development in learning (Skolverket, 2011a).

The involvement of learners in assessment has been shown to be beneficial for self-regulated skills (Falchikov, 2005). Self-assessment skills have been widely accepted as being a key learning strategy for autonomous language learning, where learners can start viewing their learning in personal terms, and plan and monitor their language development. Accordingly, self-assessment skills implicate developing independency, discipline and self-directing behaviour when learning and these skills require practice and preparation if learners are to value them (Falchikov, 2005). Through practice, learners will, in the future, be able to know how to plan autonomously and objectively assess their performance to improve and develop it if they practice these skills (Skolverket, 2011a; Jönsson, 2013). These views indicate that teachers' acquaintance with self-assessment will have an impact on the amount of practice students are exposed to, hence, to what extent learners learn how to assess their own studies and need for development (Dragemark Oscarson & Oscarson, 2011).

Teachers play an essential role and retain considerable control over classroom assessment practices. It is, therefore, important to understand what teachers know, believe and think about learner self-assessment as this will affect the way it is implemented or not. Also, understanding what teachers claim as necessary requirements will give a further understanding in teachers' practice and perhaps bring light to aspects that research lacks concerning implementation issues.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' perspective on learner self-assessment, and therefore explore the current use of self-assessment to further students' EFL learning and to explore what these teachers suggest as significant for the implementation of learner self-assessment in the Swedish EFL classroom. To do this, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What conception of learner self-assessment do seven Swedish EFL teachers have?

2. What do these EFL teachers believe are the necessary requirements for implementing learner self-assessment?

1.2 Teacher Cognition

This paper uses the term 'conception' to refer to what teachers think, know and believe in accordance with the research of teachers' cognition (Borg, 2015). There has been a rapid growth in research on teacher cognition, which fundamentally started becoming established in the mid-1970s. At that time, there was a need for investigating the relationship between thought and action which made the field of teacher cognition evolve. Not only did teachers' behaviour become relevant to investigate, but also teachers' conscious practice. Research started to look at teachers as active, thinking decision-makers and according to Borg (2015), research concluded that teachers' cognition of their teaching is related to what teachers do in the classroom.

1.3 Theoretical Background

In the field of self-directed language learning, theories concerning *knowledge about learning* have been in focus. These theories are of a cognitive and constructivist nature, where one sees the learner as an active member of the learning process (Wenden, 1998). More specifically, for learning to occur, the learner must be in control of his or her own learning. The cognitive constructivist view of self-regulated learning is based on Piaget's work, among others, (Zimmerman, 2001) and implies that learners construct meaning from experience, "…learning is not something that happens to students; it is something that happens by students" (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 31).

Moreover, *metacognitive knowledge* is the core concept that has emerged from work in cognitive science and is related to the term 'metacognition'. It has become of great importance as it tries to explain how learners can become conscious of and articulate what they know (Wenden, 1998). Therefore, to further understand the cognitive processes of learners when learning a language, this concept has been discussed. Wenden (1998) describes metacognitive knowledge as "information human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes" (p. 516). In other words, when learners are thinking about thinking. It is a process of being aware of and in control of one's own knowledge and thinking, and therefore learning (Gipps, 1994). When studying metacognitive knowledge, the purpose has been to understand the function of learners' reflection upon their own language learning and include processes where the learner becomes self-aware. There are three categories within metacognitive knowledge that put focus on the learner, the learning task and strategic knowledge.

2 Literature Review

In this section, a review of the literature on learner-self assessment in language education is provided. Furthermore, research from Swedish and other cultural contexts that emphasises the role of self-assessment in supporting learners' autonomy is also presented.

The field of learner self-assessment was firmly established in the early 1970s and gained considerable attention in language education (Oscarson, 1997). Since research has drawn much attention to the beneficial outcomes of learner participation in the assessment for learning, learner self-assessment has been incorporated in the national curriculum in Sweden and many other European countries (Council of Europe, 2001). The concept has developed in both value and meaning since the earlier stages of research. It was not until the beginning of the new millennium that self-assessment was researched with a broader purpose, to discover learning outcomes when involving students in assessment (Falchikov, 2005). Learner self-assessment in language education has previously been examined as a tool of measurement while more recent research has focused on self-assessment as a tool for learning, for formative purposes rather than summative (Goto Butler and Lee, 2010).

In early research, the focus of investigation was in fact whether learners' self-assessment had a high correlation with teacher assessment or other external measures of the same abilities, and could, therefore be used as an alternative to save both time and money (Krausert, 1991; Oscarson, 1997; Falchikov, 2005). Goto Butler and Lee (2010) indicate that learner self-assessment even "have been used for placement purposes" (p. 6). These issues in focus may indicate why terms such as self-evaluation have been closely related to self-assessment. However, Oscarson (1997) means that *self-assessment* gained ground as being the most appropriate term when referring to students' estimating their level in foreign and second language proficiency.

Learner self-assessment has often been considered more subjective than objective which made the validity and reliability of self-assessment of great interest. To assure that learner self-assessment is a possible evaluative method even for learning purposes, previous research wanted to establish the validation of self-assessment as a useful method in assessment of learners' language abilities, i.e., whether learners were able to assess themselves (Oscarson, 1997). In a state of the art review, Oscarson (1997) concludes that research had provided substantial support to believe that EFL learners have the motivation and appropriate information to make assessments effectively as any other measurer (p. 178). Ross (1998) also

investigates learners' ability to assess themselves in a meta-analysis. He concludes that learners' ability to assess their own language skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) is affected by the questions provided in the self-assessment battery. He found that learners made less accurate assessments when the questions were of an abstract kind and did better judgements when questions were of a "can-do" nature (p. 16).

Additionally, learners' ability to assess their language proficiency is affected by the amount of practice they are exposed to when learning a language (Harris, 1997; Dragemark Oscarson, 2009; Harris & Brown, 2013). Oscarson (1980), who investigates adult EFL learners' ability to assess all four language skills with questionnaires and other evaluation instruments, found that learners tend to make accurate judgements of their language proficiency when using a variety of scaled descriptions of performance as rating instruments. However, he concludes that learners need to practice self-assessment skills to make reliable judgements. In similarity, Council of Europe (2001) argue that learner self-assessment could improve learners' motivation and ability to orient their learning more effectively. For this to happen, training is, in fact, a necessity (p. 191). Likewise, Krausert (1991) emphasises the need for working with self-assessment as a continuous method as learners will not develop self-assessment skills with end-of-term assessment only (p. 5).

Moreover, Krausert (1991) also suggests that some learners are more capable of judging their language abilities than others and make use of study skills. This is in alignment with the findings of MacIntyre et al. (as cited in Oscarson, 1997, p. 181), who found a correlation between learners' emotional state and how well they assess themselves. In this study, students with anxiety tended to underestimate their ability more than students that were considered in a relaxed state of mind. These aspects indicate that learner self-assessment might not be useful for all learners if the purpose is to gather an accurate judgement of learners' language abilities (ibid).

Teacher's role in learner self-assessment has been addressed as an investigation issue in a few studies. According to Oscarson (1997), learner guidance in the initial stages is of great importance and needs to be considered in teacher education. He also states that there are different stages which entail different levels of support from the teacher. Another issue that Oscarson (1997) raises is the purpose of learner self-assessment concerning formative (to support learning) and summative assessment (to sum up/measure what has been learnt). At this point, he suggests that self-assessment ought to be integrative and process-oriented rather than summative. He also states that self-assessment to this date should not be considered as a method used for grading, promotion or other "high stakes" purposes (ibid).

Moreover, Oscarson (1997) concludes with several arguments supporting the concept of self-regulated learning, which is looked upon as an important component for life-long learning (p. 176). These arguments involve learner autonomy, development of study skills, development of co-operation and partnership between learners and teachers and possible effects on greater learner motivation and learning (ibid). According to Krausert (1991), other benefits evolve when working with learner self-assessment which include students' motivation and self-esteem. These benefits are "increased self-confidence, perceptiveness and the ability to form valid judgements" (p. 5). Also, Krausert (1991) claims that self-assessment advantages, such as learner autonomy and learner involvement are not only beneficial for the learner but also for the teacher. Teachers will also gather information about what their learners want to learn and consequently provide a better learning environment (p. 4).

According to Harris (1997), learner self-assessment can contribute to understanding the importance of gradual development in foreign language learning. Consequently, it helps learners realise that language is different from other kinds of learning and is about performance rather than knowledge about the language. Strategies are essential for learning and in autonomous learning, self-assessment has gained a crucial role as learners reflect on their weaknesses and strengths to formulate what the individual learner needs to do in order to get better grades (ibid). With this in mind, he further brings light to the implementation of self-assessment to lighten teachers' assessment burden. He argues that teacher feedback can become more effective if complemented by learner self-assessment. However, making time for implementation in the language classroom is an issue according to teachers. Harris (1997) suggests that self-assessment must be integrated into all activities in the classroom to become a regular procedure.

In order to make learners' more goal-orientated, Oscarson (2013) believes that students in the EFL classroom need to participate in course content planning. Black and William (1998) suggest that learners need to understand the learning goals and assessment criteria to be able to reflect on their own work (p. 26). Additionally, Oscarson (2013) means that transparency of goals is one of many aspects that improve conditions for self-assessment. He believes that the undergone change towards a more communicative language classroom and learner-oriented language assessment has contributed to the more comprehensible instructions regarding goal attainment (p. 2). Furthermore, Oscarson (1980) argues that self-assessment improves learners' ability to notice links between what they need to learn and specific learning objectives. Thus, working towards a goal becomes easier.

In a more recent account, Dragemark Oscarson (2009) investigates in a Swedish context, among other things, whether learner self-assessment in the subject English could contribute to developing life-long learning skills. She also explores teachers' and students' experiences when integrating self-assessment in everyday classroom practice. Two teachers and four groups of students in an upper-secondary school participated for a whole school year.

Dragemark Oscarson's (2009) study is not only based on the same theoretical background as the present study, but she also examines the Swedish syllabus goals which encourage responsibility and autonomy. She concludes that they are feasible when learner self-assessment is integrated, preferably from an early age. However, she found that teachers perceive these goals as important but difficult to achieve. One teacher was more concerned with learners' immaturity in this area which would affect their ability to take responsibility in the EFL classroom, even if the responsibility were on a fundamental level (p. 203). A group of students that initially thought self-assessment was a waste of time and a way of increasing workload on them experienced that self-assessment helped them develop skills that made them more strategic and effective in their learning. Their teacher believed it was a result from learners developing independent thinking and because they had to reflect upon their learning strategies and reconsider their strategy when it did not work for them (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009, p. 207).

Harris and Brown (2013) conducted a study in New Zealand and investigated three teachers and their students' perspectives and purposes of peer- and self-assessment exploring the potential positive effects on learning. They argue for the similarities between peer- and self-assessment as both are student-led assessment processes taking the teacher's normal role (p. 2). They found several benefits from implementing learner peer- and self-assessment. Firstly, self-assessment helped learners develop a better look at their language performances and made them obtain a more realistic view of their language proficiency (p. 11). Secondly, it also made teachers' assessment burden decrease as they did not have to give feedback on the same things over and over again. Thirdly, the communication about learning increased between the students and their teachers. However, students valued teachers' assessment higher than their own assessment or their peers'. The fact that teachers' assessment is of higher status may have affected their attitude towards writing comments as they tended to be somewhat superficial instead of identifying strengths and weaknesses (ibid). However, Harris and Brown (2013) conclude that there is a mindset of assessment yet to overcome which involves the teacher as the sole responsible for assessment.

Goto Butler and Lee (2010) conducted a study in South Korea among 254 learners in 6th grade, to examine the effectiveness of self-assessment among EFL learners. They mean that self-assessment involves both reflection and evaluation of one's performance and that self-regulated learners develop more autonomous skills than other-regulated learners. In their study, they conclude that teachers' views towards assessment affected the implementation of self-assessment. However, some positive effects were found that involve learners' foreign language learning and confidence (ibid).

Furthermore, there is a consensus in the literature reviewed that learners of foreign language should become more involved in their own language learning process. The cognitive constructivist learning theories imply that learning occurs when students are conscious of what they know, i.e., develop metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1998; Zimmerman, 2001). Thus, learners become in control of their learning, more autonomous and achieve a clearer picture of their current level (Krausert, 1991; Dragemark Oscarson, 2009). In concordance, Gipps' (1995) research pinpoints the importance of learners being actively involved when learning. She argues that new knowledge is best achieved if learners reflect and reconstruct their understanding. Learners will, therefore, benefit from being engaged in all phases of the learning process (ibid).

There was only one study found on teacher cognition that looks explicitly at learner self-assessment in language education. The author of this study, Bullock (2011), investigates teachers' beliefs in relation to implementing learner self-assessment. She found a generally positive attitude to learner self-assessment but that the implementation was of worry for the participants as it could impose problems. All ten teachers agreed on three statements: (1) when supported, learners benefit from assessing their own work; (2) self-assessment raises learners' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses; and (3) self-assessment stimulates motivation and involvement in the learning process (Bullock, 2011, p. 119). However, as mentioned, some negative attitudes were also found which were connected to the implementation of learner self-assessment. Teachers in this study worried about the amount of time it would take to become a habit for the learners. Also, teachers did not know how to guide learners in the process of formulating aims. This is a requirement for autonomy development as the purpose is for learners to better direct their learning (ibid).

To summarise the literature review for this study, teachers' cognition regarding learner self-assessment is to date in general under-researched, and non-existent in a Swedish context, apart from teachers' experiences of integrating self-assessment in Dragemark Oscarson's (2009) study. The teachers' perspective is of great importance to achieve an understanding of

what teachers think and know about self-assessment, and, also, how teachers' conception can be of help to understand why self-assessment is used or not. Teachers are the source of teaching practice, and the foundation for what is taught, which will affect what learners are learning in the classroom. This study, therefore, aspires to fill this gap about the research issue through qualitative research interviews with teachers of English in a Swedish upper-secondary school.

3 Method

This chapter begins by presenting the researcher's choice of method followed by an introduction to the participants and material that were used in this study. Then, an overview of the procedure and analysis will be presented before discussing reliability, validity and generalisability of the methodology. Also, the ethical considerations that were taken into account will be discussed, along with possible limitations of the method.

3.1 Methodological Considerations

This study has been conducted through qualitative research interviews with the purpose of investigating Swedish EFL teachers' conceptions of learner self-assessment. Interviews as a research method give the researcher the opportunity to find out more about teachers' knowledge, opinions, and attitudes towards language learning (McKay, 2006, p. 51). Depending on the questions asked and how the interaction between the researcher and interviewer develops by follow up questions (Kvale, Brinkmann, & Torhell, 2014), the researcher can gather deeper information about the interviewees' thoughts. The study could have been done through a survey questionnaire. However, the interview as a method offers a way of going deeper into the teachers' perspectives of their lived world and offers, therefore, a holistic picture of what the teacher reports (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014).

3.1 Educational Context

The school, given the name School X, is a public school located in a central part of a large city in Sweden with high socioeconomic status. The school offers five higher education preparatory programmes and an introductory programme. An application is required to be accepted to the school X, where the students have to send in their admission credits and are occasionally required to do an admission test. A teacher describes the school as "crowded"

since the capacity of students in the school is about 800 people and the school to this date has approximately 1 300 students. According to the teachers interviewed, the vision of the school has been "culture and language". However, since the school went through some new arrangements and changes, the vision is somewhat unclear.

3.2 Participants

The study examines interviews with seven English teachers, four female and two males. They all teach at school X and have varied amount of teaching experience, which has been categorised into groups in the range of less than 10 and up to 40 years. The selection of participants was done as a sample of convenience as they all teach at the school where the author conducted her teaching practice. Moreover, the participants are non-native speakers of English.

Table 1 (below) gives an overview of the participants without further detail of their subject combination and gender. The researcher made a conscious choice not to include the information mentioned above to secure the participants' confidentiality.

Table. 1. Overview of the participants

PARTICIPANTS	YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE	SUBJECT COMBINATION
TEACHER A	20 or less	English +2
TEACHER B	25 or less	English +2
TEACHER C	15 or less	English +1
TEACHER D	20 or less	English +1
TEACHER E	40 or less	English +2
TEACHER F	15 or less	English +1
TEACHER G	10 or less	English +1

3.3 Material

Semi-structured interviews were used to create an open interaction with both structure and flexibility between the interviewer and participant. An interview guide was prepared beforehand (see Appendix A) where the topic and focus were decided by the researcher. The purpose of using an interview guide approach was to make certain that every interview covered the same topics (McKay, 2006).

During the interview, all the main questions were asked but the order of the questions varied. The researcher wanted to create a natural conversation in which the order depended on the answers that were given by the participants. Also, the interview guide consisted of follow-up questions. These could vary and also depended on the conversation that developed between the interviewer and interviewee.

The introductory part of the interview consisted of two parts which served different purposes. The first part covered ethical considerations where the participant was introduced to the topic and the purpose of the study more clearly. It also treated information about confidentiality where the participants were assured of anonymity. Lastly, the participants were asked questions considering consent. The second part treated factual questions to gather information about the participants' background. Thenceforth, the interview guide consisted of self-assessment questions which focused on the topic and the research issues. The interview guide was divided into three parts with questions considering the same purpose to make a clear purpose of the questions asked with each part.

When wording the questions, a few aspects were taken into consideration with the participants in mind. Firstly, that the questions were open-ended to give the participants the opportunity to respond freely and on their own terms. Secondly, the researcher avoided wording questions that dealt with two ideas in one question as the interviewee could get overwhelmed and not be able to answer either question accurately. Lastly, the researcher constructed the interview guide in Swedish, as the researcher and the majority of the participants share the same mother tongue or speak Swedish daily and have done for many years. Making the interview guide in a language in which everyone could communicate comfortably was a conscious decision made by the researcher with the purpose of avoiding problems and misconceptions during the interview (McKay, 2006, p. 53). When the interview guide was finished a pilot-interview was done to make sure that the questions were feasible and clear to understand.

3.4 Procedure

The interviews were conducted at school X during an approximately three weeks sphere of time with one day or a whole week's interval. Some interviews were conducted on the same day with a maximum of two interviews following after each other. The appointments were arranged and confirmed via email where the time and place were stated. These were adapted to whenever the teachers and the researcher were able to find some free time.

As the school was familiar to the researcher, a visit to the school was made beforehand to reserve a private room for each appointed interview. The objective of sitting in a private location was to carry out the interview without any interruptions or distractions.

At the interview occasion, the teachers were informed of the purpose and content of the study and how the interviewee would contribute to the researcher's chosen research issue. The interviewer asked if the interview could be recorded and the interviewee stated their consent to both the participation and to being recorded.

The interviews were recorded by mobile phone which was placed in the centre to assure that both the interviewee and the interviewer were heard clearly. In order to reassure that it was working, the sound was tested before the actual interview started (McKay, 2006).

Recording the interview has both positive and negative aspects. It is beneficial to record the interview because it preserves the language in an effective way. However, the recorder could trigger anxiety and interrupt the participants' feeling of security which is important in an interview situation (McKay, 2006; Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). However, the participants did not express any type of insecurity when the inquiry was presented.

3.5 Analysis

The post-interview stages involve a set of phases which will be described in chronological order in this section. The process of analysis has been in alignment with Braun & Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. It is a qualitative analysis method that is useful in an interview study of this size and can potentially provide a rich and detailed account of data (ibid). The thematic analytical method is used in this study to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

The first step includes familiarising oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first phase was to transcribe the interviews. This was done in order to finalise the empirical data of this study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This signifies that the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee has been transformed from its original oral language to written language. Hence, the transcription has converted a live conversation into written text, which could be seen as different language games (ibid).

The researcher listened to the interviews and transcribed them not long after the interview occasion. Some features from the oral discourse have been removed from all interviews, e.g. tone of voice, gestures and body language (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Yet, other features such as laughter and long pauses have been written out to keep the context in

which the statement was said. Furthermore, when the interviewee and interviewer speak of a subject that is irrelevant to the research issue, these details have been disregarded.

The transcription has also been reread while listening to the recorded interview to guarantee that the transcription was correct. Then, the transcribed interviews were printed out and read several times something which is recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). As the researcher has both conducted and transcribed the interviews herself, there was already some prior knowledge of the data when coming into the analysis phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When reading the data, notes were made in the margin which can be seen as active reading (ibid). At this phase, the researcher highlighted relevant statements, listed ideas of what was in the data and searched for patterns on a general level.

The second step included some analytic tools, e.g., coding or categorization of the interview statements (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of coding was to organise the data. At this point, the researcher was not aware of the outcome, that is, if the coding was going to create themes that were theory-driven or more data-driven (ibid). The former was the initial purpose, as the aim and research questions were already decided before the interview occasion took place and the analysis performed. In the end, the coding was data-driven but with the research questions in mind.

The next step involved searching for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and this was done by reading the transcriptions several times finding themes that were most prominent and relevant to the study. Afterward, themes were reviewed which meant that some themes that were initially written out ended up forming a theme with other statements of the same nature. Therefore, the following step involved defining and naming themes. The transcriptions were read several times to gather the essence of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The last step included considering the results, where the most vivid statements were chosen. These statements were translated into English.

3.6 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

The trustworthiness of the conducted survey has been guaranteed through a few steps. Firstly, as mentioned in section 3.3, a pilot interview was done to test the questions in the interview guide and to discuss whether they needed to be clarified or phrased differently. The questions were also sent to the supervisor to collect an extra opinion. According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2015), validity is "whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate" (p. 367). In

the pilot, the questions were also checked to make certain that the questions were asking what they were supposed to ask.

Furthermore, the qualitative data was read several times to make sure that they were written out correctly. The interview guide was used so that the same questions were asked, and the research issue was investigated. Also, through the fact that the researcher conducted all the interviews, the reliability enhances.

The present study is a small-scale investigation and, therefore, the findings cannot be generalised. Qualitative research of this small scale generally wants to understand what happens in one particular place and the experience of specific teachers or learners (McKay, 2006, p. 14). However, since all teachers were from the same school, some generalisations may be possible to make, regarding that school. Even when there is only one school, exciting findings and ideas can inspire others (McKay, 2006, p. 14). Also, it could be replicated in a broader scope in further research to gain higher generalisability.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

To secure the participants' approval of participation a few procedures were taken into consideration, such as the issue of information, confidentiality, and consent (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

In order to assure that the participants knew what they were going to be a part of, they were informed of the content of the study in two ways. Firstly, an inquiry of participation was sent where a brief description of the subject was presented to the teachers. This inquiry and information were given in person or sent via email. Secondly, the purpose of the study was introduced at the beginning of the interview occasion combined with a concise summary to why this study was of interest for the researcher and of importance to the field, emphasizing the lack of research with a teacher perspective (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, p. 7).

Furthermore, before proceeding with the interview the participants were assured that they could interrupt at any point or skip a question if needed (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014, p. 107). They were also told that the participation was voluntary and confidential. They were asked if they wanted to be part of the study at the interview.

Moreover, the issue of confidentiality has been considered by not revealing information about the participant and keeping the interview recordings in a secure place. It is also secured by not stating any names or gender in the report to make sure that the teachers are not recognised, even by their colleagues when reading the study. The teachers' years of

experience have been categorized into groups to anonymise the participants further as some of them have similar subject combinations and years of experience. Lastly, as recommended by Vetenskapsrådet (2002), the participants were informed when they can take part of both the popular presentation as well invited to read the study when finished.

3.8 Limitations

All methods and studies have limitations of some sort as they bring inherent aspects that are difficult to avoid. It is important to be aware of the limitations of the chosen method to work towards avoiding rather than fortifying them in any possible way.

Qualitative research interviews involve a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee which means an interaction between two individuals. This leads to an encounter of two lived worlds where one may affect the other. In this study, the interviewer was in no position of power socially, but the conversation had a purpose and was one-way directed as the interviewer asked the questions and the interviewee answered them (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014, p. 52).

The interview itself creates a situation where the interviewee may feel observed by the interviewer (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014). Therefore, the participants may feel the need to say things that are expected of them rather than things they do (McKay, 2006). Qualitative interviews can also be seen as a manipulative dialogue as the researcher has beforehand thought out the issues and information that is expected to be found (Kvale, Brinkmann & Torhell, 2014).

On the other hand, this study aims to give light to teachers' role and importance in the field of learner self-assessment. The participants were in no need of hiding what they thought in front of the researcher, as the researcher was in no position of authority that would affect the power relation. Due to the issue of confidentiality, they could also express their thoughts freely. Therefore, this does not seem to endanger the reliability of the study as the data has been collected in the best possible manner with recommendations offered by Vetenskapsrådet (2002) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015).

4 Results

In this section the results will be presented in the order of the research questions. Each research question is divided into the prominent themes that have been found in the qualitative data. Some themes fall into two categories "possibilities" and "challenges" which have been written out to make the results clearer. Moreover, all themes are described and further highlighted with quotes taken from the interview occasions.

4.1 Teachers' Conception of Learner Self-assessment

Teachers' conception of learner self-assessment was seen under different perspectives and covered what they thought self-assessment was, what objectives it should have in the EFL classroom and what possibilities and challenges there were with both students and teachers in mind.

4.1.1 Reflection and self-awareness

The majority of teachers report that learner self-assessment helps students *reflect* and *think* about *their own learning.* Their understanding of self-assessment was divided into either using self-assessment to let students think about their own learning from a holistic perspective or with specific language productions. The purpose was to become more aware of their estimated level and therefore, become self-aware in their language development.

Teacher A, B, C, D, F, for example, believe that learner self-assessment should be used to make learners aware of their estimated level in English. Teacher B illustrates the overall conception by stating "it's when they think upon their level, where they are right now"[1]. In the process of reflection, learners' language abilities were in focus and guided by questions such as 'What are my weaknesses and strengths?'.

As mentioned above, teachers believe that reflection should be used to see their language levels from a holistic perspective. Teacher B states that learner self-assessment contributes to give learners a moment to reflect on what they have done so far which leads to "a more reliable self-image…when you give them a moment to reflect…from a wider perspective, learners can look and assess from an outside point of view which is actually

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[1] Ja det är när de får tänka efter själva, hur de ligger till helt enkelt.

easier because they feel less attached to their assignments"[2]. Teachers interviewed believe that learners become more self-aware when they get a moment to think about their English performances.

Additionally, reflection is associated with assessment of specific language production and teachers in the present study initially spoke of writing skills, even though oral skills were mentioned once or twice. According to Teacher D, learners come closer to their own manner of writing and expresses that learners could "become self-aware of their own writing… and then develop their own writing technique"[3]. This teacher continues to express "hopefully when they write next time they remember what is important to think about. A formative assessment provided by themselves"[4]. In other words, learners become self-aware of their language skills and learn what quality looks like at the same time.

Although, reflection was mainly looked at as positive, Teacher G believes that "reflection through self-assessment is too closely related to learners' self-image which could be a bit unnecessary"[5]. He/she suggests that for some students it may not be healthy to reflect because of their low self-esteem "some students may not benefit from doing explicit self-assessment as they judge themselves too much already and it could become too overwhelming"[6]. Students that do not feel very well on a personal level may be negatively affected by reflection of their own performances as it can hit the wrong way. The conception was that some learners would benefit from reflection more than others, as some need it more or less in different manners. However, assessing your language performances too much may cause additional stress.

In contrast, Teacher A reports that reflection could help learners' understanding of their own persona, "this is me, this is how I learn, and more than this is not possible for me"[7]. In

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[2] De får en sannare självbild och att de får stanna upp och tänka efter… när man tar då i ett helhetsperspektiv då kommer de lite utifrån perspektivet och då är det lättare faktiskt, när de fått lite distans till uppgifter.

[3] Medvetandegöra sitt eget sätt att skriva… och utveckla elevernas skrivteknik

[4] Förhoppningsvis när de ska skriva nästa gång att de kanske fotografiskt minne kommer ihåg då att "jag var inne och dutta i det är i min egen text"…och så tänker man på det nästa gång. Att det blir en egen formativ bedömning.

[5] Det kan ibland bli problem tror jag då självbedömning är väldigt nära kopplat till självbild i allmänhet, som är ibland lite onödigt.

[6] För vissa kanske det är hälsosamt att inte göra det så explicit för att de hänger sig fast vid sådana saker redan tillräckligt mycket… att försöka ta bort lite än att elda på mer.

[7] "sån här är jag och så här behöver jag göra eller mer såhär kan jag inte"

other words, learners would get to know themselves and accept their ways. This teacher continues to report that these skills "are not only useful in school but in other situations in general"[8]. Teacher F agrees and believes that "reflection of their learning can be applied in other areas also, it is not only connected to English learning"[9]. Futhermore, Teacher G claims:

> "The worst thing that can happen is to have a student a year and that when the grade comes the students is not aware, or has not understood the way, or goal and what this person actually knows, that is the worst that can happen…that school is not about passing through these 12 years, they need to understand what goes on in school, and learner self-assessment is a huge part in order to understand what is going on"[10].

He/she expresses that in order to achieve the most potential in a student they need to be able to reflect. He/she believes that learners are in need of being conscious throughout the process. Teacher G reports, "it is part of the knowledge itself, to know where you are, what you have done, what is left to do"[11].

Although most of the teachers believe that learners can assess their English proficiency level accurately, Teacher E has other experiences. He/she expresses that learners have low self-awareness and therefore, claims that learners are not able to assess their own performances "they don't have the knowledge, if you don't have knowledge about a subject how will you be able assess to yourself?...It is when you have the knowledge about something that you are able to assess your proficiency, otherwise one is just guessing"[12]. Teacher A, B, C, G and E, for example, express that Swedish learners tend to overestimate their language levels in English to begin with and needed to develop a more representative view on their language proficiency level. Thus, Teacher E suggests that "it can be pretty hard to fight

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[8] Sen tänker jag att det inte är bara för skolan utan det är ju en viktig grej att kunna överhuvudtaget"

[9] Reflekterar över sin egen lärande process, att det här kan jag applicera till andra delar också, det är inte knytet bara till engelska.

[10] Det värsta som kan hända är att om man haft en elev ett år och att när betyget kommer så hade inte förstått vägen, målet och vad de egentligen kan, det är det värsta som kan hända… att det här inte bara är att sitta av 12 år utan att de också fattar vad som händer under tiden och självbedömning är en stor del av det.

[11] Att man fattar vart man är, vad det är man gjort, vad det finns att göra för förbättring, det är ju en del av kunskapen.

[12] De har ju inte kunskaper, har man inte kunskaper om ett ämne, hur ska jag då egentligen kunna bedöma mig själv? Det är när jag har kunskaper om någonting som jag kan bedöma mina kunskaper, annars gissar man ju bara.

against learners' own conceptions"[13] if learners were not able to see themselves with realistic views.

4.1.2 Progression towards goal-attainment

Teachers' conception of learner self-assessment also involves giving learners time to *reflect* and *think* about *their own progression* in the English course. There were specific questions such as 'What have I done so far? How did it go? What do I need to improve on?' that were of importance when learners assessed their progress. This can be illustrated by Teacher F who reports learner self-assessment as "their ability to assess their performances in relation to a goal, 'what have I done? Have I reached my goal that I am aiming to achieve or is there anything left to do?'"[14]. Additionally, Teacher C reports "the purpose of learner self-assessment is to enhance learner motivation and goal-attainment as learners have a wide range of proficiency levels and therefore, have different needs"[15]. In other words, teachers will be able to support learners' individual needs with learner self-assessment.

Furthermore, Teacher A believes that learner self-assessment gives the learner a purpose when studying and that it opens up for a conversation between the teacher and the learner when they sit down and speak of their desired goal and therefore, can move forward towards that goal with advice related to the learners' ideas. Moreover, with the help of goal-setting and learner self-assessment Teacher B reports that learners will realise if they need to make more of an effort, especially during the autumn, when they have more time to demonstrate their knowledge and evolve before the course grades are set in spring "if their desirable goal is A, and they haven't done enough so far, they will realise that they need to work harder from this point on"[16]. Teacher E conveys similar conceptions and suggests that learners might "either wake up from a dream like sleeping beauty or motivate students with low confidence to believe in themselves, instead of criticising, through noticing their own

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[13] Så det kan vara väldigt jobbigt att kämpa emot det här.

[14] Ens förmåga att uppskatta ens prestation i relation till ett visst önskat önskemål…Vad har jag gjort? Har jag uppnått det målet som jag satsade på eller återstår det något annat mer jag behöver göra?

[15] Dels är väl syftet att öka motivationen och måluppfyllelsen i den meningen att eleverna har olika behov för de är väldigt olika duktiga faktiskt.

[16] Om de faktiskt strävar efter ett A, att de faktiskt får syn på att ah men jag ju faktiskt inte presterat det och måste lägga på ett kol om jag vill uppnå A.

strengths and weaknesses"[17]. In contrast, Teacher G states that progression also should involve speaking of learners' achievements and highlight where the students have come from, so the students remember not only remember what they need to improve but also what they know.

Even though there were similarities in the conception of learner self-assessment, some teachers express more insecurity than others as learner self-assessment was not implemented in all participants' everyday practice. Teacher G states, "I always let students reflect upon what we have done in class, but we come back to how one defines learner self-assessment and that I'm not sure of, where it begins and where it ends"[18].

The conception of how to work with self-assessment varied and was used in different manners by some teachers. Teacher A states, "learners need to think forward after producing something, so they don't stop developing"[19], while Teacher C states that learner self-assessment could be used before starting a project, with questions such as 'what do I see as my weaknesses?' and then make up a plan for how the learner could develop in the areas in need of improvement.

Furthermore, Teacher A reports that he/she uses learner self-assessment to enhance learners' awareness of their own progress and for learners to become more goal-oriented. Even though learners assessed specific tasks, the progress was more important than grading and he/she reports that the questions were "Not so much 'how would you grade this?'…more like 'what do you think about this language production, what grade are you aiming to attain?'"[20]. Learners' language development was essential and was, therefore, the centre of attention.

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[17] Ja men det kan väl vara bra absolut… att man i en diskussion får eleven inse sina tillgångar och korttillkommanden och få eleven väckt från antingen en Törnrosa dröm eller peppa en elev som har för dåligt självförtroende, som är för kritisk mot sig själv.

[18] I alla moment man har försöker man ändå ha någon form av reflektion och klassdiskussion om huruvida någonting gått… men det kommer tillbaka till hur man definierar självbedömning och det har jag inte riktigt fullt framför mig, vart det börjar och vart det slutar.

[19] Så man inte står och stampar i vad som har producerats utan att man tänker formativt och framåt.

[20] Nej inte så mycket vad skulle du sätta för betyg på det här?... utan där sätter vi oss med materialet som producerats och tänker hur har det gått här, vad tänker du och vilket betyg har du tänkt dig och siktar du på något speciellt?

4.1.3 Grading and evaluating

Teachers in the present study also express the conception of learner self-assessment as a tool of evaluation where the assessment course criteria of EFL becomes important. These conceptions entail using learner self-assessment to grade and evaluate specific assignments. However, some teachers were more confident in their statements whereas others were less assertive. Teacher E reports, "I know that some of my colleagues use it [self-assessment] and the students assess their performances, what the students believe they know and do not know, and sometimes they even grade themselves I'm not sure, but I guess it sounds like they should"[21].

However, Teacher B only uses learner self-assessment when learners assess their achievements from a holistic perspective once a term, where the progression gain focus even though they have to grade themselves in relation to assessment course criteria. He/she states that learners evaluate their estimated level very well. However, his/her conceptions differ when learners were asked to evaluate specific performances. Instead, Teacher B expresses "I use peer-response to a large degree when they assess their writing productions, not learner self-assessment…because it has not worked so well…they need other eyes"[22]. Teacher B reports that learners are too emotionally involved when working with their texts, presentations or other assignments and can, therefore, not look upon their work with objectivity. "They either think they are fantastic or terrible, never anything in between…and, they see themselves as a grade and I don't want them to that's the thing"[23]. In other words, when learners self-assess their performances they connect their work to their person, instead of looking at the performance from an external perspective.

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[21] "Ja, då tänker jag på att av mina kollegor gör det och då får eleverna värdera sina egna insatser och vad de tycker själva att de kan och inte kan, i vissa fall att de får betygsätta sig själva, det vet jag inte säkert men det kanske ligger i ordets definition".

[22] Jag använder mycket peer-reponse, inte så mycket att man bedömer sina egna texter och sånt… för det har inte funkat så bra… de behöver andra ögon.

[23] De har jättesvårt att se det där mitt emellan, att antingen så har de dåligt självförtroende eller så har de väldigt bra… de vill gärna se sig som betyg och jag vill inte att de ska se sig själva som betyg och det är grejen att de gör de.

4.1.4 Possibilities

Teachers in the present study speak of possibilities when involving students in the learning progress through learner self-assessment. The participants report their conception of possible developments that could evolve when using learner self-assessment while others spoke from experience.

4.1.4.1 Learners become autonomous learners

Teachers report the possibility of developing autonomous skills if learner self-assessment was used continuously and as a solid method when teaching. Teacher G reports that learner self-assessment might have an inherent tool that prepares learners for taking responsibility for what they know and what they do not know. Even though one finishes school, there is always something else to learn. "Learner self-assessment may contribute to learners knowing how to reflect upon what they know and what they do not know, they will be able to find the help or look for the help on their own which is a type of learner self-assessment"[24]. This teacher continues to report that the goal would be that learners eventually do not need a teacher to guide them through everything and that they become more autonomous learners and can be responsible for their own learning.

Teacher C agrees and reports, "in the best-case scenario, learners will become self-directed and be able to develop their language even outside of school"[25]. However, he/she continues by reporting that learners need help with creating a routine before they can become autonomous. This is, therefore, a possible outcome of working with learner self-assessment continuously. Even though none of them use learner self-assessment to that extent in their opinion, teachers could see the potentials of developing learner autonomy.

4.1.4.2 Consensus between students and teachers regarding grades

Another possibility that teachers speak of is students' becoming aware of their level of achievement in English and how this might affect the consensus between students and teachers regarding grades. Teacher A, B, G, E, for example, report that teachers would not

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[24] Det är väl ett verktyg i självbedömning i det, att man fattar vad man inte kan och vad man kan och vad är som saknas och vad man ska för att söka denna hjälpen, det är också en slags självbedömning.

[25] I bästa fall, att eleverna blir ganska självgående så småningom, att de faktiskt kan utveckla sitt språk utan oss i skolan.

have to take a discussion about the grade, as the learners already would know what their estimated level in English was because of working with self-assessment during the progression. So when the grade comes at the end of the term, the learners would not be surprised in any way. Teacher A illustrates this when he/she reports:

"Because the moment the grades are set, there won't be any surprises such as 'What? Did I get a D?', that disappear in a way. It leads to learners getting insight to the outcome and also, trusting that the result was what they thought"[26].

Teachers would not have to defend the grade in a conversation with the learners or learners' parents as the student would already know what level and grade he/she had reached. Teacher B suggests that it is not only beneficial for the learner to be aware of their estimated level but that it is valuable for him/her as a teacher, "I don't need to take any conflicts when the grades have to be set"[27]. Even though, Teacher E agrees that using learner self-assessment might eliminate the discussion of disagreement in relation to grades, he/she never experienced this anyway even if he/she did not use learner self-assessment and reports "But it never is when I give my students grades at the end of the term, because they are always told what grade they have, they never go unknowingly. I do not understand this system"[28].

4.1.5 Challenges

Teachers in the present study shed light on different challenges when using learner self-assessment. The reported statements are of a reflective nature, where some teachers speak of experience in using self-assessment and others imagine as potential challenges with their learners in mind.

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[26] För det här överraskningsmomentet 'va? Fick jag ett D?' det försvinner ju då på ett sätt. Just att det leder till att man har insikt i och en tillförlit att det här blev som det skulle på något sätt.

[27] För mig blir det lättare att säga de inte kommer upp på C när de själva säger att de tror D… så jag ser som en fördel för mig för att underlätta så man slipper ta konflikter.

[28] Men det är aldrig en chock för mina elever för de vet vilket betyg de kommer få, de är inte ovetandes överhuvudtaget. Jag fattar inte det här systemet.

4.1.5.1 Time consuming

An aspect that has been mainly mentioned as a challenge is time. Teacher C, D, E, F, G, for example, argue that learner self-assessment needs to be prepared beforehand and that the purpose needs to be clarified to the learners. Otherwise they will not understand why they should assess themselves. Teacher E expresses that it is time-consuming to go through learner self-assessment as "it cannot be left in the air, and when I am supposed to do this then?"[29]. Teacher C agrees that teachers need to devote time and work continuously with learner self-assessment in order to make it effective. Learners need to get used to self-assessment procedures of their work and progression. In other words, teachers need to work with self-assessment continuously which is perceived as time-consuming.

Furthermore, Teacher E and G believe that time not only needs to be spent beforehand but also afterward. To follow up learners' self-assessment. These teachers worry that it might take too much time from the course content, especially when learner groups include 30 students and a teacher teach approximately 6 groups every year. Teacher G reports "one needs to consider whether the results are worth the time spent on following up students' self-assessments"[30]. Moreover, Teacher C reports that it can become a challenge if there are too many learners that focus on the wrong things and claims that it is necessary to follow up what they have done to some degree.

Moreover, Teacher A, B, C, for example, mention time being a challenge because they worry about some learners being left behind which demands teacher guidance. There might not be enough time for some students to come to the point where they understand how learner self-assessment should be used. Teacher G emphasises learners different levels, "some learners do not even come up to the level of understanding where some learners begin, that is unfortunately the reality"[31]. Teacher A believes that more time needs to be focused on these learners as their first reflection may be "I do not know who I am, what I know and where I am going"[32]. Additionally, Teacher D states that time is a challenge as they do not have the time

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[29] Det kan ju inte bara hänga i luften, och då sitter man där, när ska man göra det då?

[30] Och det måste man väga ut, tänka hur mycket resultat får jag ut av det, är det värt att jag sitter med knappt 200 elever och om du ska följa deras utveckling av självbedömning.

[31] Några kommer aldrig upp till den punkten som vissa börjar med, det är tyvärr så…

[32] Jag vet inte vem jag är, vad jag kan eller vart jag är på väg.

to implement more learning. Apart from "in the English 5 course, there is some time spare to introduce self-assessment but in English 6 it is chop chop chop, so it is very difficult"[33].

4.1.5.2 Learning and not grading

There is a consensus that learners see the grade before the learning and teachers report the difficulty to make learners understand that learning should be the focus and that the grade will benefit from it and be an outcome of learning. Teacher A, C, F, for example, state that the challenge is to make students understand why it is important for their learning. Teacher F and C describe that the challenge is to make students understand that it is beneficial for them and that they have to put in some extra time for it to be useful. Teacher C expresses:

> "It's really the whole thing, that the students take it seriously, that they understand the benefits it will bring if they devote the time that is needed and therefore, to see that it is good for them…there is always some kind of resistance and questions like 'ahhh (sighs) isn't supposed to be you that reads my text?'... Students learn that it is my assessment that counts as it is the teacher that sets the final grade…learners are used to receiving grades from us and associate assessment to grading, that is just how it is"[34].

Teacher F agrees but states that even though learners understand the purpose the challenge is that the students accept and then, go through with it. "Learners' unwillingness is a challenge. I know they understand the purpose but accepting it, that is another issue"[35].

Furthermore, teachers' conceptions of learning and grading were expressed in different manners. There were different conceptions regarding giving grades or not on individual assignments or tests. Teacher A, B, C, G, for example, express that they did not give grades on either assignments or tests. Teacher G reports "one is not allowed to give grades on written

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[33] Men vi har inte tiden, i engelska 5 finns det utrymme men i engelska 6 är det chop chop chop, så det är jättesvårt.

[34] På ett vis är det ju hela grejen, att eleverna tar det på allvar, att de fattar att du kan ha nytta utav det och ta sig tiden och få de att se att det här är någonting bra men att det kräver att du engagerar dig… det finns ju ett visst motstånd att de ba 'ahh (suckar), är det meningen att du ska läsa min text?' De är skolade i att det är läraren som sätter betyget…det är min bedömning som räknas, det är jag som sätter betyget liksom…eleverna kopplar ju bedömning till betygsättning, så är det bara.

[35] Elevernas ovilja är en utmaning, Syftet förstår dem för dem är smarta, men det handlar om att acceptera det, det är en annan femma.

assignments, or better said, we are supposed to give formative assessment, but giving learners time to reflect is also part of it when they get the assignments back"[36]. Moreover, Teacher A states, "it is when we have the one-a-term conversation in the hallway that the assessment of the learners' abilities is looked at with a grade in focus"[37]. In contrast, Teacher E expresses:

> "I don't see the point with doing this [self-assessment] because I am very clear in my grading and assessment on my students, they get grades on tests and presentations. It is clear and to the point...I don't see why learners should be kept in the dark...We still speak about the process 'what should you do to improve and what do you need to think about', but they know where they are in terms of grades, therefore, when the grades are set in the spring all my students know and are aware of their level already"[38].

To sum up the results of the first research question, these EFL teachers report what they thought learner self-assessment was about, i.e., reflection and thinking about their English proficiency levels, progression towards goal-attainment, enhancement of self-awareness, grading and evaluation with comparisons to assessment course criteria. These conceptions expressed the objectives of learner self-assessment and possible challenges and possibilities when using learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom. Even though there were some similarities between the teachers' conceptions, the quantity of usage varied as well as reasons why they used it or not. Some teachers were more confident when expressing their conception of learner self-assessment and knew why they used it, while others were not sure what learner self-assessment entailed as they did not work with it in their opinion.

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[36] Man får ju inte ge betyg på uppsatserna, eller får och får, men grejen är ju att man ska ge formativ bedömning, men egentligen är det en del av det där att man ger eleverna möjligheten till självreflektion när de får en uppsats tillbaka.

[37] Sen så är det betygssamtalen som är i korridorerna, det är väl där den stora utvärderingen ligger då, som hör liksom mer till betyg.

[38] Jag ser ingen aning med att göra det här, för jag är så otroligt tydligt i min betygssättning för mina elever, de får betyg på sina prov och sina redovisningar. Tydligt och klart… Jag ser ingen anledning till att hålla eleverna i okunskap… och det pratar vi också om vad ska du göra för att förbättra och vad ska du tänka på, men de vet precis vart de ligger när betyget kommer på slutet och de är fullständigt beredda på detta.

4.2 The Necessary Requirements for Implementing Learner Self-assessment

The second research question aims to identify necessary requirements for implementing learner self-assessment. Three themes came through prominently both by teachers with no experience or some experience in the implementation of learner self-assessment.

4.2.1 Importance of clarity

To make learner self-assessment comprehensible for the students in the EFL classroom, the majority of the teachers in the present study suggest that it is important to be clear as a teacher when working with the activity. Some teachers report that this could be done through providing specific questions or use the course criteria when learners are exposed to self-assessment exercises. Teacher D expresses "I believe that if learners do not get a template, students would just stare at their texts because they don't know what they are looking for, some learners would say 'but I wouldn't have sent it in if I wasn't happy with it'"[39]. Teacher C agrees and suggests that it is a necessary requirement to give students tools to self-assess, as they will not see the errors by themselves:

> "I believe that one needs to be overly clear, you cannot say 'now you are working or reflection about your text' because then the answers will be the same every time, everyone will say 'vocabulary'. So, if one would like to work with self-assessment with a written text, which is what I do the most, you have to give learners specific questions, there is no point in saying 'give yourself two stars and a wish' it becomes too vague because then, nothing comes out of it. Specific questions and concrete material to base the self-assessment on, comparisons or other things, it needs to be as clear and comprehensible as possible… Questions such as 'How could you improve your introduction?', students don't know the answer"[40].

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[39] Jag tror att många elever, om man inte har en mall, att de skulle börja med att bara stirra på sin text, för de vet kanske inte vad de ska leta efter och vissa elever kanske säger: men jag skulle inte lämnat in den om jag inte var nöjd.

[40] Jag tror att man måste vara väldigt tydlig, man kan inte säga så här "ja men, nu får du jobba med din text här, eller nu får du fundera "…då kommer alla säga "ordförråd" typ. Så man måste om man ska jobba med självbedömning av en text så som jag har jobbat mest med så måste man ha väldigt specifika frågor, det är ingen idé att säga "give yourself two stars and a wish", det blir alldeles för luddigt, då blir det bara trevligt

The questions given to the students will affect whether they understand what they have to do. Teachers suggest that questions need to be overly comprehensible as learners require specific guidance, otherwise they do not know what they are looking for. Questions that are more or less yes/no questions will help learners get an overview of what they need to work more on, and it can be questions such as "do I have a clear headline? Do I have a clear introduction?"[41].

There is a difference in how you present self-assessment to the learners and it will become more comprehensible if the teachers also know for what purpose they do it. Teacher F expresses that a requirement for learner self-assessment is also "to know why you do it, because learners will ask and you need to be able to answer what the purpose is"[42].

Moreover, using course criteria was also a suggestion to make the learner self-assessment clearer as learners will see what is expected of them. Teacher D claims, "it would never work otherwise, learners need to have something to fall back on…so I would have to ask them 'can you identify what needs to be improved in comparison to the assessment course criteria?'"[43].

Furthermore, as grades are high-stakes in Sweden, some teachers in the present study report that it is vital that learners receive instructions in what way learner self-assessment will benefit their achievements so that they believe in assessing their own work and continue doing it not only when the teacher tells them to. Teacher C made a statement in relation to when students practice their writing skills "through the exercise of reflection upon a written text you develop your own writing skills, I do believe this could always be more clarified to the students"[44]. Nevertheless, as learners are more interested in teachers' assessment and grades for what their language production, the purpose needs to be more explicit as learner self-assessment is for their own best.

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eller ingenting av det. Utan specifika och kontreka saker att utgå från, frågor eller jämförelser eller någonting, så konkret som möjligt…Ehm, "hur kan du förbättra din inledning"… det vet dem inte.

[41] Har jag en tydlig rubrik? Har jag en tydlig inledning?

[42] Att man vet varför man gör det för man kommer få frågan varför gör vi det här vad är poängen och det måste man kunna besvara

[43] De måste alltid ha något att falla tillbaka på, aldrig att det hade funkat annars… så då måste jag fråga "kan du identifiera vad som kan bli bättre i den här utifrån kunskapskraven?".

[44] Att genom att sitta och fundera på en text till exempel utvecklar man sin skriftliga förmåga, det tror jag man måste bli bättre på att tydliggöra.

4.2.2 Practice is key

Teachers' conception of necessary requirements for implementation in the EFL classroom was also that learners must become used to working with self-assessment as stated before. There will always be initial resistance to self-assessment as students' association with assessment is grading, which indicates that teachers' assessment has higher status. Teacher C believes teachers need to invest time and practice, so the exercises with self-assessment do not become superficial. He/she reports "in the beginning, it is important to invest time, so it does not become something similar to 'yeh yeh, now we've done some self-assessment'. To develop through self-assessment you need to do it more than I have done, I have thought about that many times actually"[45]. Teacher D agrees that learners need to practice in an organised manner and suggests working with it as a scheduled part of English classroom activities, "these weeks we will be working with your writing and I have chosen animal farm for example"[46] and when self-assessment becomes part of the writing process "it may become more natural for them to work with it after working with it for a few weeks practicing explicitly with clear instructions, self-assessment may contribute to make learners aware of what they are learning and remember what to think about until next time"[47]. Teacher D also states that learner self-assessment might lead to more engaged learners. However, he/she did not speak from experience with self-assessment, "learners might spend more time with their texts…to work with the details"[48] which would "save me some time, as I would not have to spend so much time giving them teacher feedback"[49]. In other words, learner self-assessment may lead to more motivated learners who can work with their performances for longer which may decrease teachers' feedback burden.

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[45] I början av det måste man investera lite tid annars blir det såhär 'Aja, nu har vi gjort det [självbedömning] lite'. Men om man ska komma någon vart så behöver man göra mer än vad jag har gjort, det har jag tänkt på flera gånger faktiskt.

[46] De här veckorna ska vi jobba med era texter och jag har valt animal farm till exempel.

[47] Då kanske det blir mer naturligt sen att de för det själva när de fått testa när det är under mer styrda omständigheter, det kanske medvetandegör hela tiden det här med självbedömning, "ja just det, det var det här jag skulle tänka på".

[48] Kanske att dem lägger ner lite extra tid på den…får då tror jag att eleverna kan jobba mer med detaljerna.

[49] Det kanske sparar mig lite tid, att jag slipper gå in och dutta.

4.2.3 Avoid subjectivity

There were prominent statements indicating that learner self-assessment was of a subjective nature as teachers interviewed believe that learners become too emotionally attached to their language performances when practicing self-assessment in classroom activities. These statements surrounded solutions to avoid subjectivity and have been divided into two parts.

4.2.3.1 Peer-assessment and self-assessment

Teachers suggest the need of learners taking distance to what they are doing, for self-assessment to work. Teacher B suggests that "learners have difficulties with being objective when assessing their own performances as they either think the worst of themselves or the best"[50]. There is also an issue that concern separating the person from the performance "they see themselves as grades and I do not want them to"[51]. According to Teacher B, peer-assessment has worked better as the students assess each other anonymously and can then look at the strengths and weaknesses more clearly than if they were looking at their own performance.

Moreover, Teacher F believes that learners need time to distance themselves from their own work and he/she used learner self-assessment in combination with peer-assessment to create a clear link between the two. Teacher C also reports, "if you connect learner self-assessment with peer assessment you will be able to save time as a teacher as you don't have to read it [written assignments] 3 times, you can be the last one reading it"[52]. According to Teacher F, learner self-assessment is in need of a second opinion as learners tend to be too optimistic about their own performances. He/she reports "when you have just produced something you are too emotionally attached to it…so students need someone that can look at it from the outside or assess the production with 3-4 weeks' time span"[53].

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[50] Dom har svårt att se sig själva objektivt, speciellt med specifika uppgifter, antingen är de jättedåliga eller så tycker dom att dom är jättebra

[51] Dom ser sig själva som betyg och jag vill inte det.

[52] Så behöver inte jag läsa den [elevernas texter] 3 gånger utan då man kanske läser den egen bedömning en gång, och en kompis bedömning och sen så är det jag en gång.

[53] När man precis har hållit på med något så är man för nära känslomässigt… så man behöver en utomstående, eller att tid har passerat, vi säger 3-4 veckor.

4.2.3.2 Release pressure

Teachers also highlight the importance of achieving objectiveness when learners assess their language performances. Teacher B expresses that he/she might try learner self-assessment after the interview as he/she had never thought about it before now. However, learners must know that they will not be assessed on their ability to assess themselves and that the sole purpose of implementing learner self-assessment is for students to learn about their writing skills and how they can improve. Teacher B also expresses that the finished product should not be assessed so learners understand that it is for their own self. He/she reports, "I believe it is important that learners are able to work without feeling the pressure of me assessing the language they have produced because then they lose the ability to see their work objectively and become really stressed out"[54].

5 Discussion

This study has explored teachers' conception of learner self-assessment, i.e., what they believe and know of self-assessment to further students' EFL learning, and also examined what these teachers suggest as significant for the implementation of learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom. The analysis of the qualitative data has provided insights to teachers' perspective on learner self-assessment, not only what it is but also the objectives of using self-assessment in the EFL classroom, and what potential challenges and possibilities there are when implementing learner self-assessment as a continuous method with the teachers' current learners and teaching practice in mind.

The results clearly show that teachers in the present study suggest that learner self-assessment is about learners becoming involved in their learning process through reflection of their own language learning. These conceptions are highly related to the theoretical framework of this study. Cognitive and constructivist learning theories see the learner as an active member of the learning process and within language education, metacognitive knowledge has been of great importance to discuss. Wenden (1998) claims that metacognitive knowledge refers to how learners can become aware and articulate what they know (Wenden,

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[54] Jag tror att det är viktigt att de är någonting de får sitta själva, att det materialet som de själva bedömer att det inte blir ett material som jag tar in för bedömning för då blir de sönderstressade och kan inte förhålla sig objektiva till det.

1998). Thinking about one's own learning has been established as essential for self-regulated learning, i.e. self-assessment processes as learners become self-aware and can, therefore, develop strategies such as self-monitoring (ibid).

In similarity, teachers also suggest that learner self-assessment more specifically is about learners reflecting upon their own estimated level in English and their language abilities regarding strengths and weaknesses to progress in their language development. They suggest that learners benefit from reflection as they develop self-awareness and become aware of their own progress. Through reflection on their progress learners can work towards their desired goals. These statements are not only highly related to the assessment support material for Swedish teachers (Skolverket, 2011a), but also Gipps' (1994) research who pinpoints the importance of being active in all learning phases, including assessment. Along similar lines, Harris (1997) highlights that self-assessment makes EFL learners understand the importance of progression as language is about performance rather than knowledge about the language.

Furthermore, teachers' conception of learner self-assessment involves learners' ability to evaluate and grade specific assignments, performances or their general English proficiency level once-a-term. This is where the assessment course criteria of English became essential to compare with. Some teachers thought learners' ability to assess their level was relatively accurate even though they did express to begin with that Swedish EFL learners generally overestimated their English proficiency level. This is in alignment with what the Swedish support material states (Skolverket, 2011a). Goto Butler and Lee (2010) also claim that self-assessment involves both reflection and evaluation of one's performances and state that through self-regulated strategies such as self-assessment, learning is affected beneficially as well as learners develop autonomous skills.

The development of learner autonomy has been discussed in several studies (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009; Krausert, 1991; Harris, 1997; Harris & Brown, 2013; Falchikov, 2005, Council of Europe, 2001). This was also suggested by the teachers in the present study. Teachers suggest that reflection of your own learning was a necessity, otherwise learners will not know what they know or what they need to do to improve. Therefore, learners become owners of their learning and hopefully, in the future, not dependent on teacher's assessment to progress. In relation to their conceptions of reflection, progression, and evaluation, teachers reported potential possibilities which involved the development of autonomy skills. However, learner autonomy would only develop if learners were exposed to self-assessment as a continuous method. Learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom could potentially make learners self-directed in the English classroom which was a skill that learners could use even

outside of school. Nevertheless, no teacher in this study used learner self-assessment to the degree necessary in their opinion. This has also been proposed by Krausert (1991), who states that learners would not develop self-assessment skills if they did a one-a-term assessment only. Also, Dragemark Oscarson (2009) found that teachers may feel that goals of making learners autonomous and responsible learners may be difficult to achieve even though they thought they were important. However, practice was the initial solution to the issue.

Practice was stated as a key requirement for implementing learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom according to the teachers interviewed. In order to make learner self-assessment a natural part of the English classes, it had to be implemented continuously. Otherwise, learners would not take it seriously. In accordance, the amount of practice learners is exposed to has been found to affect, among other things, the effectiveness, attitudes towards self-assessment and learners' ability to assess their language proficiency (Harris, 1997; Dragemark Oscarson, 2009; Harris & Brown, 2013; Oscarson, 2013). Furthermore, learners' attitudes towards self-assessment have been investigated previously in general terms, Harris and Brown (2013) who found that learners' attitudes towards assessment affected how effective learner self-assessment was and meant that there was a need of overcoming a mindset about teachers being the sole assessor of learners' performances.

This has also been stated by teachers in this study, how learners' attitudes and understanding for learner self-assessment is challenging. Teachers' assessment tends to have higher status than their own assessment as learners' associate assessment to grading. Teachers interviewed claimed that the challenge was to make learners understand the purpose of this strategy, that the focus was rather on learning than assessment for summative purposes. Also, that they develop knowledge of language awareness through the assessment of their own language and others' performances. The dilemma between grades and learning, assessment for summative and assessment for formative purposes has been discussed by the Swedish National Agency of Education. As grades are of high stakes in Sweden, Oscarson (1997) has expressed that learner self-assessment should not be used for these purposes. Harris and Brown (2013) found that the communication between learners and teacher increased through learners' involvement in their own assessment processes which can lead to deeper understandings among learners.

The consensus between learners and teachers regarding grades was also a possibility expressed by teachers in the present study. This entails better communication of learners' language proficiency level in relation to the assessment course criteria of English. The fact that learners were aware of their own estimated level brought benefits for the teacher as they

did not have to defend the grade and learners would feel trust and security when the grade was set. Transparency in assessment course criteria has been looked at by Black and William (1998), who state that learners need to understand the course criteria to be able to assess themselves. Also, Oscarson (2013) agrees that working with assessment course criteria will lead to better transparency which is necessary and regarded as good conditions for learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom. Learners will know what is expected of them.

Moreover, time was considered a challenge in the results and was the main hinder to implement learner self-assessment in EFL classroom for teachers that did not work with self-assessment. It was the idea of learner assessment being an increased workload for teachers or hinder other course content that had to be incorporated in the English language classroom. Teachers voice their concern towards the work and time that needs to be put both before and after integrating learner self-assessment. They express the need of following up learners' self-assessments and fear that some learners would need more help than teachers could provide them with. Teachers' concern regarding time was also found in Bullock's (2011) study. She found that teachers worried about the amount of time it would take in order for it to become a habit for the learners, as it was not possible to guide them throughout a whole year.

Teachers' statements regarding the implementation of learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom also involved aspects such as the importance of clarity in relation to instructions, purpose and materials. The purpose of learner self-assessment was necessary clarify to the learners as they would struggle to understand the reason why they should assess themselves. For them to accept that learner self-assessment was used for learning and for them to become independent thinkers, this had to be highlighted when implementing learner self-assessment. Additionally, the importance of materials and questions provided to support learners' self-assessment was necessary. Teachers voice that learners do not know what they are looking for and need to be guided with concrete questions that are comprehensible and easy to answer. Along similar lines, Ross (1997) claims that the questions asked when learners practice self-assessment affect how they are able to answer them, especially if the questions are of an abstract kind. This was also reported by teachers in the present study. This could be seen as useful evidence for potential guidelines when constructing self-assessment materials in English for the EFL classroom.

Lastly, a third requirement that was perceived as necessary in order to implement learner self-assessment effectively was to avoid learner subjectivity in the exercises. Two solutions that were provided by teachers of the present study were using peer-assessment as a complement to self-assessment. Harris and Brown (2013) and Skolverket (2011a) argue for

the similarities between these two alternative assessment forms as both are student-led. Teachers of this study meant that the same questions could essentially be used in both exercises and therefore, complement each other. The other solution expressed to avoid subjectively was to make sure that learners did not feel the pressure from their teacher. To make sure that learner self-assessment was emphasised as a tool for learning, teachers should not take in the language produced for assessment. This aspect has not been brought up in previous research and could be seen as a new perspective in regard to teachers' conceptions of learner self-assessment in the EFL classroom.

To sum up, the results clearly show that teachers have an overall correct conception of what learner self-assessment should be used for in the Swedish English classroom, to support learning and progression. The results provide information that has been researched before, however, with a greater focus on students. One objective that previous research has not touched upon is the necessity of reducing subjectivity through reducing pressure of grades and enhancing learning by not assessing the language produced which learners have performed in combination with learner self-assessment exercises. For the purpose of emphasising learning and that learner self-assessment is beneficial for the students, and not used for the teacher to grade them. Teachers' understanding of learner self-assessment for EFL was also in accordance with theories of metacognition as well as the support material provided by the Swedish National Agency of Education (Skolverket, 2011a). However, some teachers used learner self-assessment more than others which created a variety of statements and some were more assertive than others. Goto Butler and Lee (2010) found that teachers' views towards learner self-assessment also affected the effectiveness which can help us conclude that teachers' conceptions regarding challenges need to be considered in order to make the implementation of learner self-assessment more effective. Lastly, in order for all teachers to use self-assessment in their English practice and in the degree that teachers thought were necessary to develop learner autonomy, more attention must be drawn to how teachers should implement this in the EFL classroom and other subjects. It would even be necessary for the whole school to implement learner self-assessment, so that teachers can implement ideas together and, in the future, share possible guidelines, of which can be of use for other upper secondary schools.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore seven upper-secondary EFL teachers' current use of learner self-assessment as an activity to further students' learning in the EFL classroom and also, to investigate what these teachers considered to be essential for the implementation of self-assessment in English classes. In order to answer these questions, seven interviews were conducted with teachers in an upper-secondary school. The collected data was analysed, and the most prominent themes were presented with statements from the interview occasions.

The present study found that teachers think of learner self-assessment as a tool for learning, to help learners understand what they know and what they need to improve to progress in their language development. However, current use of learner self-assessment per se varied and some teachers were more assertive than others in their reports.

Moreover, there were both possibilities and challenges with learner self-assessment which teachers should be aware of when incorporating learner self-assessment in the English language classroom. The possibilities found in this study involve consensus between learners and teachers regarding grades and the potential development of learner autonomy. Regarding the challenges, two main aspects were found in this study. Firstly, learner self-assessment was perceived as time-consuming which made the implementation difficult. Secondly, making learners understand that learner self-assessment should solely be used for learning purposes and not for them to grade their performances. To emphasise that learners would learn more through self-assessment and to avoid subjectivity in self-assessment, teachers should consider not assessing the language produced or combine self-assessment with peer-assessment to enhance objectivity in self-assessment exercises.

Even though this study was carried out with a small group of teachers and the results are only generalisable for the school X, the results present pedagogical implications that may be of value for other groups as well. Some of these pedagogical implications are provided in research question two. Teachers need to take into account the importance of clarity when presenting learner self-assessment as learners must understand the purpose of this strategy as a learning tool to gain the advantages that it entails. The importance of clarity concerning instructions and materials are also essential. Learners need to be guided in their self-assessment as they do not know what they are looking for their own.

Furthermore, practice is a necessity for learner self-assessment as it needs to become a natural procedure when working with English. The importance of clarity in the questions asked is essential which indicates that teachers need to have material useful for self-

assessment exercises. However, as teachers believe the implementation of learner self-assessment is time-consuming and teachers experience time constraints, they must be provided with tools to avoid the issue of time. If materials for self-assessment exercises were constructed that are fitted to use with Swedish students of English, it would perhaps prevent the issue of time. Lastly, as grades are used for high-stakes purposes in Sweden, learners are initially grade-focused which could make the implementation of learner self-assessment challenging.

Although the majority of the teachers in this study report their conceptions through experience of working with self-assessment in the EFL classroom, they did not feel that they did it enough due to time constraints or not putting too much thought to it before the interview occasion. In conclusion, more research is needed to emphasise further the importance of teachers' conception regarding the issue. To include more teachers would be desirable as the gap concerning teachers' conception is in need of larger scope-studies to enhance the generasability. Also, to assure that teachers' conception is in correlation to what they do, an observational study could be used to complement the qualitative research interviews to get a full picture of self-assessment practice in the EFL classrooms.

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Appendix

Intervjuguide

Bakgrundsfrågor

1. Hur många års erfarenhet har du inom läraryrket?
   a. Hur många års erfarenhet har du i att undervisa i just engelska ämnet?
   b. Vilka andra ämnen undervisar du i?

2. Hur skulle du beskriva skolan som du jobbar på?
   a. Hur skulle du beskriva eleverna som går på denna skolan?

Intervjufrågorna

Tema 1

1. När jag säger självbedömning, vad tänker du på då?
   a. Enligt dig, vad innebär självbedömning? Vad betyder det?

2. I vilket syfte använder du dig av självbedömning?
   a. Enligt din upplevelse, tror du att eleverna förstår syftet?
   b. Hur har du gjort för att tydliggöra ditt syfte för eleverna? /Hur skulle man kunna förtydliga syftet för eleverna?

3. Enligt dig, vad är målet med arbetet av självbedömning / Vad ska den leda till?
   a. Vad vill du/ tror du att eleverna ska lära sig/utveckla?

Tema 2

4. Om du skulle uppskatta, hur mycket jobbar du med självbedömning under en termin?

5. När gör du det vanligtvis (dvs. i vilka sammanhang/typ av sammanhang är det aktuellt)?

6. Skulle du kunna beskriva ett tillfälle när du använt dig av självbedömning?
   a. Inom vilket tema var det?
   b. Hur startades det upp och avslutades?
   c. Vilken förmåga var det eleverna skulle bedöma?

7. Hur förbereder du eleverna inför självbedömningstillfället?

a. Något specifikt du går igenom innan?

8. Finns det någon anledning till varför du inte jobbar med självbedömning?
　　a. Vad hade du behövt för att börja arbeta med självbedömning?

9. Om jobbat med självbedömning men slutat, vad var det som inte fungerade?
　　a. Inom vilka sammanhang använde du det?
　　b. Har du hittat något annat alternativ istället för självbedömning?

10. Om du hade gjort det annorlunda, hur hade du gjort då?

Tema 3

11. Vad ser du för fördelar med att använda dig av självbedömning i undervisningen?
　　a. Från ett elevperspektiv
　　b. Från ett lärarperspektiv

12. Vad ser du för nackdelar med att använda dig av självbedömning i undervisningen?
　　a. Från ett elevperspektiv
　　b. Från ett lärarperspektiv

13. Vad ser du för utmaningar med att använda dig av självbedömning i undervisningen?

14. Vad behöver lärare tänka på när man jobbar med självbedömning, tror du?

15. I den bästa av världar, hur hade du velat jobba med självbedömning om det inte fanns några gränser?