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## **Assessment for Learning: Formative and Summative Assessment Practices**

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**Assessment for  
Learning: Formative  
and Summative  
Assessment Practices.**

Shane Dowling

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the award of Professional Master of Education  
in Post-Primary

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**Abbreviations:**

Assessment for Learning.....AFL

General Data Protection Regulation.....GDPR

Continued Professional Development.....CPD

## **Abstract:**

This mixed-methods study investigated formative and summative assessment practices in Irish secondary schools. An online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with two teachers were conducted. Findings revealed the prevalence of formative strategies, with homework assignments, peer assessments, and class discussions being common. Curriculum-based exams dominated summative practices. Technology integration was more prominent in formative assessment, with challenges identified. Qualitative data emphasised authentic assessments, data analytics, and professional development needs. The study highlights the importance of balanced assessment approaches, increased technology integration, and targeted teacher support. Recommendations include diversifying summative methods, investing in technology infrastructure, fostering research engagement and continuous professional learning.

## **Chapter One: Introductory Chapter**

### *1.1. Origin of the Dissertation:*

The research dissertation at hand stems from the realisation that assessment practices in education play a crucial role in the educational landscape, shaping student's learning experiences and influencing their academic achievements. As stated by Harlen et al. (2006), assessment is essential in effective education as it informs instructional practices, measures learning outcomes and individualises learning. Through reflection and observation during the third year of an undergrad, a pattern emerged where some teachers would not incorporate formative assessment practices in the classroom. Similarly, from personal experiences, students seem to benefit from a richer learning environment when exposed to learning outcomes and lessons that were tailored to them by the educator using formative assessment practices. Therefore, the idea was sparked from a growing interest in exploring the dynamics between formative and summative assessment practices within contemporary Irish secondary schools.

### *1.2. Background to the Project:*

In recent years, assessment for learning has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical approach aimed at enhancing student engagement, motivation, and achievement. The following section provides a contextual overview of the research by examining the interplay between assessment practices and educational policies, as well as drawing upon existing research literature. Education policies worldwide have recognised the importance of effective assessment practices in promoting student centered learning environments. For example, Clark's (2011) adoption of formative assessment practices aligns with the emphasis on personalised and differentiated instruction, as can be seen in new policies such as the Common Core State Standards in the United States or the National Curriculum in England. Therefore, these policies highlight the need for ongoing feedback and assessment as integral components of the learning process.

Similarly, the report by Dolin et al. (2018) has shown that formative assessment practices, such as providing timely feedback, self-assessment and peer-assessment opportunities contribute to deeper learning and increased self-regulation. The role of summative assessment, with an emphasis on measuring student attainment at the end of a topic cannot be overlooked as it serves as an important accountability measure and a means for evaluating curriculum effectiveness.

### 1.3.Rationale:

This study is motivated by the need to further explore and understand the dynamics of formative and summative assessment practices in the classroom, particularly within the context of secondary schools.

Firstly, assessment practices significantly influence students' learning experiences and outcomes. By examining the current state of formative and summative assessment practices, this research aims to identify effective strategies that can enhance student engagement, motivation, and achievement. As stated by Mpu, Roy and Hackmack (2022), understanding how assessment practices impact students' learning processes will provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers to create supportive and conducive learning environments.

Secondly, educational policies have emphasised the importance of assessment for learning as a means of improving educational outcomes. For instance, MacPhail, Halbert, and O'Neill (2018) outline the goal of shifting assessment away from being a tool for making summative decisions and toward supporting teaching and learning. The project can assess the alignment between policy objectives and actual classroom practices. Exploring the challenges and opportunities in implementing assessment for learning within the existing policy framework can inform future policy development and instructional practices.

Similarly, despite the existing literature on formative and summative assessment, there are still gaps in knowledge regarding their practical implementation in secondary schools. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the current practices, exploring potential barriers, and identifying strategies to optimise assessment for learning in contemporary secondary school education.

### 1.4.Dissertation Layout:

The following section will briefly discuss the research dissertation layout. The dissertation layout comprises six chapters: Introduction establishes the research background. It outlines the origin of the dissertation and highlights the gaps in existing literature. The Literature Review explores existing research. It explores key concepts, theories, and models, while also identifying gaps and areas for further exploration. The Methodology explains the research design. It provides a rationale for the chosen research approach and outlines the process of data collection. Findings presents analysed data and presents empirical evidence to address the research questions and provides insights into the current state of assessment practices.

Discussion interprets findings and explores implications and addresses any limitations of the study. Finally, Conclusion summarises findings, provides recommendations, and suggests areas for further research.

### *1.5. Conclusion:*

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an overview of the research topic, highlighting the importance of investigating formative and summative assessment practices in secondary schools. It has outlined the origin of the dissertation, identified gaps in existing literature, and established the rationale for the study. Building upon this foundation, Chapter Two, the Literature Review, will critically examine the existing research and theoretical frameworks related to formative assessment and summative assessment, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic and setting the stage for the subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review:**

### *2.1. Introduction:*

The Literature Review at hand delves into the multifaceted landscape of Assessment For Learning (AFL) and its transformative impact on educational practices. To begin, the review explores AFL's historical trajectory, shaped by seminal studies such as Black and Wiliam's (1998) foundational definition, the review underscores AFL's evolution from static evaluations to an ongoing, responsive process nurturing continuous student growth. Examining key debates, the discourse navigates distinctions between formative and summative assessments, drawing on perspectives from the most prominent theorists. For example, Shepard (2000), Crooks (1988) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). The contradictory views on the roles and impacts of these assessments contribute to lively discussions, setting the stage for an in-depth study into formative and summative assessment strategies within a contemporary post-primary school environment. Analysing strengths and weaknesses, the literature review addresses the dynamic interplay between the immediacy of formative assessments, subjectivity concerns, and the comprehensive nature of summative assessments, integrating insights from theorists such as Black and Wiliam (1998), Popham (2009) and Peeters and Martin (2017).

The integration of formative and summative assessments emerges as a complex and crucial undertaking that is guided by strategic approaches outlined by Black and Plowright (2010) and Zlabkova et al. (2021). Similarly, policy influences on assessments, explored by Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) and Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) further enrich the understanding of assessment integration. To conclude, the review explores current trends and innovations, considering contemporary insights from Bennett and Gitomer (2009), Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020), Ferrell and Smith (2023) and the enduring influence of seminal theorists such as Dewey (1986), Bruner and, Wiggins (1990) and Biggs and Tang (2011). This comprehensive exploration contributes to a nuanced understanding of assessment practices, serving as a guide for educators in making informed decisions that enhance student learning within the dynamic educational landscape and address gaps in knowledge where the following dissertation may offer further insights.

## 2.2. What is Assessment for Learning?

Assessment for Learning (AFL) represents a transformative educational approach, redefining assessment as a dynamic, integral component of teaching and learning. For example, Black and Wiliam (1998) define AFL as an ongoing, formative methodology prioritizing continuous feedback to inform and enhance the educational experience. The work by Black and Wiliam (1998) has become instrumental in shaping AFL, focusing on the dynamic nature and inseparable connection to instructional strategies. Similarly, the article not only provided a turning point but also systematically demonstrated the positive impact of formative assessments on student learning outcomes. This historical trajectory underscores AFL as a paradigmatic departure, signifying a dynamic evolution from assessment as a static, end of term evaluation to an ongoing, responsive process nurturing continuous student growth. The paramount importance of assessment in the educational context is underscored by the multifaceted roles it plays in shaping instruction, motivating students, and ensuring accountability.

According to the study by Hattie and Timperley (2007), assessments are effective instruments that can guide instructional practices and raise student involvement. Similarly, their work illustrates the broader significance of effective assessment practices, with assessment serving as a linchpin for accountability at institutional levels. Therefore, AFL is not only an instrument used to shape instructional practices or raise student involvement it serves as a cornerstone of institutional accountability. By providing real-time insights into student progress and understanding, AFL empowers educators to tailor instruction effectively. Similarly, Sadler (1989) contributes to this discourse, highlighting the importance of formative assessment in closing the gap between current and desired performance levels. Through a critical examination of these key academic references, this literature review aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective assessment strategies, shedding light on their implications for educational advancement.

### 2.3. Key debates in Assessment:

The effectiveness of formative and summative assessments is a topic of much discussion in the broad field of Assessment for Learning (AFL), involving the viewpoints of many educational theorists. For example, Shepard (2000) elucidates the nuanced distinctions between these two assessment paradigms. Formative assessment, celebrated for its emphasis on continuous feedback and its role in shaping ongoing instruction, is juxtaposed with summative assessment, which traditionally evaluates overall student achievement at the culmination of a learning period. The discourse on the effectiveness of formative versus summative assessment extends to divergent views regarding their respective roles and impacts on student learning. Similarly, the meta-analytical work of Crooks (1988) offers substantial contributions to this discourse systematically evaluating the impact of various assessment practices on student achievement. Crooks' (1988) insights shed light on the relative efficacy of formative and summative assessment strategies, further fueling the ongoing debate within the educational community. Furthermore, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) delve into the intricacies of formative assessment and emphasise the potential to enhance student learning outcomes through well-structured feedback processes. Their perspective contributes valuable dimensions to the ongoing dialogue surrounding assessment practices in education. In contrast to this, reaching a consensus on the optimal balance between formative and summative assessments remains an ongoing challenge.

As previously mentioned, formative assessment is praised by theorists such as Black and Wilian (1998) for its ability to promote lifelong learning. Contrasting this, critics like Stiggins (2004) contend that summative assessments are crucial for serving as benchmarks for student achievement and as accountability measures. Therefore, with an understanding of previous debates based on formative and summative assessment strategies, this dissertation will aim to provide an in-depth study into formative and summative assessment strategies as a method of AFL in a contemporary post-primary school environment. This contradiction fuels lively discussions in the field of education, including curriculum creation, instructional design, and the general efficacy of assessment procedures in promoting student learning. In conclusion, discussion about formative and summative evaluations demonstrates how assessment procedures are always changing in educational settings. The current literature review navigates the complicated terrain of these arguments by including opinions from a varied range of academics, thereby, shedding light on the conflicting views and their consequences for developing effective procedures for assessment.

#### 2.4. Strengths and Weaknesses of Formative and Summative Assessment:

Analysing assessment techniques in education requires a comprehensive consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of formative and summative assessment methods. Formative assessment is recognised for having an emphasis on continuous feedback and plays a pivotal role in informing instructional strategies and enhancing the learning experience. As previously mentioned, Black and Wiliam (1998) underscore the strengths of formative assessment, highlighting the capacity formative assessment strategies has to provide immediate insights into student understanding, allowing educators to adapt their teaching in real time. Therefore, students continue to engage and advance because of this immediacy, which creates a dynamic learning environment. In comparison to this, the strengths of formative assessment coexist with certain limitations. While formative assessments excel in providing detailed feedback, concerns arise regarding the potential subjectivity and variability in the interpretation of qualitative data (Sadler, 1989). It becomes more difficult for educators to maintain consistency in their evaluative processes when subjectivity is present since it adds a variable element to the feedback process. Furthermore, the time-consuming aspect of formative assessments could be perceived as a drawback because the requirement for prompt feedback forces educators to carefully strike a balance between thorough assessment and realistic viability in learning environments.

In comparison to this, summative assessment serves as a culmination of students' learning experiences, providing a comprehensive evaluation of their overall achievement. Similarly, Hossain (2021) states that the strengths of summative assessment lie in its ability to offer a clear, measurable benchmark of student performance at a particular point in time. Therefore, this clarity is crucial for accountability purposes, aiding educational institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders in evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs. Similarly, summative assessments often mirror real-world scenarios where outcomes are judged against predetermined criteria. However, the strengths of summative assessment are accompanied by potential drawbacks particularly when it comes to high-stakes testing. The theoretical work by Popham (2009), delves into the impact of high-stakes assessments on student motivation and learning. For example, the study argues that the intense pressure associated with high-stakes testing can lead to adverse effects, such as increased anxiety and a narrowed focus on rote memorization at the expense of deep understanding. Therefore, this shift in focus may compromise the holistic educational goals of fostering critical thinking and long-term knowledge retention.

In addition to these perspectives, Moss and Brookhart (2019) emphasise the importance of formative assessment in enhancing student motivation and engagement, contributing valuable insights to the discussion on formative assessment. Furthermore, Carless, Joughin and Liu (2006) explores the potential of formative assessment in promoting student self-regulation and metacognition, adding depth to the discourse on the strengths of formative assessment. When considering summative assessment, Peeters and Martin (2017) offers insights into the challenges and considerations associated with high-stakes testing, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on the impact of summative assessments on student learning. In summary, the strengths and weaknesses inherent in formative and summative assessment approaches highlight the complexity of implementing effective evaluation strategies in education. For example, by drawing on insights from the most prominent theorists in the field of AFL and assessment strategies, this literature review contributes to the ongoing discourse on assessment practices. This discussion underscores the need for a balanced approach that maximises the benefits of both formative and summative assessments while navigating their inherent challenges.

#### 2.5. Integration of Formative and Summative Assessment:

The integration of formative and summative assessments within the educational landscape is a complex and crucial undertaking. For example, the work of Broadfoot and Black (2004) delves into how educators strategically merge these assessment approaches in the classroom and therefore, emphasising the synergistic relationship between formative assessments, which guide ongoing instruction, and summative assessments, which offer a comprehensive evaluation of student achievement. This integrated perspective aligns with the overarching goal of assessment as a multifaceted tool that informs teaching practices while also providing a holistic overview of learning outcomes. To further on from this foundational understanding, Zlabkova et al. (2021) contributes to the discourse by discussing specific strategies for achieving a balanced assessment approach. The study advocates for formative assessments as valuable tools for understanding student progress, offering insights that inform instructional adjustments, while also recognising the significance of summative assessments in evaluating overall student achievement. Therefore, this balanced integration ensures that assessment practices serve both immediate instructional needs and broader educational objectives.

A study by Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) offers insights into the impact of educational policies on the classroom environment by considering how policies shape assessment practices, emphasising the need for alignment between policy decisions and the effective implementation of assessments. This aligns with the idea that policy decisions act as a guiding framework for educators, influencing not only what is assessed but also how assessments are designed and executed in the classroom. Further enriching the exploration of policy influences on assessments, Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) examine the role of policy in shaping teacher practices. The study delves into how educators interpret and enact policies related to assessment, highlighting the dynamic interplay between policy decisions and the practicalities of assessment within the classroom. As a result, this nuanced viewpoint acknowledges teachers' agencies in moderating how policies affect their methods of evaluation. As discussed by the theorists above, the integration of formative and summative assessments necessitates a careful and strategic approach. Simultaneously, the influence of policy documents as examined by Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) and Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) underscores the intricate relationship between overarching policy decisions and the practical implementation of assessments within educational settings. The literature review synthesises these perspectives contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between assessment integration and policy influences in education.

#### 2.6. Current Trends and Seminal Theorists:

The ever-evolving landscape of assessment practices in education is witnessing significant shifts propelled by recent research on innovative approaches. Noteworthy contributions from Bennett and Gitomer (2009) delve into contemporary trends that emphasise the importance of considering diverse sources of evidence in the assessment process. The study advocates for a broader perspective on assessment that encompasses a range of data, moving beyond traditional forms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student learning. Similarly, Broadfoot and Black (2004) contribute insights into formative assessment by emphasising the role it plays in providing timely feedback to students during the learning process and therefore, enhancing student outcomes. According to Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020), the use of technology in assessment has also become a useful tool in the world of assessment by looking at how digital tools improve assessment procedures and provide information about how technology affects learning outcomes and student engagement (Williamson, et al., 2020).

The incorporation of technology not only facilitates more dynamic and interactive assessments but also opens avenues for personalised feedback and therefore fosters a more individualised approach to student development. Expanding on this, Ferrell and Smith (2023) discuss the use of learning analytics in assessments and focuses on the potential of data-driven insights to enhance teaching and improve student success. Therefore, this highlights the evolving landscape of assessment methodologies and the role of technology in providing educators with valuable tools for informed decision-making. In contrast to the incorporation of technology into assessment practices, the foundational ideas of seminal theorists in education, such as John Dewey and Jerome Bruner continue to shape contemporary assessment practices. For example, Dewey's (1986) emphasis on experiential learning and the integration of assessment into daily educational experiences finds resonance in current discussion on formative assessment in the classroom. To further on from this, Wiggins (1990) contributes to the conservation of authentic assessment and aligning with Dewey's (1986) principles by focusing on assessments that mirror real-world tasks and engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, Bruner's constructivist theories provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how assessment can be used to scaffold student learning (Reid, 1988)

Current research exemplified by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) explores the alignment of Bruner's ideas with formative assessment practices, emphasising the role of promoting student self-regulation and metacognition. Furthermore, Cowan's (2012) review on Biggs and Tang (2011) contributes insights into constructive alignment and focuses on the importance of aligning assessments with intended learning outcomes to enhance the effectiveness of educational practices. Therefore, by integrating the principles of these seminal theorists, contemporary assessment practices can draw inspiration from the rich theoretical foundations laid by Dewey and Bruner and foster a more student-centred and experiential approach. In contrast, this alignment prompts critical reflection on how these theories both complement and challenge prevailing assessment paradigms and provide a dynamic framework for ongoing educational innovation and improvement. In conclusion, the exploration of current trends and innovations in assessment, coupled with the integration of ideas from seminal theorists in education, contributes to a robust understanding of the dynamic nature of assessment practices. As education continues to evolve, these insights serve as a compass, guiding educators toward informed decisions that enhance student learning and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on effective assessment strategies.

## 2.7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this Literature Review illuminates the intricate landscape of Assessment for Learning (AFL), traversing historical evolution, key debates, strengths and weaknesses of formative and summative assessments, integration strategies, and current trends. Seminal works by Black and William (2006) and Hattie and Timperley (2007) underpin, and paradigm a shift from static evaluations to a dynamic, responsive process nurturing continuous student growth. The discourse on formative and summative assessments, as explored by Shepard (2000), Crooks (1988), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) set the stage for an in-depth examination within a contemporary post-primary school environment. The review at hand addresses the complexities of assessment integration, drawing insights from Broadfoot and Black (2004), Zlabkova et al. (2021), Crosnoe and Johnson (2011) and Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002). Current trends including technology integration and policy influences are explored perspectives from Bennett and Gitomer (2009), Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020), Ferrel and Smith (2023) and seminal theorists like Dewey, Bruner, Wiggins (1990) and Biggs and Tang (2011). To conclude, this synthesis highlights gaps in current literature, paving the way for a comprehensive dissertation that not only explores these dimensions in-depth but also aims to contribute new insights, address existing gaps, and provide a practical guide for educators navigating the dynamic landscape of AFL by attempting to address the following research questions:

1. How do teachers currently implement formative assessment practices in secondary schools, and what are the perceived benefits and challenges associated with their implementation?
2. How do teachers incorporate summative assessment practices in secondary schools, and what are the perceived effects on student learning and motivation?
3. What opportunities exist for integrating formative and summative assessment practices to create a comprehensive assessment framework that supports student learning and achievement in secondary schools?

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### *3.1. Research Paradigm:*

The research paradigm adopted for this study aligns with an interpretivist approach. As mentioned by Lincoln and Denzin (2007), interpretivism emphasises understanding social phenomena from the perspective of those involved, acknowledging the subjective nature of reality and the importance of context in shaping individuals' experiences and interpretations. As such, this study seeks to explore teachers' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs regarding formative and summative assessment practices in a contemporary Irish secondary school classroom. The interpretivist paradigm is particularly appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexities inherent in teachers' perceptions of assessment. As stated by Borislav (2017), by adopting an interpretivist stance, the researcher acknowledges the dynamic and subjective nature of the research process, recognising the inevitable interaction between the researcher and participants. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural factors that influence teachers' perspectives on assessment, thereby contributing to a richer interpretation of the data collected. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm emphasises the importance of context and meaning making in research, aligning closely with the mixed methods employed in this study, such as online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. According to Smith (2008) these methods allow for a deeper exploration of teachers' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to assessment practices within the specific context of their urban school environment.

### *3.2: Methodology:*

The second section will delineate the methodological approach underpinning the research design, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, along with a discussion on mixed methods. A clear theoretical justification for the choice of methodology is provided to elucidate the alignment with the research objectives that were previously discussed. To begin, quantitative research is rooted in positivism, the quantitative methodology seeks to collect observable and measurable data that can be subjected to statistical analysis, enabling the dissertation study to draw objective conclusions and make predictions based on patterns of thought and behavior (Martin, 1981). The research methods employed, such as online questionnaire distribution through Google Docs, are in line with the main principles of quantitative methodology, as they aim to gather numerical data that can be quantified and analysed statistically from a group of staff that were selected based on criteria from a previous placement secondary school.

By administering structured surveys with closed-ended questions, the researcher endeavors to capture quantifiable information from respondents, facilitating rigorous statistical analysis to test the proposed research questions and derive generalisable findings. In comparison to this, qualitative research draws from interpretivism, the qualitative methodology focuses on collecting data that captures the richness and complexity of human experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, which the researcher will interpret to uncover underlying meanings and patterns (Rowe and McAllister, 2002). The use of semi-structured interviews complements the qualitative approach by providing an opportunity for participants to express their perspectives on formative and summative assessment in depth, allowing for a nuanced exploration of their experiences and insights. As stated by Bernauer (2023), open ended questions and probes, the researcher aims to elicit rich narrative data, enabling a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints. The overall mixed methods approach presents a pragmatic outlook and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to triangulate findings, enrich understanding, and address research questions from multiple perspectives (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By combining online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the research leverages the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to gain rich comprehensive insights into the dynamics of formative and summative assessment practices in secondary schools.

As stated by Hammersley (2006), the richness of data refers to the depth and complexity of the information collected, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic. Therefore, this integrated approach allows for a multifaceted examination of the research topic, facilitating a more robust analysis and interpretation of the findings. The selection of methodology is guided by the research objectives and the nature of the research questions, ensuring that the chosen approach is congruent with the epistemological stance and theoretical framework underpinning the study. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research aims to capitalise on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, thereby providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon.

### 3.3. Approach:

The approach chosen for a research project is pivotal as it provides the foundational structure and guides the planning, implementation, and progression of the study. Moreover, the chosen approach influences various elements of the research, including sampling, data collection, and analysis. In this section, the adopted approach will be outlined, considering its alignment with the research objectives and the nature of the dissertation study.

As previously mentioned, for this research, a mixed-methods approach is deemed most suitable. A mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, offering a comprehensive understanding of the research problem from multiple perspectives. This aligns with the pragmatic stance adopted in the research paradigm and Day et al. (2008) states this approach emphasises the importance of utilising methods that best serve the research objectives outlined in the literature review. The quantitative component of the study will involve the distribution of online questionnaires to teachers in an urban school setting. This survey approach is typical in quantitative projects and will enable the collection of observable and measurable data regarding assessment practices in secondary schools. The quantitative data obtained from the surveys will provide valuable insights into the prevalence and frequency of different assessment practices. Similarly, the online questionnaires will also provide valuable insights into the frequency of formative and summative assessment practices in classrooms based on teachers experience and length of service in a classroom environment. In contrast, the qualitative component will involve conducting semi-structured interviews with a subset of teachers from the same school. The teachers involved have been selected based on several categories such as longevity in the school and longevity in education overall.

Lin Abdullah Kamal (2021) states that the qualitative approach, typical in interpretivist projects, allows for an in-depth exploration of the research topic. Therefore, this aligns with the aims of this research study to dive into teachers' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs regarding formative and summative assessment practices in the classroom. The interviews will provide rich, nuanced data that complement the quantitative findings, offering deeper insights into the underlying factors influencing assessment practices. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to capitalise on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods while mitigating their respective limitations. This approach will enable a holistic examination of formative and summative assessment practices in secondary schools, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. Overall, the chosen approach aligns with the research objectives and ensures the rigor and robustness of the study findings. It provides a structured framework for data collection and analysis, facilitating the achievement of the research aims and objectives.

### 3.4. Research Methods:

The selection of research methods is pivotal in ensuring the credibility and reliability of the study outcomes. This section delineates and rationalises the research methods employed, encompassing semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, elucidating the reasoning behind their adoption and the process of their formulation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a primary data collection method owing to their capacity to solicit detailed and nuanced responses from participants (Johnson and Schoonenboom, 2016). This method afforded the flexibility to delve deeply into participants' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs regarding assessment practices. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore specific topics comprehensively while allowing participants the latitude to express their perspectives openly. The formulation of the interview protocol entailed a meticulous process of reviewing pertinent literature on assessment practices, formative and summative assessments, and teacher perspectives.

Drawing from this literature review, a set of open-ended questions was crafted to encompass key dimensions of assessment, including teachers' utilisation of diverse assessment types, integration of technology, encountered challenges, and coping strategies. As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2006) the interview protocol in this research study underwent iterative revisions to ensure clarity, coherence, and alignment with the research objectives. In tandem with the qualitative insights gleaned from interviews, questionnaires were deployed to garner quantitative data on a broader scale.

The questionnaires provided a structured mechanism to gather information on teachers' assessment practices, attitudes, and demographic profiles. The questionnaire's design was informed by the research aims and the study by Ellingson (2017) that discusses the need for questionnaires to quantify certain facets of assessment practices across a wider spectrum of participants. The development of the questionnaire entailed identifying pertinent constructs and variables for measurement, formulating succinct and lucid questions, and piloting the questionnaire to assess its clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance. Feedback from the pilot phase was instrumental in refining the questionnaire, ensuring its efficacy in capturing the intended information. Furthermore, the questionnaire encompassed closed-ended and open-ended queries to facilitate quantitative analysis and qualitative insights. The open-ended questions allowed for the gathering of personal opinions from participants in relation to their thinking around summative and formative assessment practices and the challenges and opportunities involved.

The amalgamation of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires facilitated a comprehensive exploration of teachers' assessment practices and viewpoints. The rationale behind the selection of these methods was grounded in their suitability for capturing qualitative depth and quantitative breadth of data. By adhering to ethical precepts and securing requisite approvals, the researcher upheld the integrity and rigor of the data collection process.

### 3.5. Sample and Participants:

For the semi-structured interviews, a purposive sampling method was selected for this study. As stated by Linhart (2015) purposive sampling allows for the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This method was chosen to ensure participants have direct experience and expertise in assessment practices in education. By targeting teachers with diverse teaching experiences and backgrounds, the study aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of assessment practices in various educational settings. In comparison to this the sample size of the questionnaire consisted of 122 teachers within one previous placement school. The questionnaire was distributed via a whole-school email to all staff members with teaching experience ranging from two to forty years. Participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study, ensuring a broad representation of experiences and perspectives. Before the questionnaire was distributed to all staff, a pilot questionnaire was distributed to two teachers of different genders with separate subjects in order to identify any issues or changes that needed to be addressed before distributing the questionnaire to the entirety of the school staff.

Two issues were identified from the pilot questionnaire. Firstly, the structure of the questionnaire was changed to improve the readability and understanding of it to allow participants to have a smooth transition between sections. Secondly, participants of the pilot questionnaire felt they were being asked the same or very similar questions. To correct this, the questions were analysed, and the total number of questions was reduced. Therefore, the pilot questionnaire highlighted any corrections needing to be made before the questionnaire was fully distributed.

### 3.6 Data Analysis:

Data analysis involved a mixed methods approach to explore both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data, obtained from the online questionnaires, underwent statistical analysis, including frequency distributions. As stated by Connolly (2007) the aim of this is to identify patterns and trends among teacher responses.

Qualitative data, gathered from the interviews, underwent thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes and insights into teachers' experiences and perspectives. This combined approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by triangulating findings from both data sources. Thematic analysis involved a systematic process of coding and categorising qualitative data to extract meaningful themes and interpretations, ensuring rigor and reliability in the analysis.

### 3.7. Rigour:

Ensuring the quality of the research process and its outputs is paramount. For quantitative endeavors, rigorous examination of subjectivity and objectivity, validity, and reliability is essential. Additionally, Pitman (1998) discusses how acknowledging the limitations of generalisability and transferability is crucial while in qualitative inquiries, establishing trustworthiness is imperative. This involves employing strategies such as triangulation of data sources and member checking to enhance credibility. Member checking can often enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings as it involves sharing the research findings with participants in order to receive feedback and participants validate the research to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented. Raw data processing methods, including audio-recording interviews, taking comprehensive field notes, and transcribing interviews verbatim, contribute to ensuring rigour. Reflexivity, a critical aspect, involves vigilantly managing personal biases, often facilitated through reflective journaling. As stated by Fitzgerald (2021), the triangulation of data in mixed method approaches further enhances rigour and a well written literature review underpins these choices, offering justifications for selected methodologies over alternatives.

### 3.8. Limitations:

While this study aims to provide valuable insights into assessment practices among secondary school teachers, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, the small-scale nature of the investigation, conducted solely within one secondary school in County Clare, Ireland, may limit the generalisability and transferability of the findings to broader contexts. As mentioned by Price and Murnane (2004) the reliance on a single school may introduce bias and restrict the diversity of perspectives. Furthermore, the use of a singular methodology without triangulation could impact the comprehensiveness of the data collected (Creamer, 2018). These limitations highlight the need for caution in extrapolating the results beyond the specific context of this study.

### 3.9 Ethical Issues:

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research endeavor, and this study is no exception. The study received ethical approval from Hibernia College Ethics Committee, ensuring compliance with established guidelines. As outlined by Tatto and Furlong (2015), maintaining ethical standards involves several key aspects, including ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, securely storing data to prevent unauthorised access, and allowing participants the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, the study adheres to the Hibernia College data protection and GDPR guidelines, which, Verhenneman et al. (2020) states that adhering to data protection and GDPR guidelines safeguards the privacy and rights of participants. Similarly, James and Busher (2007) state that pseudonyms are recommended to anonymise data, further protecting the identity of participant. Throughout the research process, careful consideration is given to the potential impact on participants, ensuring that their welfare is prioritised.

Moreover, the study complies with guidance from Kretzer, Murphy and Bertuzzi (2019) who states that all research projects should uphold principles of integrity and honesty in data collection, analysis, and reporting. Transparency is maintained regarding the research process, and efforts are made to minimise any potential harm to participants. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study aims to uphold the trust and respect of participants and contribute valuable insights to the field of educational research in relation to formative and summative assessment practices.

## **Chapter Four: Findings:**

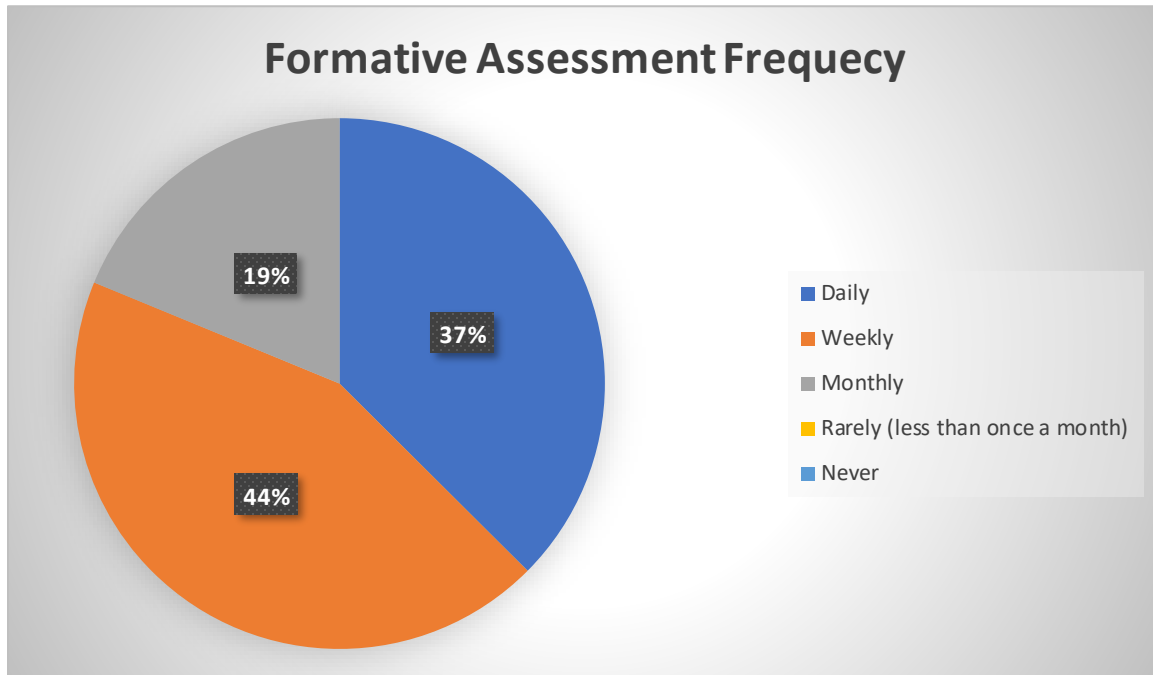
### *4.1. Introduction:*

This chapter presents a comprehensive and critical analysis of the findings from the mixed-methods study exploring formative and summative assessment practices in Irish secondary schools. The study employed a two-phase approach, collecting data through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences, perspectives, and practices related to assessment. The online questionnaire aimed to gather quantitative data on assessment frequency, strategies, technology integration, and professional development needs from a larger sample of secondary school teachers. The questionnaire data provides valuable insights into the current state of assessment practices and helps identify patterns and trends across the participating teachers. To complement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of teachers to delve deeper into their experiences, challenges, and perspectives on effective assessment practices. The interviews allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the themes emerging from the questionnaire data and provided rich qualitative insights into teachers' real-world experiences. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides a holistic understanding of assessment practices in Irish secondary schools, laying the foundation for further discussion and interpretation in subsequent chapters.

## 4.2. Quantitative Findings:

### 4.2.1. Assessment Practices:

The online questionnaire revealed that all participating teachers employed both formative and summative assessments in their teaching practice. However, the frequency of formative assessments varied, as illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Formative Assessment Frequency*

The Figure shows that the majority of participants (44%) used formative assessments on a daily basis, while 38% used them weekly, and 18% used them monthly. This indicates a high frequency of formative assessment practices among the participating teachers. Therefore, from this it may be stated that two thirds of participating teachers use formative assessment practices on a daily and weekly basis and no participant has stated that they use formative assessment strategies less than once a month.

Similarly, common formative assessment strategies used by teachers included homework assignments (31%), peer assessments (25%), class discussions (12%), and quizzes (13%). Figure 2 presents the distribution of these strategies among the respondents.

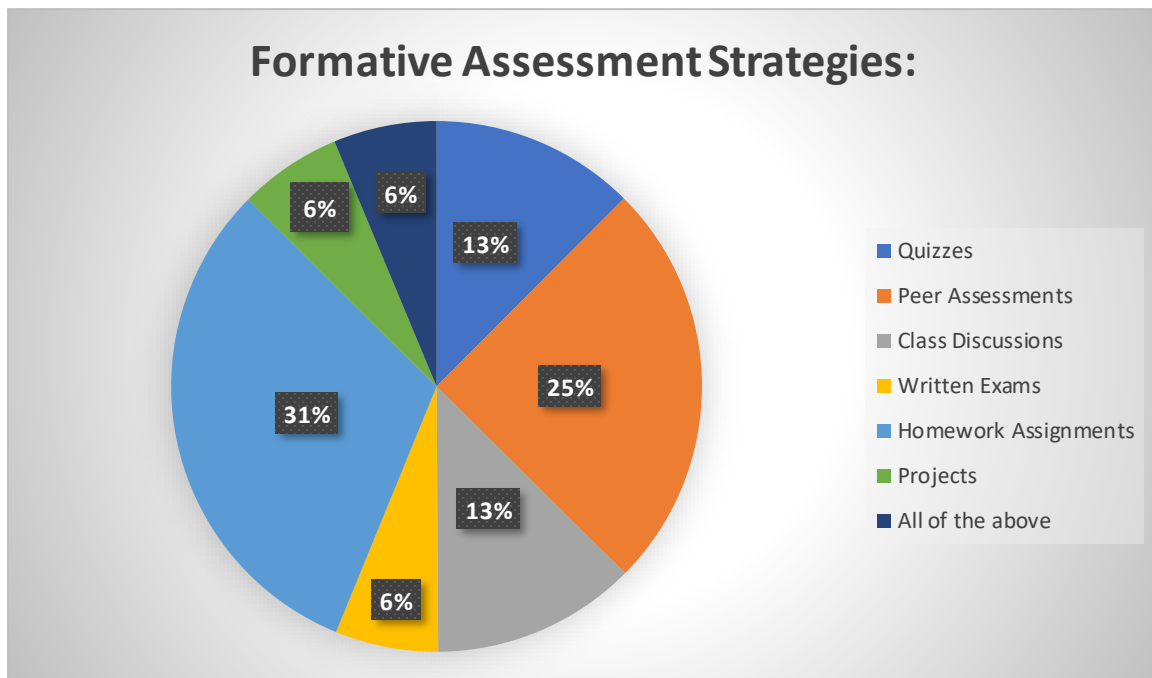


Figure 2: Formative Assessment Strategies

The graph illustrates that homework assignments were the most used formative assessment strategy, employed by 31% of participating teachers. Peer assessments, class discussions, and quizzes were also used by a significant proportion of teachers, indicating a variety of formative assessment strategies in use. As seen from the graph, projects and written exams were the least used formative assessment strategy (6%). This may be due to time constraints of these strategies as teachers may struggle to implement these formative assessment strategies in comparison to less time-consuming strategies such as class discussions, quizzes and homework assignments.

Regarding summative assessments, curriculum-based exams were the predominant choice (75%), while a smaller proportion (18.8%) utilised standardised tests, as shown in Figure 3.

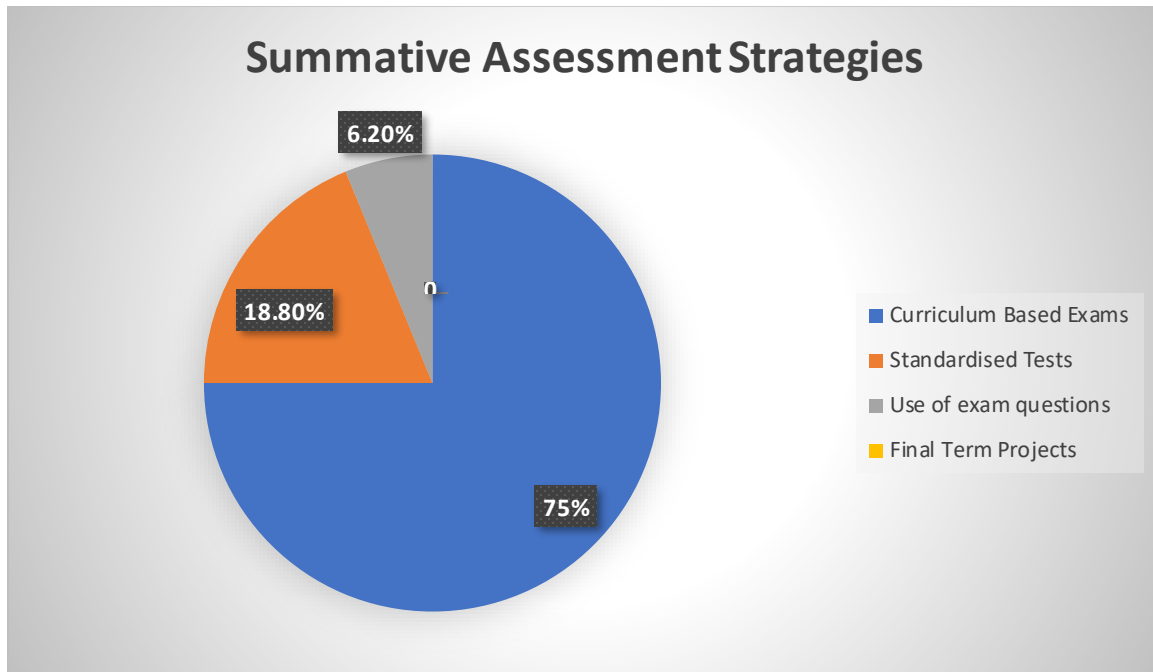
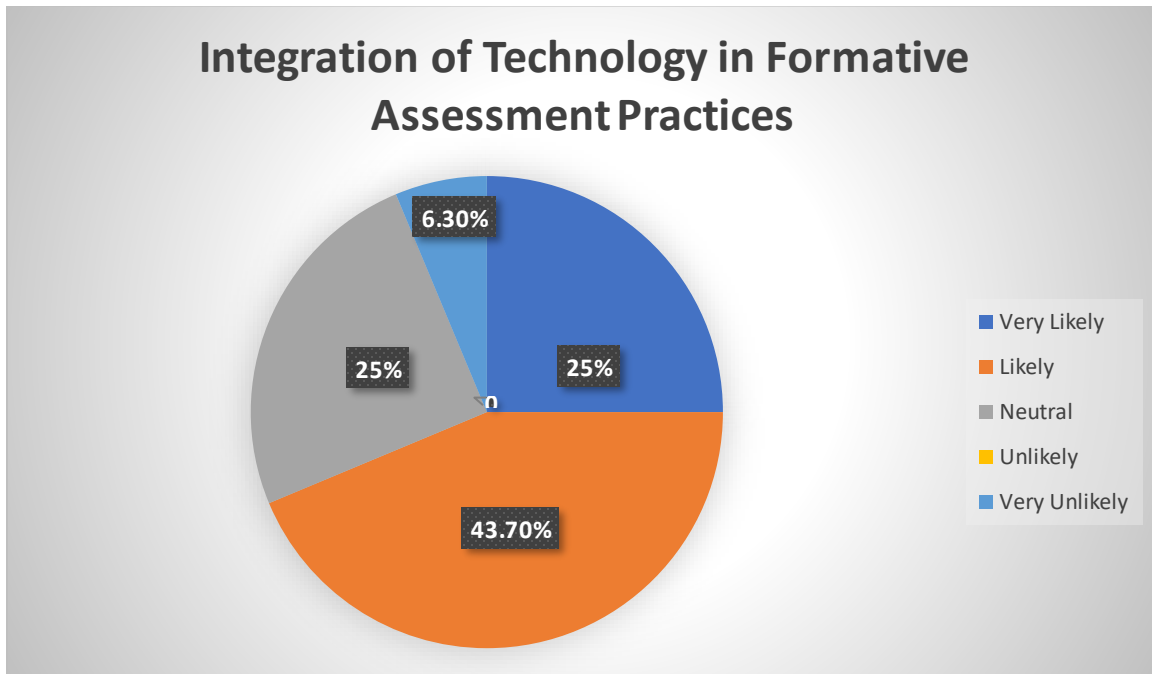


Figure 3: Summative Assessment Strategies.

The graph clearly shows that curriculum-based exams were the most widely used type of summative assessment, with 75% of teachers employing them. Standardised tests were used by a much smaller proportion (18.8%) of teachers, indicating a preference for curriculum-aligned summative assessments. Similarly, one participant stated the use of exam style questions within their summative assessments. Therefore, it may be stated that participants favoured summative assessments that they could align effectively with curriculum standards. In comparison to this, no participant stated they used final term projects as a form of summative assessment. This may be linked to time constraints which is similar to written exams being used as formative assessment strategies.

#### 4.2.2 Technology Integration:

The survey data revealed that 68.7% of participants were likely or very likely to incorporate technology into their formative assessment practices. Figure 4 illustrates the most frequently used technology tools.



*Figure 4: Integration of technology in formative assessment practices.*

The graph shows that a large percentage of participants (68.7%) were very likely or likely to integrate technology into formative assessment practices. This may be linked back to the type of formative assessment practices used where homework assignments were highlighted as being the most popular. Therefore, it may be stated that teachers may use platforms such as Microsoft Teams to assign homework on a frequent basis. In comparison to this, 25% of participants identified as being neutral and 6.30% of participants stated that they were very unlikely to integrate technology into formative assessment practices.

Figure 5 shows that online quizzes were the most popular technology tool used in formative assessment, with 57.10% of teachers incorporating them. Digital platforms for student collaboration were used by a 21.40% of the participating teachers, indicating a growing trend in leveraging technology for formative assessment purposes.

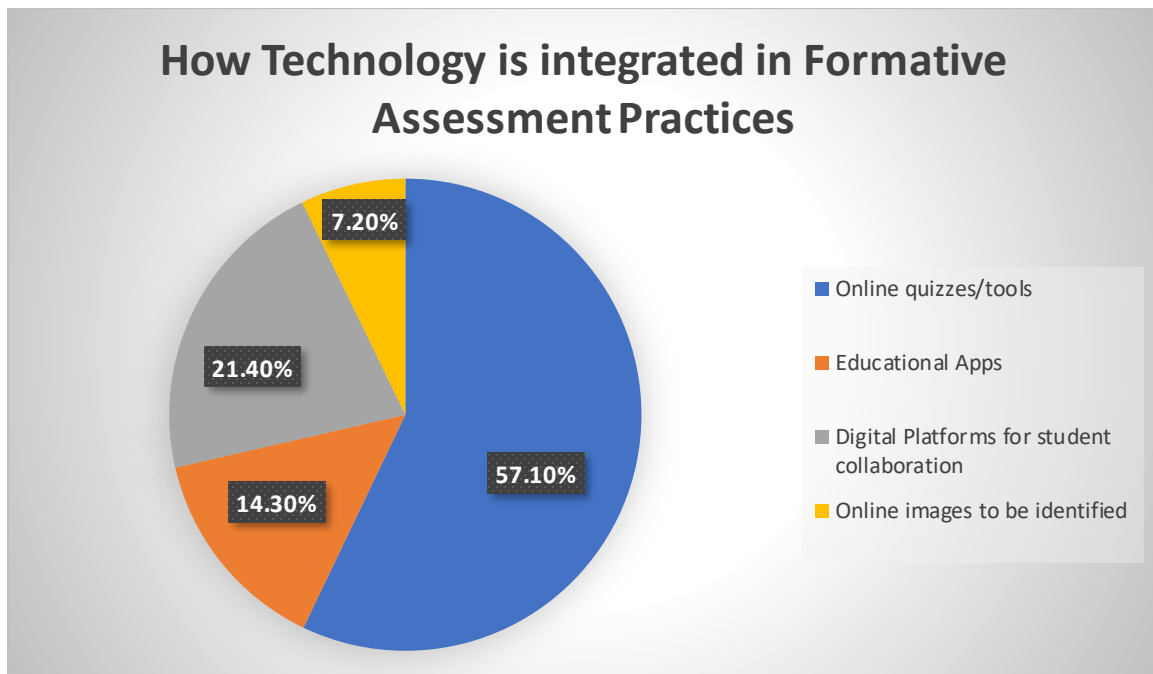


Figure 5: How technology is integrated in formative assessment practices.

As seen from chart 5, 14.30% of participants stated they used educational applications and only 7.20% used online images to be identified to integrate technology in formative assessment practices in the classroom. The use of identifying images online may be scarcely used as the strategies functional use may depend on the subject being taught. In comparison to this, online quizzes or tools may be used as they are easily accessible to both teacher and student, are time efficient and can cater to a broad range of subjects.

However, the extent of technology integration in summative assessments varied, as shown in Figure 6.

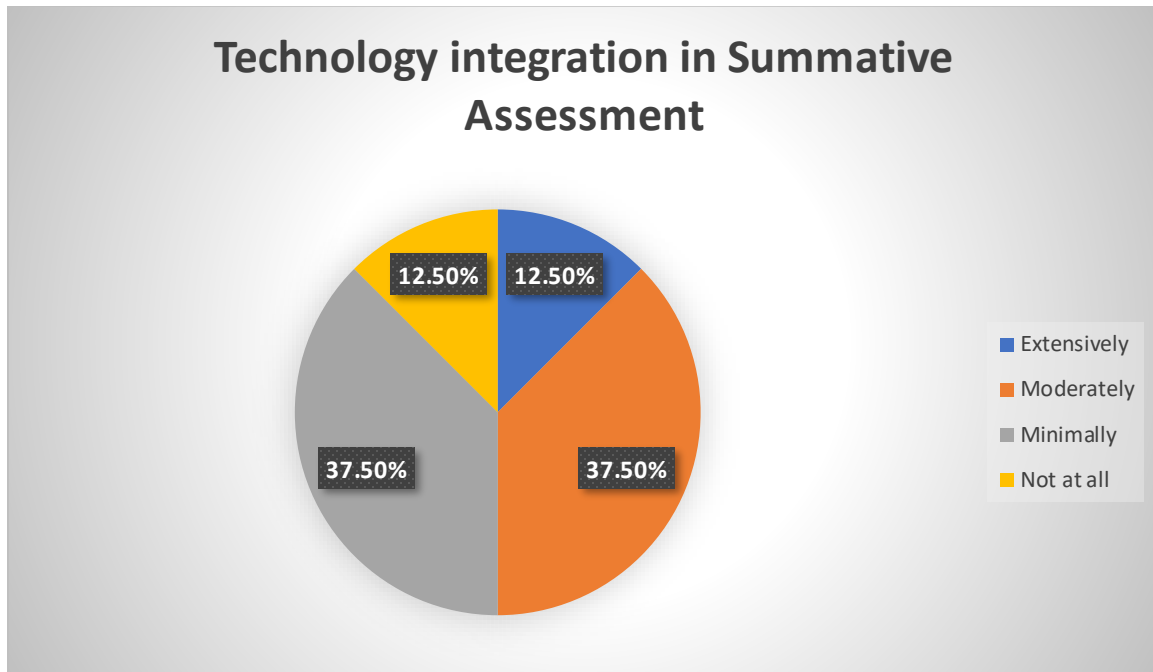


Figure 6: Technology integration in Summative Assessment.

The graph illustrates a diverse range of technology integration in summative assessments. While 12.5% of teachers extensively incorporated technology and 37.5% used it moderately, an equal proportion (37.5%) had minimal integration, and 12.5% did not use technology at all in their summative assessments. This suggests that there is still room for growth in leveraging technology for summative assessment purposes. Therefore, it may be stated that teachers are more likely to integrate technology into their formative assessment practices in comparison to summative assessment practices.

#### 4.2.3. Professional Development and Research Engagement:

The survey data revealed that 88.2% of respondents had not received training on using technology for assessments, highlighting a significant need for professional development in this area. Similarly, 11.8% of respondents stated they received training but from different sources such as 5.9% stating they were self-trained and 5.9% stating they received training from CPD in another school.

Similarly, engagement in research regarding the latest assessment strategies varied among participants, as depicted in Figure 7.

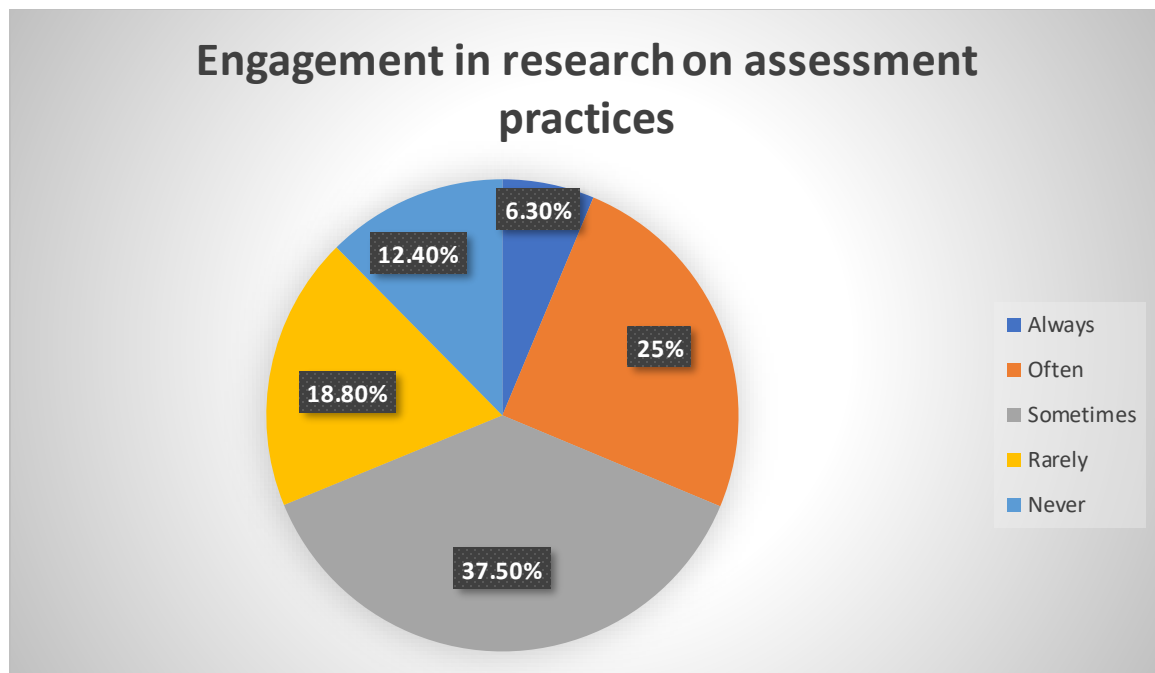


Figure 7: Engagement in research on Assessment Practices.

The graph shows that while 25% of teachers often engaged in research on assessment strategies, the majority (37.50%) did so only sometimes. A significant proportion (18.80%) rarely engaged in such research, and a small percentage (6.30%) never did. This suggests that there is a need for greater encouragement and support for teachers to stay updated with the latest assessment strategies through research engagement. As a large percentage of teachers stated they did not receive training on technology integration on assessment practices, it may be stated that a lack of training provided may be related to a significant percentage of teachers not engaging in research in relation to assessment practices.

These quantitative findings provide valuable insights into the current state of assessment practices, technology integration, and professional development needs among Irish secondary school teachers. The graphs visually represent the key patterns and trends emerging from the online questionnaire data.

### 4.3. Qualitative Findings:

#### 4.3.1. Thematic Analysis of Interviews:

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to gain deeper insights into their assessment practices and experiences. The interviews were conducted with Participant 1 with 6 years teaching experience and Participant 2 with 16 years teaching experience. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The following themes emerged from the analysis:

The first theme identified was Formative Assessment Strategies. Both interviewees discussed their use of formative assessment strategies in their classrooms. Participant 1 with 6 years of experience highlighted the effectiveness of questioning techniques, exit tickets, and short quizzes in gauging student understanding and informing instruction. Participant 1 stated, *"I have found that using a combination of questioning techniques, such as open-ended questions and think-pair-share activities, helps me gain valuable insights into my students' understanding."* Participant 2 with 16 years of experience emphasised the value of authentic assessments, such as real-world projects and simulations, in assessing student learning. Participant 2 mentioned, *"I find formative assessment strategies such as concept mapping, case studies, and structured discussions to be highly effective in gauging student understanding and guiding my instruction in business and economics-related subjects."*

The second theme highlighted was Technology Integration. The integration of technology in assessment practices emerged as a common theme in both interviews. Participant 1 mentioned using online platforms and interactive tools to enhance formative assessments, stating, *"One tool that has greatly enhanced my assessment practices is an online platform called Formative. It allows me to create interactive assignments, quizzes, and polls that students can complete on their devices."* Participant 2 discussed the use of online simulations and data analysis software to provide students with hands-on experiences and develop practical skills. Participant 2 shared that *"The use of online stock market simulations has positively impacted my assessment practices in Economics classes. These simulations provide students with hands-on experience in applying economic concepts and analysing market trends, enabling me to assess their understanding and decision-making skills."*

Challenges and Adaptations was the third theme identified. Both interviewees discussed the challenges they faced in implementing formative and summative assessments. Time constraints and ensuring the authenticity and integrity of assessments in the face of technological advancements were identified as common hurdles. Participant 1 mentioned, *"Challenges I have faced include time constraints and ensuring consistency in assessment implementation, which I addressed through careful planning and collaboration with colleagues."* Participant 2 shared, *"I have implemented strategies such as using plagiarism detection tools, designing assessments that require higher-order thinking skills, and educating students about academic honesty."*

The fourth theme highlighted from the interview data was Professional Development. The need for ongoing professional development in assessment practices was emphasised by both interviewees. They expressed a desire for training on effective formative assessment strategies, the use of technology in assessment, and the interpretation and utilisation of assessment data to inform teaching and learning. Participant 1 stated, *"I believe that a well-balanced approach, incorporating both formative and summative assessments, is essential for supporting student growth and achievement."* Participant 2 stated, *"I would like to emphasise the importance of collaboration among educators in sharing best practices and innovative assessment strategies. By working together and learning from each other's experiences, we can continuously improve our assessment practices and better support student learning in our respective subjects."*

The fifth and final theme identified was Student Engagement and Reflection. Both teachers highlighted the importance of student engagement and reflection in the assessment process. They shared strategies for involving students in self-assessment and peer assessment activities, promoting metacognition and self-regulated learning. Participant 1 explained, *"Formative assessments contribute to student engagement by providing opportunities for active participation, self-reflection, and peer interaction."* Participant 2 noted, *"I have observed that well-designed formative assessments lead to increased student motivation and self-directed learning. When students receive constructive feedback and have opportunities to improve, they develop a growth mindset and become more engaged in the learning process."*

#### 4.4. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings:

The quantitative findings from the online questionnaire and the qualitative insights from the interviews provide a comprehensive understanding of assessment practices in Irish secondary schools. The integration of these two data sources allows for triangulation, enhancing the credibility and validity of the findings. The survey data reveals patterns in assessment frequency, strategies, technology integration, and professional development needs, while the interview findings offer deeper insights into teachers' experiences, challenges, and perspectives on effective assessment practices. The integration of these findings highlights the widespread use of both formative and summative assessments, with teachers recognising the importance of formative assessment in guiding instruction. The interviews shed light on specific formative assessment strategies, such as questioning techniques, exit tickets, and authentic assessments, that teachers find effective in their classrooms. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the growing integration of technology in assessment practices, with teachers leveraging online platforms, interactive tools, and simulations to enhance student learning and assessment. However, the interviews also reveal the challenges teachers face in implementing technology-based assessments, such as time constraints, lack of training and resources and ensuring the authenticity of assessments. Both the survey data and the interviews emphasise the need for ongoing professional development in assessment practices, particularly in the use of technology and the interpretation and utilisation of assessment data. The importance of student engagement and reflection in the assessment process is also highlighted, with teachers sharing strategies for involving students in self-assessment and peer assessment activities.

#### 4.5. Conclusion:

The findings from the online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews provide a rich and nuanced understanding of assessment practices in Irish secondary schools. The quantitative data reveals patterns and trends in assessment frequency, strategies, technology integration, and professional development needs, while the qualitative insights from the interviews offer a deeper exploration of teachers' experiences, challenges, and perspectives on effective assessment practices. The integration of these findings highlights the widespread use of formative and summative assessments, the growing integration of technology, the challenges teachers face, and the need for ongoing professional development. The insights gained from this study lay the foundation for further discussion and interpretation in the subsequent chapter, where the results will be examined in the context of the existing literature, and implications for practice will be explored.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### *5.1 Introduction:*

This chapter critically discusses the key findings of the research on formative and summative assessment practices in Irish secondary schools, in relation to the existing literature and research questions. Assessment plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences and outcomes, and understanding the current state of assessment practices is essential for identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The discussion aims to interpret the findings, highlight their significance, and situate them within the broader context of assessment in education. By examining the results through the lens of relevant theories and empirical evidence, the chapter sheds light on the complexities, challenges, and potential of assessment practices in secondary schools. The insights gained contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective assessment strategies and inform recommendations for policy and practice. The discussion is structured around key themes that emerged from the findings, including the prevalence and nature of formative assessment, the dominance of curriculum-based summative assessments, technology integration in assessment, and teachers' professional development needs. Each theme is explored in-depth, drawing connections to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and considering implications for student learning and educational practice.

### *5.2 Formative Assessment Practices:*

The findings revealed that formative assessment strategies were widely used by participating teachers, with the majority employing them on a daily or weekly basis. This aligns with the growing emphasis on formative assessment as a crucial component of effective teaching and learning (Moss and Brookhart, 2019). The prevalence of homework assignments, peer assessments, and class discussions as formative strategies reflects teachers' efforts to gather ongoing evidence of student learning and provide timely feedback. As highlighted by Sadler (1989), formative assessment plays a vital role in closing the gap between current and desired performance levels. The use of diverse formative assessment strategies, such as exit tickets and short quizzes, demonstrates teachers' recognition of the importance of gauging student understanding and adapting instruction accordingly. This aligns with the principles of effective formative assessment outlined by Black and Wiliam (1998), which emphasise the continuous nature of assessment and its integration into the teaching and learning process.

However, the findings also shed light on potential challenges in implementing formative assessment, such as time constraints and ensuring consistency in evaluative processes. This resonates with the concerns raised by Sadler (1989) regarding the subjectivity and variability in interpreting qualitative data from formative assessments. Addressing these challenges requires careful consideration of strategies to balance the need for comprehensive feedback with practical feasibility in the classroom setting. Professional development opportunities that focus on effective formative assessment practices and strategies for managing time and resources could support teachers in overcoming these challenges and maximising the benefits of formative assessment for student learning.

### 5.3 Summative Assessment Practices:

The dominance of curriculum-based exams as the primary summative assessment strategy aligns with the accountability-driven nature of educational systems that was previously mentioned by Hossain (2021). Teachers' preference for summative assessments that closely align with curriculum standards reflects the pressure to demonstrate student achievement and meet institutional expectations. The emphasis on traditional exam formats suggests a focus on measuring content knowledge and recall, which may not fully capture the range of skills and competencies students need to develop. However, the reliance on high stakes testing raises concerns about its impact on student motivation and learning, as cautioned by Popham (2009). The pressure associated with summative assessments can lead to increased anxiety and a narrowed focus on rote memorisation, potentially compromising deeper understanding and critical thinking skills. This highlights the need for a more balanced approach to summative assessment that considers the diverse needs and abilities of learners. The limited use of alternative summative assessment methods, such as projects or authentic tasks, suggests a need to explore more diverse approaches that capture a wider range of student abilities and promote deeper learning. As argued by Wiggins (1990), authentic assessments that mirror real-world tasks can engage students in meaningful learning experiences and foster critical thinking skills. Therefore, incorporating performance-based assessments, portfolios, or collaborative projects could provide a more comprehensive picture of student learning and encourage the development of transferable skills.

To address these challenges, educational policymakers and school leaders should consider reforming summative assessment practices to prioritise authentic learning experiences and align with the diverse needs of learners. Professional development initiatives that support teachers in designing and implementing alternative summative assessment strategies could contribute to a more balanced and effective assessment framework in secondary schools.

#### 5.4 Technology Integration in Assessment:

The findings highlight the growing integration of technology in formative assessment practices, with online quizzes and digital platforms for student collaboration being popular choices. This trend aligns with the increasing recognition of technology's potential to enhance assessment and provide personalised feedback (Williamson, Eynon, and Potter, 2020). The use of digital tools enables teachers to gather real-time data on student understanding, facilitate interactive learning experiences, and provide immediate feedback to support learning progress. However, the extent of technology integration in summative assessments varied, indicating room for further exploration and development. The interviews revealed challenges in implementing technology-based assessments, such as resource constraints, ensuring the authenticity of assessments, and the need for teacher training. These findings underscore the importance of addressing the digital divide and providing equitable access to technology resources across schools and classrooms.

To fully harness the potential of technology in assessment, targeted professional development and support for teachers are crucial. As highlighted by Ferrell and Smith (2023), the use of learning analytics and data-driven insights holds promise for enhancing teaching and improving student success. Professional learning opportunities should focus on developing teachers' digital competencies, exploring innovative assessment tools, and strategically integrating technology into assessment practices. Furthermore, educational policymakers and school leaders should prioritise investments in technology infrastructure, resources, and ongoing technical support to enable the effective implementation of technology-enhanced assessments. By creating an enabling environment and empowering teachers with the necessary skills and resources, schools can leverage technology to transform assessment practices and personalise learning experiences for students.

### 5.5 Professional Development and Research Engagement:

The survey data and interviews emphasised the need for ongoing professional development in assessment practices, particularly in the use of technology and the interpretation and utilisation of assessment data. This finding resonates with the call for targeted support and training to empower teachers in effectively implementing formative and summative assessments (Zlabkova et al., 2021). Professional development initiatives should focus on enhancing teachers' assessment literacy, providing them with the knowledge and skills to design, administer, and interpret assessments that support student learning. The varying levels of engagement in research regarding assessment strategies among participating teachers suggest a need for greater encouragement and support to stay updated with the latest developments in the field. Promoting a culture of research engagement and providing accessible resources and opportunities for professional learning can contribute to the continuous improvement of assessment practices in secondary schools. School leaders should foster collaborative learning communities where teachers can share best practices, engage in reflective dialogue, and critically examine assessment strategies.

Furthermore, establishing partnerships between schools and research institutions can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, enabling teachers to access cutting-edge research findings and evidence-based practices. By bridging the gap between research and practice, such collaborations can drive innovation and enhance the effectiveness of assessment practices in secondary schools. To support professional development and research engagement, educational policymakers should allocate resources and create incentives for teachers to participate in ongoing learning opportunities and research activities. By prioritising the continuous growth and development of teachers, schools can cultivate a culture of evidence-based practice and ensure that assessment strategies remain responsive to the evolving needs of students and the changing educational landscape.

### 5.6 Implications for Practice:

The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice. Firstly, the widespread use of formative assessment strategies highlights the importance of providing teachers with the necessary resources, time, and support to effectively implement these practices. This may involve allocating dedicated planning time, facilitating collaborative discussions among teachers, and offering targeted professional development opportunities. School leaders should prioritise the creation of a supportive environment that encourages the regular use of formative assessment and values its role in promoting student learning. Secondly, the reliance on curriculum-based exams as the primary summative assessment method calls for a critical examination of assessment policies and practices. Exploring alternative approaches that promote authentic learning experiences and align with the diverse needs of learners can contribute to a more comprehensive and balanced assessment framework. Educational policymakers should consider reforms that emphasise the development of higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, rather than solely focusing on content recall and standardised testing.

Finally, the growing integration of technology in assessment practices necessitates strategic investments in infrastructure, resources, and teacher training. Providing teachers with access to appropriate tools, platforms, and ongoing support can enable them to harness the potential of technology to enhance assessment and personalise learning. Schools should develop comprehensive technology integration plans that address issues of equity, digital literacy, and data privacy, ensuring that all students have access to the benefits of technology-enhanced assessment.

### 5.7 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research:

While this study provides valuable insights into formative and summative assessment practices in Irish secondary schools, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The small-scale nature of the investigation, conducted within a single school, may limit the generalisability of the findings to broader contexts. Future research could expand the scope to include a larger and more diverse sample of schools and teachers to enhance the representativeness of the findings. As noted by Peeters and Martin (2017), increasing the sample size and diversity can strengthen the external validity of the study.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from surveys and interviews may be subject to participants' perceptions and biases. Incorporating observational data or triangulating findings with student perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of assessment practices in action. Furthermore, future research could delve deeper into the impact of specific assessment strategies on student learning outcomes, motivation, and engagement, particularly for diverse student populations. Longitudinal studies that track student progress over time could shed light on the long-term effects of assessment practices. Finally, given the rapid advancements in educational technology, ongoing research is needed to explore emerging trends, innovations, and best practices in integrating technology into assessment. Collaborative research efforts between educational institutions, technology providers, and research organisations could accelerate the development and dissemination of innovative assessment solutions that harness the power of technology to support student learning and achievement.

### 5.8 Conclusion:

This chapter critically discussed the key findings of the research on formative and summative assessment practices in Irish secondary schools. The findings highlighted the widespread use of formative assessment strategies, the dominance of curriculum-based exams in summative assessment, the growing integration of technology, and the need for ongoing professional development and research engagement among teachers. The discussion situated the findings within the broader context of assessment in education, drawing connections to existing literature and theoretical perspectives. The implications for practice emphasized the importance of providing support and resources for effective implementation of formative assessment, exploring alternative summative assessment approaches, investing in technology integration, and fostering a culture of research engagement and continuous professional learning. While acknowledging the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research were provided to expand the scope, incorporate diverse data sources, investigate the impact on student learning outcomes, and explore emerging trends in technology-enhanced assessment. Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective assessment practices in secondary education and highlights the need for continued research, collaboration, and innovation to support student learning and achievement.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion:**

This research study aimed to explore the dynamics of formative and summative assessment practices in Irish secondary schools. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study sought to understand teachers' experiences, perspectives, and practices related to assessment, as well as the integration of technology and the professional development needs of educators. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on effective assessment strategies and provide valuable insights for educational stakeholders. The results revealed a widespread use of formative assessment strategies among participating teachers, with homework assignments, peer assessments, and class discussions being the most common. This aligns with the growing recognition of formative assessment as a crucial component of effective teaching and learning (Andrade, 2019). However, the study also highlighted challenges in implementing formative assessment, such as time constraints and ensuring consistency in evaluative processes, echoing concerns raised by previous research (Panadero and Brown, 2017). Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educators, school leaders, and policymakers to provide the necessary resources, support, and professional development opportunities.

Summative assessment practices were dominated by curriculum-based exams, reflecting the accountability-driven nature of educational systems. While this approach aligns with institutional expectations, it raises concerns about the potential impact on student motivation and learning (Harlen, 2005). The limited use of alternative summative assessment methods suggests a need for more diverse approaches that capture a wider range of student abilities and promote deeper learning (Boud and Soler, 2015). Educators should be encouraged to explore and implement innovative assessment strategies that prioritise authentic learning experiences and cater to the diverse needs of learners. The integration of technology in assessment practices emerged as a growing trend, particularly in formative assessment. Online quizzes and digital platforms for student collaboration were popular choices among teachers. However, the extent of technology integration in summative assessments varied, indicating room for further development. The study highlighted the importance of addressing resource constraints, ensuring the authenticity of assessments, and providing targeted professional development for teachers to effectively leverage technology in assessment (Spector et al., 2016). Policymakers and school leaders should prioritise investments in technology infrastructure and provide ongoing support to teachers in harnessing the potential of technology-enhanced assessment.

Professional development and research engagement emerged as crucial areas for supporting the continuous improvement of assessment practices. The study emphasised the need for ongoing professional development initiatives that focus on enhancing teachers' assessment literacy and digital competencies. As stated by Coburn and Penuel (2016), promoting a culture of research engagement and establishing partnerships between schools and research institutions can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and drive evidence-based practices. By fostering a collaborative and reflective environment, educators can continuously refine their assessment strategies and adapt to the evolving needs of students. The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice. Firstly, school leaders and policymakers should prioritise the provision of resources, time, and support for teachers to effectively implement formative assessment strategies. Secondly, a critical examination of summative assessment policies and practices is necessary to explore alternative approaches that promote authentic learning experiences and align with the diverse needs of learners. Finally, strategic investments in technology infrastructure, resources, and teacher training are essential to harness the potential of technology-enhanced assessment. By addressing these implications, educational stakeholders can work towards creating a comprehensive and inclusive assessment framework. While this study provides valuable insights into assessment practices in Irish secondary schools, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The small-scale nature of the investigation and the reliance on self-reported data may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope to include a larger and more diverse sample of schools and incorporate observational data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of assessment practices in action. Additionally, longitudinal studies could shed light on the long-term impact of assessment strategies on student learning and achievement.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective assessment practices in secondary education. It highlights the importance of formative assessment, the need for a balanced approach to summative assessment, the growing integration of technology, and the crucial role of professional development and research engagement. By addressing the challenges identified and leveraging the opportunities presented, educators and policymakers can work towards creating a comprehensive assessment framework that supports student learning and achievement. Continued research, collaboration, and innovation are essential to ensure that assessment practices remain responsive to the evolving needs of students and the changing educational landscape. As education continues to evolve, it is imperative that assessment practices keep pace, empowering students to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

### **Acknowledgements:**

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## **Appendices:**

### *Principal Consent Form:*

06/12/23

Dear Principal,

As part of my Professional Masters in Post-Primary Education with Hibernia College, I am investigating the role of assessment for learning and formative and summative assessment strategies in the classroom. The title of the research project is 'Assessment for Learning: Formative and Summative Assessment Strategies'. Classroom teachers are key stakeholders in student assessment strategies and this dissertation aims to identify key benefits and challenges of formative and summative assessment strategies in assessing for learning within the classroom.

This letter aims to provide you with an introduction to the research project and to seek consent from you for the project to move forward in order to inform my future professional practice as a teacher. With your permission, I would like to interview two classroom teachers as well as provide a further twenty-two staff the opportunity to answer an online questionnaire. The staff will be asked to partake in semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into the aims of the project.

Please find enclosed for your perusal, a copy of the information and consent forms. Only those respondents who return a signed copy of the consent form will be purposely selected to take part in the study. Any data gathering will strictly be underpinned by the school's ethical code of conduct. No students will be interviewed. Information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The school's name will not appear on any research findings.

Interviews will be recorded, and the data from the interviews and online questionnaire will be securely held under Hibernia College Research Ethics guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my research project and may be disseminated through professional publication. I would appreciate your cooperation in providing access to the staff at the school over the coming weeks. If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher:

Mobile:

Email:

This research study has received Ethics approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

School of Education, Hibernia College Dublin.

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 06/12/23

Principal's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 19/03/24

Participant Consent Form:

<b>Participant Consent Form</b>	
<u>Researcher name:</u>	
<u>Organisation:</u>	Hibernia College Dublin
<u>Title of Study:</u>	Assessment for Learning: Formative and Summative Assessment Strategies
Consent (to be completed by the participant)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No</li><li>• Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No</li><li>• Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you? Yes/No</li><li>• Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No</li><li>• Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No</li><li>• Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report. Yes/No</li></ul>	
Participant's name (printed) : _____	
(signature): _____	Date: _____
Researcher's signature: _____	
Date: _____	

Online Questionnaire:

<b>Demographic Information:</b>	
Class Years taught:	
Subjects Taught:	
Years of Teaching Experience:	
<b>Assessment Practices:</b>	
1. Which types of assessments do you commonly use in your teaching?	
a) Formative Assessments	
b) Summative Assessments	
c) Both	
2. On average, how often do you administer formative assessments in your classroom?	
a) Daily	
b) Weekly	
c) Monthly	
d) Rarely	
e) Never	
3. Please indicate the formative assessment strategies you frequently employ:	
a) Quizzes	
b) Peer assessments	
c) Class discussions	
d) Homework assignments	
e) Projects	
f) Other (please specify):	

4. How likely are you to integrate technology into your formative assessment practices?

- a) Very Likely
- b) Likely
- c) Neutral
- d) Unlikely
- e) Highly Unlikely

5. How do you integrate technology into your formative assessment practices?

- f) Online quizzes/tools
- g) Educational apps
- h) Digital platforms for student collaboration
- i) Other (please specify):

6. Regarding summative assessments, how do you ensure they align with your instructional goals?

- a) Curriculum-based exams
- b) Standardised tests
- c) Final projects
- d) Other (please specify):

7. In your opinion, how effective are formative assessments in guiding your instructional decisions?

- a) Very effective
- b) Effective
- c) Neutral
- d) Ineffective
- e) Very ineffective

**Technology Use:**

8. To what extent do you incorporate technology into your summative assessment practices?

- a) Extensively
- b) Moderately
- c) Minimally
- d) Not at all

9. Have you received any training on using technology for assessments?

- a) Yes
- b) No

10. Do you engage in research regarding the newest forms of assessment strategies?

- a) Always
- b) Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

**Challenges and Solutions:**

11. What challenges have you encountered in implementing formative and summative assessments, and how have you addressed them?

**Feedback and Reflection:**

12. How do you provide feedback to students after assessments?

a) Written comments

b) Verbal feedback

c) Rubrics

d) Other (please specify):

13. Do you encourage students to reflect on their assessment performance?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Occasionally

**Final Thoughts:**

14. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your assessment practices, challenges, or thoughts on the topic "Assessment for learning: Formative and Summative Assessment Strategies"?

**Conclusion:**

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Your insights are valuable to my research.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please tell me about your experience as a teacher, including the grade level and subjects you have taught?
2. How do you stay informed about new developments and best practices in assessment strategies, particularly in formative and summative assessments?
3. Can you share an example of a professional development experience related to assessment that has influenced your teaching practices?
4. What formative assessment strategies do you find most effective in gauging student understanding and guiding your instruction?
5. How do you incorporate summative assessments into your teaching, and how do you believe they contribute to overall student learning?
6. In what ways do you use technology to enhance formative and summative assessments in your classroom?
7. Can you share an example of a technology tool or resource that has positively impacted your assessment practices?
8. How do you balance formative and summative assessments to inform your teaching and provide meaningful feedback to students?
9. Can you share your approach to providing constructive feedback that helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement?
10. What challenges have you faced in implementing formative and summative assessment strategies, and how have you addressed them?
11. Can you share an instance where you encountered a challenge related to assessment and successfully implemented a solution?
12. How do formative assessments contribute to student engagement and participation in your classroom?
13. What strategies do you use to ensure that summative assessments are fair, transparent, and contribute to a positive learning experience for students?

14. Given the context of my thesis on "Assessment for learning: Formative and Summative Assessment Strategies," how do you think these assessment strategies impact student learning in your experience?
15. Have you observed any specific challenges or successes related to formative and summative assessments in your teaching career that you would like to share?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences with formative and summative assessments or any insights related to the thesis topic that we haven't covered?

*Research Information Sheet:*

<b><u>Research Information Sheet</u></b>	
<b><u>Researcher:</u></b>	
<b><u>Organisation:</u></b>	Hibernia College Dublin
<b><u>Title of Study:</u></b>	Assessment for Learning: Formative and Summative Assessment Strategies
<p><b><u>Outline of research study:</u></b> The data gathered from questionnaires and interviews will allow the dissertation to delve into the multifaceted landscape of Assessment For Learning (AFL) and its transformative impact on educational practices. Examining key debates, the discourse navigates distinctions between formative and summative assessments, drawing on perspectives from the most prominent theorists. For example, Shepard (2000), Crooks (1988) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). Analysing strengths and weaknesses, the dissertation addresses the dynamic interplay between the immediacy of formative assessments, subjectivity concerns, and the comprehensive nature of summative assessments, integrating insights from theorists such as Black and Wiliam (1998), Popham (2009) and Kane (2006).</p> <p><b><u>Objectives of the project:</u></b> The aim of this research is to examine how teacher currently implement formative and summative assessment practices in a contemporary post-primary educational environment. Similarly, the research aims to examine classroom strategies and different methodologies used in the classroom to integrate formative and summative assessment practices to create a comprehensive assessment framework that supports student learning and achievement in post primary schools. The final aim of this research is to examine the perceived benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of formative and summative assessment strategies.</p> <p><b><u>What would I need you to do?</u></b> Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a Short (20-25min) semi-structured interview with the researcher. Similarly, the online questionnaire, if you also agree to participate, will also only take 20-25min and any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential. Quotes from the interview may be used and may also be published in the research however your name and the name of the school will not be published. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript will be made available to you on request. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. It may also be used in conference proceedings or used in academic articles. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.</p> <p><b><u>What is the purpose of this research?</u></b> The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Master of Education (Post-Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.</p>	

*Thematic Analysis Sample:*

<b>Theme 1: Formative Assessment Strategies</b>	
Participant 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighted the effectiveness of questioning techniques, exit tickets, and short quizzes.</li> <li>• "I've found that using a combination of questioning techniques, such as open-ended questions and think-pair-share activities, helps me gain valuable insights into my students' understanding."</li> </ul>
Participant 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasised the value of authentic assessments, such as real-world projects and simulations.</li> <li>• "I find formative assessment strategies such as concept mapping, case studies, and structured discussions to be highly effective in gauging student understanding and guiding my instruction in business and economics-related subjects."</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2: Technology Integration</b>	
Participant 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentioned using online platforms and interactive tools to enhance formative assessments</li> <li>• "One tool that has greatly enhanced my assessment practices is an online platform called Formative. It allows me to create interactive assignments, quizzes, and polls that students can complete on their devices."</li> </ul>
Participant 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussed the use of online simulations and data analysis software.</li> <li>• The use of online stock market simulations has positively impacted my assessment practices in Economics classes. These simulations provide students with hands-on experience in applying economic concepts and analysing market trends, enabling me to assess their understanding and decision-making skills."</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3: Challenges and Adaptions</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified time constraints and ensuring consistency in assessment implementation as challenges</li> </ul>

Participant 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Challenges I have faced include time constraints and ensuring consistency in assessment implementation, which I addressed through careful planning and collaboration with colleagues."</li> </ul>
Participant 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentioned using plagiarism detection tools and designing assessments that require higher-order thinking skills</li> <li>• I have implemented strategies such as using plagiarism detection tools, designing assessments that require higher-order thinking skills, and educating students about academic honesty."</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 4: Professional Development</b>	
Participant 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believes in the importance of a well-balanced approach incorporating both formative and summative assessments</li> <li>• "I believe that a well-balanced approach, incorporating both formative and summative assessments, is essential for supporting student growth and achievement."</li> </ul>
Participant 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasises the importance of collaboration among educators in sharing best practices and innovative assessment strategies</li> <li>• "I would like to emphasise the importance of collaboration among educators in sharing best practices and innovative assessment strategies. By working together and learning from each other's experiences, we can continuously improve our assessment practices and better support student learning in our respective subjects."</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 5: Student Engagement and Reflection</b>	
Participant 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighted the role of formative assessments in promoting student engagement and self-reflection</li> <li>• "Formative assessments contribute to student engagement by providing opportunities for active participation, self-reflection, and peer interaction."</li> </ul>
Participant 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussed the impact of well-designed formative assessments on student motivation and self-directed learning</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "I have observed that well-designed formative assessments lead to increased student motivation and self-directed learning. When students receive constructive feedback and have opportunities to improve, they develop a growth mindset and become more engaged in the learning process."</li></ul>
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