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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Formative Assessment in Moroccan EFL Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

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| ABSTRACT

Formative assessment plays a significant role in teaching as it provides feedback that supports learning. For students, it helps them know where they are in the learning process. For teachers, it gauges understanding and informs subsequent instruction. To this end, this study aims to gain deeper insights into Moroccan high school EFL teachers' perceptions of formative assessment, their classroom practices and whether there is an association between the two. In order to meet the study objectives, the researcher opted for a quantitative research approach using a questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. Results indicate that EFL teachers perceive formative assessment positively and report using it (to varying degrees) in their classrooms. Findings also report a modest positive correlation (p=.000, rho=.40) between FA practices and perceptions; the more positively teachers view formative assessment, the more likely they are to use it. Teachers also report time constraints, large class sizes and a summative-assessment focus, among other factors, as barriers that render using formative assessment challenging.

1. Introduction

Assessment is an integral part of language education. According to Brown (2004), assessment is a continuous, embedded process within classroom interactions, in which learner performance is assessed by teachers, peers, and students themselves. It aims at enhancing student learning by using evidence to record, interpret, and improve performance (Angelo, 1995). Researchers identify two major types of assessment: summative and formative assessment. While summative assessment measures what a student has learned typically at the end of a unit, formative assessment takes place during learning and uses feedback to drive growth (Brown, 2004). Formative assessment is widely regarded as a core pedagogical practice that enhances student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). Its effective use leads to substantial learning improvements (Andrade & Heritage, 2018), which suggests that teachers are at the centre of this process and are crucial to its success; however, teachers' perceptions, shaped by their belief systems, frame their day-to-day practices and depth of implementation (Kagan, 1992). Nevertheless, implementation can be constrained by requirements for certification and accountability (e.g., summative judgments, deadlines), teachers' confidence and knowledge, lack of time, workload, and large classes (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of formative assessment and examine the association between the two constructs. It also seeks to explore barriers to its implementation so that support can be provided. It specifically answers the following questions:

RQ1-What are EFL teachers' perceptions of formative assessment?
RQ2- What are EFL teachers' practices of formative assessment?

RQ3- What challenges do EFL teachers encounter when implementing formative assessment?

RQ4-Is there a statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices with regard to formative assessment?

2. Review of literature

2.1 Formative Assessment

According to Black and Wiliam (1998a), formative assessment comprises "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged' (p. 7)". This definition implies that formative assessment is a process, in which evidence drives subsequent learning and teaching. It also highlights the roles of both teachers and students in using feedback to adjust learning. In line with this, the OECD's CERI (Center for Educational Research and Innovation) (2008) describes formative assessment, or assessment for learning, as an ongoing, in-lesson process that makes use of various sources of evidence. These sources range from classroom interactions to more traditional tests, which provide actionable information to guide next steps.

Popham (2008) shares this view, defining formative assessment as "a planned process in which assessment-elicited evidence of students' status is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional procedures or by students to adjust their current learning tactics."(p. 6). He further clarifies that formative assessment is not a particular test but rather a set of formal or informal evidence-eliciting activities. In practice, Leahy et al. (2005) provide a framework that organizes formative assessment into five strategies:

• Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success.

• Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions, and learning tasks.

• Providing feedback that moves learners forward.

• Activating students as the owners of their own learning. (Peer support)

• Activating students as instructional resources for one another (self-assessment)

The discussion above hinges on the same core idea that formative assessment elicits evidence to where the students are relative to the goals and uses feedback to bridge learning gaps and adjust learning and instruction.

2.2 Formative Assessment Significance

Traditionally, assessment has been used to motivate students through grades and report cards, etc, under the premise that more pressure leads to more learning (Stiggins, 2005). However, such an approach does not yield detailed insights about student learning that would allow teachers to diagnose needs and provide individualized help (Stiggins, 2005). In fact, this guidance can be achieved through formative assessment. It is a process that assesses learners' present understanding, clarifies learning goals and designs instructional steps to help them reach those targeted goals (Wiliam & Thompson, 2007). Although summative assessment summarizes student achievement and supports learning, formative assessment is particularly effective at improving learning gains (Andrade & Heritage, 2018). It shows strong potential to bridge learning gaps of all students, and more so for low achievers. This is supported by research findings of Black and Wiliam (1998b), which indicate that ''improved formative assessment helps low achievers more than other students and so reduces the range of achievement while raising achievement overall'' (p. 141). In contrast to formative assessment, summative assessment can produce unintended effects that limit improvement. To illustrate, research shows that grades tend to promote ego-focused motivation (e.g., ranking and approval), and reduce interest and performance, whereas feedback-oriented practices, such as formative assessment, raise performance and motivation (Butler, 1987). With feedback central to this process, Shute (2008) contends that supportive feedback can lower cognitive load, especially for novice learners. Consistent with this, Moreno (2004) found that explanatory feedback, rather than right-or-wrong judgments, improved transfer performance (application of learned knowledge to new problems) and was associated with lower cognitive load.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design, which provides empirical evidence that is then analyzed numerically (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). A questionnaire was used as the main data collection tool. Questionnaires are one of the most commonly used research instruments and, when well-designed, can provide reliable results (Shaughnessy et al., 2012). Using quantitative measures, this study aims to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of formative assessment, examine the association between them, and identify implementation challenges.

3.2 Instrument

Guided by the literature reviewed in this study, a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was developed (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, and 5=Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire consisted of 28 items. The first two questions provided demographic information to simply describe the participants, namely their gender and age. The remaining questions were

divided into three scales: EFL teachers' perceptions (10 items), EFL teachers' practices (9 items), and the challenges faced when implementing formative assessment (9 items). Data were collected via the Qualtrics platform and analyzed using SPSS.

3.3 Participants and Sampling Strategy
A total of 80 Moroccan EFL high-school teachers completed an online questionnaire distributed via WhatsApp. Due to time and distance constraints, convenience sampling was employed. The respondents ranged in age from 21 to 40 or older. Of the 80 participants, 38 were male and 42 were female. Participation was voluntary and anonymous as participants were informed that their data would not be used outside of research.

3.4 Reliability
Prior to distributing the questionnaire, internal reliability should be established. Therefore, consistency among items was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. As shown in Table 1, the test revealed that all three scales demonstrated adequate reliability with values above .70, meeting the recommended guidelines (Peterson, 1994; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 1: Reliability Test for the Questionnaire

Scale	Items	Cronbach's alpha
EFL teachers' perceptions	1O	.84
EFL teachers' practices	9	,78
FA Challenges	9	,80

3.5 Analysis Procedure
In view of the research questions, descriptive statistics (mean values and standard deviations) were used to explore EFL teachers' perceptions, practices, and challenges. To address the fourth research question, we conducted inferential analyses, including a correlation between Perceptions and Practices. Before analysis, scale scores were computed. Normality tests indicated that the data were not normally distributed, as shown in Table 2. The Kolmogorov-Smirnova test was used because the number of participants exceeded 50. Therefore, Spearman's correlation was used to estimate their relationship.

Table 2: Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Perceptions	,125	80	,003
Practices	,100	80	,046

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4. Findings

Table 3: EFL teachers' perceptions

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1-Formative assessment is integral to teaching.	80	1	4	1,59	,610
2-Formative assessment improves learning	80	1	2	1,60	,493
3-Formative assessment improves teaching	80	1	4	1,66	,674
4-Formative assessment identifies gaps in learning.	80	1	4	1,61	,720
5-Formative assessment takes place during learning	80	1	4	1,85	,748
6-Formative assessment provides information to adjust teaching.	80	1	4	1,69	,722
7-Formative assessment encourages student engagement	80	1	4	1,93	,883
8-Formative assessment should be carried out frequently.	80	1	4	1,78	,746
9-Timely feedback is essential to learning	80	1	2	1,41	,495
10-There should be formal training to enhance formative assessment skills.	80	1	4	1,46	,745

As Table 3 illustrates, the majority of EFL teachers show positive perceptions towards formative assessment. This is indicated by the mean scores that demonstrate strong agreement with the statements. Teachers strongly agree that formative assessment is integral to teaching (M=1.59, SD=0.61), that it improves learning (M=1.60, SD=0.49) and teaching (M=1.66, SD=0.67), and helps identify gaps in learning (M=1.61, SD=0.72), indicating that they see value in using formative assessment. The respondents also

recognize the importance of timely feedback in learning as they express strong agreement with this fact (M=1.41, SD=0.46). Responses to statements 5 and 8 show that teachers agree that it takes place during learning (M=1.85, SD=0.74), and that it should be carried out frequently (M=1.78; SD=0.74). The results also demonstrate that thanks to formative assessment, teachers can adjust their teaching (M=1.69, SD=0.72). Finally, teachers strongly agree that training is needed, which suggests that targeted professional development programs are necessary to improve formative assessment practice (M=1.46, SD=0.74).

Table 4: EFL teachers' practices

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1-I use formative assessment regularly	80	1	5	2,20	,786
2-I engage students in self-assessment.	80	1	5	2,17	,868
3-I engage students in peer-assessment.	80	1	5	2,03	,842
4-I provide immediate feedback.	80	1	4	2,11	,827
5-I always discuss feedback on tasks with individuals/small groups	80	1	4	2,21	,896
6-I always allow students to refine their work after receiving feedback.	80	1	4	2,13	,718
7-I always use formative feedback to identify learning gaps and adjust future teaching.	80	1	5	1,99	,879
8-I use questioning technique	80	1	5	2,05	,745
9-I use portfolio, discussion, exit tickets and other formative activities.	80	1	5	2,40	,949

As shown in Table 4, teachers agree that they use formative assessment regularly (M=2.20, SD=0.79). Results also show that formative assessment manifests itself in the EFL teachers' classroom in different ways, including self-assessment (M=2.17, SD=0.86), peer-assessment (M=2.03, SD=0.84), and questioning (M=2.05, SD=0.745). The least endorsed strategies were portfolio and exit tickets (M=2.40, SD=0.94). Mean scores show agreement on using formative feedback to identify gaps and adjust their future teaching (M=1.99, SD=0.87), providing immediate feedback (M=2.11, SD=0.89), and discussing it individually/in groups (M=2.21, SD=0.90), suggesting that feedback is viewed as a crucial component of formative assessment.

Table 5: Challenges when implementing formative assessment

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
1-Time-consuming	80	1	4	2,00	,968
2- Overcrowded classes	80	1	4	1,55	,840
3-Overloaded curriculum with limited amount of time	80	1	4	1,59	,852
4-The pressure to complete the syllabus	80	1	4	1,58	,759
5-Students' focus on test scores	80	1	5	1,58	,759
6-Focus on summative assessments	80	1	5	1,90	,922
7-Formative assessment requires a considerable amount of time and effort.	80	1	4	1,76	,860
8-Failure to provide each individual with detailed feedback	80	1	5	1,94	,946
9-Lack of training on formative assessment	80	1	4	1,90	,880

As displayed in Table 5, EFL teachers show agreement to a great extent with the listed challenges, suggesting that they indeed find implementing formative assessment demanding. Teachers identify overcrowded classes as the main barrier as it received the highest agreement (M=1.55, SD=0.84). Similarly, statements 3–5 indicate agreement to a high degree with mean scores of 1.59, 1.58, and 1.58, respectively. That is to say, teachers perceive an overloaded curriculum with time limitations, pressure to complete the syllabus, and students' focus on test scores as key challenges to implementing formative assessment. Performance orientation is further highlighted in their response to statement 6 as the participants agree that the focus on summative assessment poses a real challenge (M=1.90, SD=0.92). The previously identified challenges can explain their agreement with statement 8 (M=1.94, SD=0.94), which identifies their inability to provide each individual with detailed feedback. With regard to efforts associated with formative assessment, respondents strongly agree that it requires a considerable amount of time and effort (M=1.76, SD=0.86), and agree that it is time-consuming (M=2.00, SD=0.96). As for the last statement, teachers agree that formative assessment training is insufficient (M=1.90, SD=0.88).

Table 6: Perceptions-Practices Correlation

			Perceptions	Practices
Spearman's rho	Perceptions	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,407**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,000
		N	80	80

Practices	Correlation Coefficient	,407**	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	.
	N	80	80

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 6, Spearman correlation indicates a statistically modest positive association between EFL teachers' perceptions and practices (p-=.000, rho=.40). Given that the p-value is lower than .05, we reject the null hypothesis of no association. Accordingly, more positive perceptions are aligned with more use of formative assessment.

5. Discussion

The results from the study revealed that EFL teachers perceive formative assessment positively and regard it as integral to effective teaching, particularly feedback which received the highest agreement. The results suggest that they perceive formative assessment as beneficial, highlighting their awareness of its instrumental role in education. These findings align with previous studies: Sach (2012) reported positive perceptions with participants placing particular value on formative assessment's role in promoting learning; Büyükkarcı (2014) found that Turkish primary EFL teachers held similarly favorable beliefs; and Asare (2020) likewise indicated that Ghanaian public basic school teachers expressed positive perceptions regarding its usefulness. Martin et al., (2022) also reported that elementary teachers found formative assessment to be advantageous for instructional improvement and identifying learning gaps. Overall, teachers recognized the important role of formative assessment practices, which is consistent with Bell and Cowie's (2002) view that its aim is to gather evidence and use it to enhance learning.

Regarding enactment, teachers agreed that they would use formative assessment. Questioning and feedback were the most embedded practices, while portfolios, exit tickets and discussions were least emphasized. This finds agreement with Asare's (2020) study where teachers reported using formative assessment in their classrooms with class participation, in-lesson Q&A and feedback among the most common, and self- and peer-assessment were among the least used. Similarly, a study conducted with Vietnamese EFL teachers observed classroom practice centered on providing feedback, unit tests and strategic questioning, with self-assessment among the least-used strategies (Duy & Vien, 2020). Büyükkarcı (2014) also reported self- and peer-assessment, and providing oral and written feedback as practices adopted by the teachers; however, despite positive perceptions, the use of these practices was infrequent. In a similar study, although Indonesian EFL teachers rated themselves highly on formative assessment knowledge, interviews showed much lower understanding and practice of formative assessment strategies, which led the author to conclude that the teachers may not fully comprehend formative assessment (Sulastini, 2022).

While perceptions were positive, teachers identified several challenges that complicate implementation in the Moroccan classroom. Time constraints and large classes, among the identified barriers, are felt in the classroom but are largely driven by systemic constraints, which include curricular overload, high coverage demands, and a focus on grades and summative assessment. These barriers drew the strongest agreement, which can help explain why the teachers in our study struggle with providing individualized feedback and their view that formative assessment demands effort. These findings are consistent with prior research, which likewise observed large classes as a major obstacle, along with time constraints and institutional emphasis on summative results, which dampen FA use (Al-Wassia et al., 2015; Duy and Vien, 2020; Al-Mofti, 2020; Atikur Rahman, 2021). In fact, pressure to cover the whole syllabus and emphasis on high-stakes examinations push teachers away from formative practices (Al-Mofti, 2020).

A recurring barrier across studies is limited assessment knowledge or limited professional development (Al-Wassia, 2015; Duy & Vien, 2020; Al-Mofti, 2020), which aligns with our study results as the participants highly agreed with the need for training opportunities to hone their formative assessment skills. Interview findings reported by Al-Mofti (2020) show that many instructors could not clearly distinguish formative from summative assessment. Also, Sulastini (2022), as previously discussed, highlighted this issue with teachers rating their knowledge highly on questionnaires, yet interviews revealed misconceptions. Such confusion can spill into the classroom, leading to misuse or non-implementation, especially with the pressure to cover content coupled with a lack of time and an emphasis on high-stakes examinations.

The findings of this study also showed a positive correlation between teachers' perceptions and their reported formative assessment practices; teachers who value FA more also report using it more. This is consistent with prior correlational evidence. For Ghanaian and Timorese teachers, perceptions were positively associated with formative assessment use in the classroom (Asare, 2020; Akoyt, 2024). Ahmedi (2019) examined attitudes, a related construct, among Kosovar teachers and reported a positive association with practice. However, studies using paired t-tests reported a difference between practice and attitudes/beliefs. For instance, Ahmedi (2019) and Büyükkarcı (2014) found that attitudes and beliefs exceeded reported use. Likewise, Akoyt (2024) found a significant gap between perceptions and classroom application despite the reported positive

correlation. This mismatch is similar to the one observed in Ahmedi's (2019) study. These patterns show that positive perceptions matter for enactment, even though teachers reported less use compared to their positive perceptions.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that Moroccan EFL teachers are highly aware of the importance of formative assessment, which they perceive positively. It also reports the use of multiple FA strategies, with the degree of agreement varying across items (M=1.99-M=2.40), with the strongest for using feedback to adjust teaching and the least strong for portfolios, exit tickets and discussions. The positive perception-practice correlation suggests that teachers who value FA more also report using it more. At the same time, teachers identified contextual barriers, particularly large classes (highest agreement), time pressure, overloaded curricula, and emphasis on high-stakes examinations. These challenges help explain why the need for training is paramount, as advocated by the participants and prior studies' findings. These results indicate that positive perceptions are important, but may not be sufficient on their own for proper and successful implementation. Without adequate pedagogical support, appropriate tools, and institutional support (e.g., smaller class sizes), positive perceptions alone will not translate into effective everyday formative practices.

7. Recommendations

Further study is recommended to gain deeper insights into teachers' practices, as questionnaires alone may not capture the complex nature of formative assessment. Given prior reported evidence of a mismatch between teachers' perceptions and practices, it would be especially informative to conduct interviews to probe how FA is understood and practiced, or classroom observations to document actual implementation in Moroccan EFL classrooms.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest
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