A MIXED METHODS INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN CYPRUS ON THE PURPOSES AND APPROACHES OF ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

The role of assessment in education has been vital, since the earliest establishment of formal education. Though assessment in its early history was used only as a measurement instrument, alternative assessment of student achievement has arrived on the scene the past two decades. It is accepted that assessment can be used for learning also known as Formative Assessment. In this context, many studies have emerged worldwide investigating students’ and teachers’ perceptions on assessment approaches and purposes as these will affect their practices. The current study uses a Sequential Mixed Methods design to investigate perceptions on the purposes of students’ assessment in general and the assessment framework specific for the Modern Greek language subject within the New National Curriculum in Cyprus (NNC). The methods involved two questionnaires; the one administered to Greek language teachers (N=95) followed by 7 individual interviews and the other administered to lower secondary school students (N=599) followed by three group interviews involving 15 students in total. The qualitative data helped explain and build upon initial quantitative results while involving people from the same sample. Results are discussed in light of other research showing that the perceptions of teachers and students are in alignment with the current shift of assessment to be used for enhancing teaching and learning. Both parties tend to agree with the legitimate purposes of assessment. Teachers and students would like to use the elements of Formative Assessment as promoted by the NNC but feel that there is inadequate training, a lack of literature and concrete examples on how to put these elements into practice.
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1 Introduction

The idea of assessment to support learning is not new. However, it was not until the late 1980s when the idea that classroom assessment practices could both enhance or even limit student learning began to gain widespread acceptance (Wiliam, 2011a). Drawing on developments in the fields of socio-cultural learning theory, metacognitive and self-regulation theory, a number of writers (Heritage, 2013; Sadler, 1989; Black and Wiliam, 1998a, b; Torrance and Pryor, 1998) began to argue more strongly that the learner had to be assigned a key role in the assessment process. Of central importance was the need for the learner to be able to assess and improve the quality of the work produced through the application of the skills of self-monitoring and self-regulation (Dixon and Haigh, 2009). As a result, during the 1990s the concept of assessment for learning first appeared in the assessment literature and has now become a part of the discourse of assessment (Gardner, 2006 cited in Dixon and Haigh, 2009). A major change in approaches to assessment is the shift to view assessment not only as a means to an end, to determine measurement and thus certification (as it has generally been in the past) but also as “a tool for learning” (Dochy and McDowell, 1997, p.279). As stated by Biggs (1996) assessment can only steer learning when there is a constructive alignment between learning, instruction and assessment. Assessment practices can be extremely powerful in hindering or enhancing students’ learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Wiliam, 2011a). Formative Assessment holds great potential for linking assessment with learning leading to improved achievement for all (Wiliam, 2011a), but especially to low achievers according to Black and Wiliam(1998a).

It is accepted that there should be a balance between high and low stakes assessment and efforts should be refocused on a new overarching belief: “a balance between standardized tests of learning and classroom assessment for learning” (Stiggins, 2004, p.26; Stiggins, 2007). This is not straightforward or easy, as McMillan (2000) states, because competing purposes, uses and pressures result in tension for teachers and administrators as they make assessment-related decisions. Generally the term ‘high stakes assessment’ is used to define a single, standardized process which has important consequences because it is usually used.
for determining the progress of a child after a long period of time while the results can be used for showing a child’s level, promoting the child to the next grade or for giving diplomas (Isaacs, Zara, Herbert, Coombs and Smith, 2013). Usually results can be comparable between students because they are standardized.

Current research into assessment as a tool to support student learning is increasingly focused on how this support is perceived (Pat-El, Tillema, Segers.M and Vedder, 2013). As also stated by Butler and McMunn (2006), for improving teachers’ assessment practices we should first examine their beliefs that inspire these practices. As much as policy makers want to implement some changes which are persuaded to be good for their educational system, if students and teachers do not perceive them as meaningful and helpful, most probably they are not going to apply them. Changes in perceptions may even have to occur first before any practical changes occur in students’ and teachers’ practices because the way they perceive things, is closely related to how they will treat them. Also, as mentioned by Shepard (2000) in order for the assessment framework to be reformed the teachers’ perceptions on assessment must change accordingly. The decision to involve students in this study was made due to equal emphasis given in research to both teachers’ and students’ perceptions. For example several other countries such as the U.S investigate students’ perceptions in order to evaluate the quality of educational policy and practice as exemplified by the “No Child left behind” policy (McInerney et al. 2009). In New Zealand a major project called Assess to Learn Professional Development Project (AtoL PD) has its foundations in the belief that students’ opinion is what counts the most. This draws on the work of Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) who posed the question: “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinions matters?” (cited in Smardon and Bewley, 2007, p.1).

As perceptions on assessment, in Cyprus were largely ignored by researchers, it was decided to generate quantitative data in order to establish some baselines about main perceptions on the purposes of assessment as well as what do students and teachers associate with the term assessment. The assessment framework in Cyprus is changing as part of a large-scale curriculum change called the New National Curriculum (NNC) the implementation of which started in 2010. One of the main aims of the New National
Curriculum (NNC) strategy is to associate more fundamentally assessment with instruction. Through revising the literature for the Cypriot context it was revealed to me that practitioners are trying to shift assessment to be used for learning and while at the moment there is no literature on students’ and teachers’ perception on the reformed assessment framework in Cyprus this study intends to develop a basis and a starting point in this area as well. Thus, the importance of this study and its originality lies in the fact that it is the first study undertaken in Cyprus for considering teachers’ perceptions about assessment on a large scale, and it is also the first study considering students’ perceptions on assessment. It is also the first attempt in Cyprus to capture the perceptions of teachers and students on the assessment framework of the NNC. Since the reform was implemented only a year before the collection of the data, this thesis is capturing initial perceptions.

The NNC is being implemented in all levels of compulsory and non-compulsory education (primary to upper secondary, Year 1-12, age 6-18). In an attempt to narrow the focus of this study; as according to the literature assessment perceptions and practices are proven to vary according to the subject and grade levels (Zhang and Stock, 2003), this study is focused only on lower secondary (Year 7,8,9 age 12-15) and the reform in the subject of Modern Greek Language. My specific interest in the Greek Language lies in my background as a Greek language teacher. Greek Language is given much attention by the Ministry of Education and Culture as it is a central element of the Cypriot curriculum, leading to the maximum number of teaching hours a subject can be given in the Cypriot system which is 5 teaching hours per week (Eurydice Database for Education, 2007/2008). My research focuses on Cyprus because it is my home country, thus I have experience of the curriculum as a student and as a teacher. The specific interest in lower secondary lies in the fact that in 2011-2012 when the collection of data took place the NNC had only been implemented in a piloting form in primary and lower secondary schools.

My focus on assessment started in 2008-2009 as it was introduced to me as one of the ‘Contemporary Issue in Education’ when I was undertaking an MSc on ‘Educational Research Methods’. This resulted in the research for my dissertation ‘A case study on Formative Assessment in Upper Secondary Schools in Cyprus’ (2009, unpublished). The purpose of that study was to explore if the elements of Formative Assessment (FA) were in
use taking the case of only two upper secondary schools in Nicosia, Cyprus. Case study was chosen as the best methodology approach for that study, which involved six students and four teachers. The methods undertaken were: four observations of one Greek language lesson of the teachers who were interviewed and one group interview including six students. The findings had shown that all four interventions of Formative Assessment (a more analytical discussion on the interventions is going to be held on the next chapter) are appreciated by both parties and are partially known but not well established thus not much in use. No generalisations were made because of the small sample included (Solomonidou, 2009, unpublished). The lack of research within the Cypriot context and indeed the lack of teacher training in using Formative Assessment suggest that it was not in much use prior the NNC.

This thesis included a much larger sample than the dissertation mentioned above in order for results to be generalisable. More specifically it included 95 Greek language teachers completing questionnaires and seven of them interviewed. The students’ sample included 599 students from lower secondary schools successfully completing questionnaires while 15 were interviewed in three groups, each one composed of students from the same age level. More detail on the sample is given in a later section.

1.1 Cypriot educational context

Education in Cyprus is divided into four levels: pre-primary (age 4-6), primary (age 6-12), and secondary which is divided into lower –gymnasium- (age 12-15) and upper -lyceum- (age 15-18). There are two types of secondary schools with those being the public and the private. In the upper secondary there is one more division including technical and vocational schools between public schools. The technical and vocational is aiming to provide the local industry with craftsmen and technicians. All of the laws regarding payment for schooling and compulsory attendance were developed in 1993 under law 24(I)/1993. According to this law education is compulsory until the end of lower secondary education. Education is provided free of charge for all primary and secondary public
schools. Children attend seven lessons every day from Monday to Friday each one lasting for forty-five minutes, this structure being centrally determined (Eurydice Database for Education, 2007/2008).

The broader educational objectives according to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) are in unity with the general objectives as discussed later, set by other Western/European countries and are in keeping with the educational demands of the 21st century. The general educational objectives that govern the operation of schools in the secondary general sector as can be found in MoEC and in the commission of European Unities are: The assimilation of national identity and cultural values, the promotion of the universal ideas of freedom, justice and peace, the nurturing of love and respect for fellow human beings in order to promote mutual understanding and democracy, the development of skills and abilities for the needs and challenges of the modern world and the development of skills and abilities for lifelong learning, academic studies and the world of work (Brussels, 2008; Eurydice, 2008/9, p.121, Committee documentation, 2008). Some of the differences within Cyprus compared to other European countries reflect Cyprus’s contextual issues. While other countries after World War II developed in peace Cyprus has suffered from colonization, coup, military invasion and military occupation in 1974. This made the objectives of education more focused on values such as democracy, race and humanitarian ideals (Koutselini, 1997).

A large-scale change of the curriculum was decided in 2008 and it has been partly implemented from the school year 2010-2011. The name ‘New National Curriculum’ (NNC) is used to describe the reform of the whole educational system to achieve better standards. The main reforms concern:

- “the mission and the objectives of education
- the central pedagogical principles
- the principles for the organisation and implementation of the curriculum at every level and in each module,
- the specific objectives of the curriculum,
- the content of the curriculum
- the curriculum for every level and subject
This study is focused specifically on the *indicators for success and the ways of assessment* mentioned above though most of the aforementioned points are interrelated. A conference presentation by Vasileiou and Michaelides (2012) devoted to similarities and differences between the NNC and the previous curriculum within the primary Cypriot public schools suggests that one of the most important alterations is that in the old curriculum assessment suggestions were in unity for all the subjects but within the NNC different assessment approaches are suggested for each subject. In addition, in the old curriculum, assessment was seen as something that involved mostly the teacher and the educational system but in the new curriculum assessment is seen as something that students should be involved in to enhance their learning. The major conclusions based on the Vasileiou and Michaelides (2012) study is that in the previous curriculum as modified in 1996, assessment was uniformly approached and the nature of each subject was not taken into consideration. In the NNC each subject taught manages assessment in a different way and the NNC committees responsible for each subject defines assessment differently and gives different approaches, uses and practices. Though the Vasileiou and Michaelides (2012) content analysis mainly involved documents referring to primary schools, the same philosophy of NNC applies to secondary schools. Some basic reform approaches suggested for assessment both prior and again emphasised for all subjects in the NNC are: the use of portfolios, collection of reflective comments, improvement of self- and peer- assessment methods in and outside the classroom, continuous, regular assessment, daily evaluation of oral participation, and students’ involvement in the teaching/learning process (Eurydice, 2008; Vasileiou and Michaelides, 2012; Hatzisavvides, 2010).

The most drastic innovation of the NNC, which is focused on reforming the assessment framework, is considered to be the division of the school year in two semesters instead of
three for the ultimate purpose of reducing the number of end of term tests from three to two. This change is aiming to ultimately give more space for teachers to use the suggested methods of assessment on a more frequent basis beyond the testing. Assessment procedures in the NNC are focused on the development of Formative Assessment or Assessment for Learning (AfL) but these umbrella terms are not used with a consistency within the Cypriot context neither used regularly. As discussed later, the tendency in Cyprus is to discuss the four interventions of FA separately.

1.2 Background information concerning the ‘New National Curriculum (NNC) for Secondary Education’

The Cypriot reform to be discussed concerns a major national curriculum revision as mentioned earlier, which has shaped the ‘New National Curriculum’. In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Culture selected a Committee named “Committee for the configuration of the curriculum” (ΕΔΑΠ – Επιτροπή Διαμόρφωσης Αναλυτικών Προγραμμάτων) made up of academics and specialists in curriculum issues with the authorization to set out guidelines, general objectives and expected educational outcomes for the design of new curricula and syllabi for all levels from pre-primary education to primary and end of secondary education. This Committee submitted a set of objectives and expected outcomes for the public educational sector in December 2008. In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a number of sub-committees made up of subject specialists and practitioners in the field of education with instructions to design new curricula and syllabi per subject/area based on its broader recommendations (Eurydice, 2008/9).

The rationale for the change of the Curriculum was created mainly by national and international reports which suggested that the Curriculum of Cyprus should be modernized. Key reports are the “Report for the Educational Reform” and the “UNESCO Report” referring to the Cypriot educational context (year undertaken, not known) (National Curriculum, 2010b, http://www.moec.gov.cy/analytika_programmata/istoriko.html, my translation). Another reason for the commissioning of the review of the educational system
was the entry of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004 and the need to follow its main guidelines (Eurydice, 2008/9). Thus in 2008 the council of Ministers decided to review the curriculum from pre-primary to upper secondary education. To accomplish this goal they set up the Committee for the configuration of the curriculum (committee named above) which is composed by nine experts including the president named George Tsiakalos (Γιώργος Τσιακάλος), Professor of the Pedagogical Institute of Primary education at the Aristotelion University of Thessaloniki (Greece) and the other members being Simphis Mpouzakis (Σήφης Μπουζάκης), Professor of the Pedagogical Institute of Primary education University of Patra (Greece), Mairy Koutselini (Μαίρη Κουτσελίνη), deputy Professor and head of the department of Education in the University of Cyprus, Michalinos Zempylas (Μιχαλίνος Ζεμπύλας), assistant professor of the Open University of Cyprus, Eric Erotocritou (Έρικ Ερωτοκρίτου), former head of Technical and Vocational Education, Athena Michaelidou (Αθηνά Μιχαήλιδου), chief of the department of educational research at the Pedagogical Institute, Margarita Kousathana (Μαργαρίτα Κουσαθανά), head of the Experimental School University of Athens (Greece) until 20/10/2008, George Georgiou (Γιώργος Γεωργίου), teacher in primary education, George Zisimos (Γιώργος Ζήσιμος), teacher in secondary education.

The main differences between the ‘New National Curriculum’ and the old curriculum are described as being:

“The curriculum for every subject will be continued from the first grade of primary school until the first grade of Lyceum. Thus there will be coherence between stages and any gaps will be overcome. They (students) are intending to develop skills and competences which are demanding for the new knowledge society as well as create properties which a modern, active citizen should have”


The main skills and competences which are in demand for the 21st century are considered by Cypriot policy makers, the Committee and people responsible for the reformation to be: creativity, critical thinking and reflective use of knowledge, ability to transform theory into
practice, ability to co-operate with others, prudent use of technology, ability to resolve problems or find alternative solutions and the capability of finding alternative theories and having interpersonal skills. This is in accordance with what it is claimed in the international literature as ‘skills and abilities of the 21st century’ (Kellaghan, 2001).

The Committee suggests that the reform is distanced from any traditional approaches which consider the change of the curriculum just as a synonym of expanding or reducing the material of the subject which needs to be taught (Eurydice, 2008/9). Teaching and learning is suggested to be seen not as a one way process or as something that is happening to the children. While the committee emphasises the aforementioned, apparently one of the major changes in this NNC is to reduce the material to be taught.

The change of the curriculum is of central importance to the whole educational system according to Cypriot policy makers. This is because any change in assessment or in the teaching material or even in the infrastructure of the school is believed to have their foundations in changes of the curriculum. Thus in 1970 where lots of changes started happening in the foundations and conceptual framework of education, they were characterised mainly by the phrase “any educational change is the curriculum change” (National Curriculum for Greek 2010, p. 10, my translation). Developments in learning theories are argued to have affected the curriculum, also changing classroom assessment methods although traditional testing is still apparent. Shepard (2000) argues that instruction (at least in its ideal form) should be realised through a reformed vision of the curriculum. However, Wiliam (2011c) points out that the starting point for curriculum change should not be the curriculum itself but the teachers’ pedagogy (the way they teach). The reformed curriculum in the U.S, in Cyprus and in many other European countries has developed the principle that ‘all students can learn’ in antithesis with older curriculum theories which held the belief that only a group of elites could master demanding subject matter. The reformed curriculum in most Western European countries and the U.S also emphasises equal opportunities for high quality instruction and that school learning should be connected with the outside world. Furthermore, the association with social efficiency curricula in which the schools were managed like factories, educational objectives used to be carefully specified based on job analysis and scientific measurement was used to sort pupils by ability based
on IQ tests and objective tests were used to measure achievement (Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007; Kellaghan, 2001; Shepard, 2000). Learning is now seen as an active process “of mental construction and sense making” (Shepard, 2000 p.6) mainly referred to as cognitive constructivism. Additionally, the notion of the school being a small culture in itself which should represent and prepare students for real-world settings brings a lot of changes to the extent that school should be authentic and representative of society.

The “New National Curriculum for Secondary Education” is somewhat an exception to the “centre-periphery” model which characterised the Cypriot Educational system until recently (Committee documentation, 2006). By ‘centre-periphery’ model we are referring to the central role of the government upon the educational system and upon schools which were considered as government and not community institutions. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) was solely responsible for educational policy making, the administration of education and the enforcement of educational laws for all public schools from primary to secondary and higher education (Committee documentation, 2006). The year 2008-2009 was named, “The year of educational reform” and this project was seen as a public one for the first time. Though the MoEC has employed the committee mentioned earlier to reform the curriculum in all subjects, everybody who is involved in the educational system and is interested in education could contribute to this procedure through an interactive platform from the MoEC’s website and some meetings that were held before the final reformation. Additionally, the committee has been publishing all of its concerns, discussions and thoughts in order for the public to be able to contribute by suggesting methods and ideas or just discussing some subjects. Furthermore, lots of meetings took place with teacher committees, political parties, parents’ committees and school staff for discussion (Committee documentation, 2008; Tsiakalos, 2008). It is estimated that over 50 University Teachers and 400 active school teachers cooperated in this procedure. The formula of including practitioners in consultation was interesting because according to researchers “curriculum change is unlikely to be successful unless it actively engages the ‘practitioners who are the foot-soldiers of every reform aimed at improving student outcome’ (Cuban, 1998, p.459 cited in Priestley and Sime, 2005 p.475). The open discussion lasted for a little more than a month and the 21 subcommittees were supposed to
acknowledge the suggestions and take them into account before the final form of the NNC was shaped. To what extent this actually happened in practice remains unknown to the researcher. The only obvious impact of ‘the public’ on the final formation of their syllabus based on the NNC is apparent from the fact that in the first stage of the teachers’ Training (as discussed later) teachers are responsible for co-operating with their trainees and supporters for the completion of the teaching proposals. This though concerns a small number of teachers (360 in total, one from each lower secondary school on every 17 subjects) who took part in the first-trial phase in 2010-2011 training programme. The rest of the teachers who implemented the NNC in 2011-2012 had to follow these guidelines (Office for the Configuration of the Curriculum, 2010).

1.3 Framework of assessment system in Cyprus

Primary Teachers in Cyprus are obligated to keep records with grades for each child mainly kept for internal school purposes and monitoring of student achievement and not for formal grade reporting. Assessment becomes more formal in the Gymnasium, (lower secondary, age 12-15) and Lyceum, (upper secondary, age 15-18) where teachers have to inform parents and students of progress and attainment through end of term reports.

At the Gymnasium and the Lyceum, the teacher is responsible both for deciding the content and assigning the grades for assessment. The only exceptions to this are the end of term exams in four core subjects in all levels of secondary education and the Pancyprian Common Examinations taken in the last grade of the lyceum which are used for the entrance to higher education level institutions in Cyprus and Greece. Thus generally Cyprus is considered to have a low stakes assessment policy, due to a lack of external exams and regular standardised testing.

Assessment is based on a number of methods. The various approaches which a teacher is instructed to use include daily evaluation of oral participation, and a pupil’s involvement in the teaching/learning process; assignments composed by a pupil either at home or at school as part of the daily learning process; creative projects undertaken by pupils, either
individually or in groups, on a subject of their choice and under the guidance of the teacher. Short written tests which are given without notice and period-long compulsory written tests which are given with notice are undertaken once or twice in each of the terms. Both are designed by each teacher who is responsible for the content of the test and assigning a grade to students as well as giving them feedback. Written examinations are school wide and are composed through the collaboration of all the teachers in the modules to be examined. They are held every year in June in the subjects of: Modern Greek, History, Mathematics and Physics (see Appendix A).

In the Lyceum the same methods of assessment are apparent with the only exception being the use of portfolios (see Appendix B).

1.4 Background information on the New Assessment system

The year 2010-2011 was considered crucial for the implementation of the new assessment system. The NNC is supposed to give teachers and students more flexibility in time to use alternative methods of assessment. Another main aim of this new assessment system is to reduce the test stress from the children who had to attend two major tests in each subject for their semester grade to be conducted. One of the major changes of the NNC is the elimination of the three semesters which separated the school year and which was in force from the foundations of the educational system until the school year 2009-2010. The school year will now be divided into two semesters, from the beginning of the school year, (mid-September) until the 21st of January. Then the two days following will be free from school for children and at the same time teachers will attend seminars to enhance knowledge on some aspects of the New Curriculum concerning the second semester. The second semester will begin from January 24th until the end of May. Teachers are now expected to undertake continuous and diverse forms of assessment. It is expected that children will care less about the grade and will work harder due to the new alternative methods of assessment which will correspond to the evaluation of differing skills, abilities and knowledge through presentations, interdisciplinary work, projects which are going to be taken into consideration for their official semester grade. Teachers are also expected to have more scope of time for revision in order to observe what has been learned before the test occurs
and take appropriate actions. As stated by Sikka et al. (2007) mandated testing requirements by schools may reduce teacher flexibility and teaching effectiveness due to the time and efforts these require. The minimisation of testing is supposed to give teachers opportunities for feedback to children for enhancing their knowledge and for teachers to take appropriate actions in order to alter any learning gaps (Committee Documentation, 3 September 2010-09-29) (see Appendix C).

By the aforementioned it is clear that some alternative methods of assessment throughout the semester should be incorporated but it seems that the final grade is again of central importance. It feels like Cyprus while trying to follow its European declarations and the European background (Commission of the European Communities, 2008) which suggests Formative Assessment to promote leaning it does not justify or prove how it is going to implement it by what is exposed in the government papers.

To help teachers in the implementation of the NNC some seminars have already been conducted offering teachers the opportunity to get informed about the reform as a whole though more actions were going to take place throughout the year 2011-2012. These actions included informing and training inspectors, executives and active teachers through seminars, conferences and informative days (more details below) (Committee Documentation, Document. No.: 7.1.05.23). The training of the active teachers to meet these objectives will be achieved by the ‘Main Training’ which will be offered through seminars and ‘Continuous Training’ which will provide support inside the school unit. The ‘Main Training took place from the 29th of October 2010 until the 9th of February 2011 for secondary schools. Furthermore, the ‘Main Training’ took place in school hours (8:30-1:00) and covered 15 modules. From every school unit one educator was selected from the Administrator of the school and participated for each of the 15 modules. Each teacher attended three four hour seminars relevant with the content of the new syllabus for his/her module (Committee Documentation, Document. No: ΠΙ 7.7.09.16).
1.5 The Philosophy and Content of the Training

The “New National Curriculum” was partly implemented the school year 2010-2011 by small scale controlled implementation. This year gave the opportunity for a small number of teachers who were trained to implement it and indicate points for modification. Subsequently the NNC took its final form by the end of the school year 2010-2011 in order for its full implementation to take place in 2011-2012. The main objective of the training programme was for active teachers to acknowledge the elements of NNC and the syllabus of their subject (initials, content, and methods) and embrace the new philosophy in order to implement it directly into their teaching practice indicating points for improvement (my translation, see Appendix D). More specifically, the teacher participants of this study have received an average of 8 hours mandatory and non-mandatory training, with the sample varying from people who have received zero hours of training up to 30 hours of training according to their willingness. This is made clearer in table 1.1:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>10.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1-1: Hours of training and frequency of teachers

The next table shows the mean of mandatory and non-mandatory hours teachers have been trained and their years of teaching, collapsed in five groups, group one including teachers with 1-5 years of experience, group 2 including teachers with 6-10 years of experience, group 3 including teachers with 11-15 years of experience, group 4 including 16-20 years of experience and group five including teachers with more than 21 years of experience. According to the table it seems that older teachers underwent less training than less experienced teachers.
Figure 1-1 Mean of teacher training hours and collapsed years of experience

Besides the ‘Main Training’ and the ‘Ongoing Training’ a multiple support inside the school unit was implemented. This was undertaken by Special Consultants in every Course and many other researchers, specialists and people from relevant organisations who took part in the formation of NNC.

In order to gain some more insights it is useful to observe the material given to the Modern Greek language teachers in their initial ‘Main training’ for the NNC as this is the subject under investigation in this thesis. First of all the conceptual framework of the first phase of training was to explain the rationale of the change so the differences and innovations between the old Curriculum system are identified and compared to the NNC. The documents of the main training sessions reveal that not much emphasis was given on the assessment methods but only the general approach and conceptual framework that are also defined elsewhere. This is against research evidence showing that improving teachers’
assessment approaches is much more beneficial to students’ learning and outcome than teaching and training teachers on content knowledge (Wiliam, 2011a). The presentation used for the training shows that just two of the total 98 PowerPoint slides referred to assessment. Through this it was suggested that assessment should be mostly carried out through feedback. Thus a final assessment should not evaluate an end product but the progress that a student has made (known also as ipsative assessment). Furthermore, it is suggested that continuous diagnostic assessment should occur taking the place of old/traditional forms of assessment. Some of the methods to achieve this are considered to be:

“the portfolios, collection of reflective comments and improvement of self- and peer- assessment methods in and outside the classroom” (Hatzisavvides, 2010, my translation).

Implicit in this is the need to develop assessment tests which allow for these opportunities. The aforementioned training presentation, although giving emphasis to the autonomy of the teachers in the classroom it has the form of a simple recipe. I have in mind Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and William (2003) when referring to this because according to these leading theorists: “Any attempt to force adoption of a simple recipe by all teachers would not be effective, and that success would depend on how each could work out his or her own way of implementing change” (Black et al., 2003, p.18). As mentioned earlier, though teachers had a role to play in this reform and they cooperated with policy makers and the committee for the final form of the NNC, this involved only a small number of the total population of teachers while the rest needed to follow these main guidelines.

1.6 Modern Greek Syllabus

Modern Greek is given much attention by the Cypriot curriculum. According to the official syllabus children need to familiarise themselves with the new textual practices and be able to handle digital, figurative and multimodal literacy which dominates the modern society. This is also in accordance with what is suggested by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to characterise the most effective learning environments in innovating schools (OECD, 2008). It is further suggested for students to be
able to interact in multiple semiotic ways such as through language, sound and picture. These approaches are designed to be achieved through ‘critical literacy’ (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010, p.1, my translation).

Some other main goals expected to be achieved through Modern Greek are for students to develop multiple reading practices which will lead to a critical awareness of the world. Furthermore, they are expected to understand the ways a specific linguistic and documental choice imply differing social conditions and ideological formations; understanding the way in which different textual articles function in the framework of a school community and other communities for the negotiation or control of specific ideologies. The syllabus also emphasises the need to broaden the creativity of children through their familiarization with multiple writing practices. ‘Creativity’ is seen as the ability of students to express themselves through their written documents, social relationships with their interlocutor and build ways of resisting modular structures. Students should also develop ‘critical reflection through writing’, meaning the way that humans can control their surroundings through script (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010, p.3-4, my translation). Some of the practical approaches for implementing the aforementioned are: “the subjects that the classroom is involved should come from different sources of written, electronically and oral speech which is produced in several communication conditions. All students should be given the opportunity to produce several species of written or oral speech and addressed to a real listener. The teacher should have the role of the coordinator in the learning procedure. Teachers shall not only depend on the textbook but will have the opportunity to use several other activities according to the stage and age group of the students. Students should be encouraged to work in groups for the several activities of producing written or oral documents. Timeframe of a section should be depended on the classroom and the groups” (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010. p.16-17, my translation).

Suggested forms of assessment categorised by their position in relation to learning are:

1) Initial: for diagnostic reasons (to be informed and plan the next steps)
2) Continuous: For feedback during lessons
3) Final: For evaluating broader parts of learning after long time periods
These forms of assessment imply a fundamental role in relation to assessment with ongoing instruction. Thus we can see that an initial form of assessment is suggested to take place in order to understand the level of students and for teachers to be able to plan the content of their modules based on students’ prior knowledge and abilities. As suggested by Ausubel, half a century ago but still relevant, the most important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows, whilst teachers should discover this, and teach accordingly (Ausubel, 1968, cited in Wiliam, 2011b). Diagnostic assessment is also described by Isaacs et al (2013) as the assessment which ‘identifies characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skill, abilities and any learning difficulties or problems in a new or potential learner with the aim of providing initial advice and guidance both for the learner and the teacher about a particular course of study’ (p.43).

Continuous assessment suggests that assessment should be an everyday procedure taking place during the lessons thus not separated from instruction. In this way teachers shall take into account students’ achievement level and plan on the next steps of teaching and evaluate their own teaching. By using feedback teachers shall be able to inform students on the ‘lost’ knowledge and how to make the appropriate next steps to cover it before proceeding. The emphasis given by the NNC on feedback can be seen in several other educational reforms such as the National Assessment strategy undertaken in New Zealand in 2004 where the notion of quality feedback has been emphasised as a critical and vital aspect of teachers’ practice (Dixon and Haigh, 2009). Similarly Isaacs et al (2013) describe continuous assessment as a classroom assessment undertaken by teachers in multiple ways to observe what the learners already know and give them feedback to improve while also observing which children will need further support.

The final form is suggested to play a minor role but useful for evaluating broader parts of learning, for informing third parties and to establish if a child can move on to the next level.

The introduction of this thesis has explained the need for this study. It has given an idea of the Cypriot educational context, some background information concerning the NNC, the assessment framework in Cyprus and information on how this assessment is to be reformed. It ended with some specific information on the philosophy and content of the training and some more details on the assessment reform of the Modern Greek language as this is the
module investigated in this thesis. As the new assessment approaches suggested through the NNC challenge teachers’ assessment skills and there is a total lack of research in Cyprus considering this area, it was considered as very important to firstly investigate teachers’ and students’ perceptions for reasons mentioned several times above. In addition this area is given much attention by the research community in other countries. It is now clear that the research problem for this study is to investigate how students and teachers perceive all the interventions of assessment based on suggestions of the NNC, investigate what they largely perceive assessment to involve while also investigating their conceptions of the purposes of assessment in all modules as these were described by other researchers before and summarised in four major ones for teachers and five major conceptions for students (the major conceptions are explained in detail in the next section). This study can be considered as an initial one in this field. Based on its results more studies shall occur focused specifically on practical strategies in helping teachers implement assessment which is in alignment with the NNC and the international trend for assessment to be used for learning, interwoven with instruction.
2 Literature Review

2.1 Assessment

2.1.1 Introduction

The chapter will give the definition of key concepts of assessment. A more analytical discussion will follow on the nature of Summative and Formative Assessment, the changes on the topic over time, issues, debates and controversies. Then details will be given on the interventions of Formative Assessment as they are strongly related to NNC. A literature review on students’ and teachers’ perceptions will follow. The literature led the author to the research questions which are:

1) a. What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?
   b. What assessment methods do Cypriot teachers associate with the term assessment?
2) a. What are Cypriot students’ perceptions of assessment purposes?
   b. What assessment methods do students associate with the term assessment?
3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?
4) What are students’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

2.1.2 The importance of assessment globally

In the past two decades the growth of links between countries in the context of globalisation has had an impact on the relative development of educational systems by means of improving their administration and planning factors and as a consequence on their assessment systems too. There has been a remarkable growth in assessment since the late 1990 in its use to measure the achievement outcomes of national educational systems (Kellaghan, 2001). National assessment is designed and implemented within individual countries whereas international assessments require the countries participating to cooperate
in following similar procedures and using the same instruments in order for comparisons of the educational level between-countries to be made. The most obvious example is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (more details on the programme are given below).

At an international level the ‘International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’ (IEA) is one of the leaders in the field for comparative international studies of achievement founded in 1958 by UNESCO. The International studies are mainly concerned with basic subjects such as reading, mathematics, geography and science achievement (Goldstein, 2004; Kellaghan, 2001; Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2007). The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) is also an important organisation which undertakes lots of comparative studies. The OECD has developed principles for desirable social development and thus contributes to defining the future direction Western economies are to take in their development (Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2007; McGaw, 2008).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) created in 1998 is an ongoing international comparative survey study led by the OECD and designed to monitor the outcomes of education systems every three years in terms of achievement of 15 years old students in reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy in members of the OECD and other countries (Kellaghan, 2001; McGaw, 2008; Turner and Adams, 2007). Up until 2009, 65 countries have participated in one or more PISA surveys (Turner and Adams, 2007). PISA is intended to look at knowledge and skills for life and is not intended as a study of how far students have `mastered a specific school curriculum’ (Kirsch et al., 2002, p.14 cited by Goldstein, 2004) and it follows that `reading proficiency among the PISA population cannot be so directly related to the reading curriculum and reading instruction’. In spite of such statements, PISA does claim to `monitor the development of national education systems by looking closely at outcomes over time’ (Kirsch et al., 2002, p.13 cited by Goldstein, 2004). Throughout the various PISA reports, and in many commentaries, there is the assumption that direct comparisons of educational systems are possible. The philosophy of such global tests are that through comparison of results teachers should help students improve their outcomes in the context of being prepared for participating in
tomorrow’s economies as education has long been viewed as a vital determinant of economic well-being (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007; Kellaghan, 2001). On the other hand, someone could claim that overemphasis given in achievements globally makes the development of knowledge and skills another investment and “the purpose of education becomes ‘winning the global competition’ and educational achievements ‘a mimetic of global capitalist competition’” (Rautalin and Alasuutari, 2007; Kellaghan, 2001, p.95).

It is argued that accountability tests have negative effects and prevent thoughtful practices inside the classroom, although important for external reasons. The discussion on globalization is useful to the extent that such countries (for example many E.U countries and the U.S) also attempt to develop both Formative and Summative Assessment. Shepard claims that assessment’s form and content must change in accordance with the development of learning theories and the curriculum in all disciplines. Generally the reform of assessment in its content and form suggests a broader range of assessment tools so as to reflect changed learning goals (McMillan, 2000). Thus Shepard, (2000 p.8) suggested more use of “directly connected assessment to ongoing instruction’ and more open-ended questions in contrast with closed questions which promote memory recall and prevent critical thinking and reasoning. Shepard also argues that “good assessment tasks are interchangeable with good instructional tasks” emphasising that there is a clear link between learning and assessment (Shepard, 2000 p.8). The main point to emphasise from Shepard’s study, and it is indeed what many countries are trying to implement, is the need for diversity in assessment alongside a more explicit link to learning in all contexts.

Globalization appears to have led many countries to suggest assessment systems which enshrine Formative Assessment but which actually still emphasize the importance of Summative in relation to standards and international comparisons.

In contrast to countries giving emphasis to external testing policy such as the UK, in Cyprus there is no compulsory large-scale assessment system mandated by the government for national or international level though students can voluntarily participate in international exams or national competitions. A discussion held in 2000 in Cyprus tried to implement national assessment in order to monitor school performance but was never adopted (Michaelides and Brown, 2010). In the national level no tests are undertaken for comparisons to be made between schools beyond the ‘Pancyprian Common Examinations’
taken in the last stage of upper secondary which are used for the entry selection in Higher Education. This is not to argue that Cyprus is isolated from the international pattern. Cyprus became a full member of the European Union on 1 May 2004 and as an active member participates in lots of International and European programmes and organizations in the Educational sector. Cyprus is a member of a number of international organizations such as: the United Nations (since 1960) and almost all of its specialized agencies; the Commonwealth (1961); the Council of Europe (1961); the World Bank (1961); the World Trade Organisation (1995). Cyprus is also participating in the European Programmes: Eurydice network, Socrates Programme, Lifelong Learning Programme National Agency (LLP), Erasmus programme, Bologna process, Leonardo Da Vinci programme, Study visits, Comenius, Grundvig and Europass (Eurydice, 2008/9). Though an active member of the global community differs in the importance given on external assessment remaining its low stakes policy.

As many other countries, due to the impact of globalization and mainly following the suggestions of the aforementioned European programmes Cyprus is trying to shift assessment to be used for learning, as part of on-going instruction and describes elements of Formative Assessment through the NNC which should be implemented. Although it would have been ideal to have a thorough view of the development of assessment in Cyprus, the lack of research does not allow us to proceed to such an approach. A more extensive discussion on Summative and Formative assessment is to follow, aligned with their main features, and a critique of their relationship, as well as their role in the Cypriot context.

2.1.3 **Summative assessment**

Generally there are several types of summative assessment including formal high stakes examinations and tests. According to the purpose for which they are going to be used, they differ in their level of difficulty, the timing and their administrative procedures. They can be norm referenced or criterion referenced; occasionally they can be interpreted by using both methods while they usually result in a score or mark. Many countries require learners to take standardized tests at some point in their educational career (Isaacs et al, 2013).
‘Summative assessment’ (SA) or ‘Assessment of Learning’ is a summary of the achievement of students. It is essential for informing parents on attainment levels to give certification, or for confirmation that a child can move to the next level of education as well as producing an end of year report (high-stakes). It is usually taken at the end of a course or a module of work (Broadfoot, 2007; Sadler, 1989; Wood, 2009). The Task group on assessment and testing in the UK (DES, 1988) report defined Summative Assessment as one of the purposes of assessment which is used “for the recording of the overall achievement of a pupil in a systematic way” (DES, 1987, para 27 cited in Singh, 1999).

Summative Assessment usually takes place at certain intervals when achievement is reported and it relates to progression in learning compared against public criteria. Results from different students can be compared, thus it requires methods that are as reliable as possible involving quality-assurance procedures (Broadfoot, 2007; Harlen, 2007).

Summative Assessment, standard setting and accountability are based upon the assumption that they can monitor and improve the practice of teachers ultimately leading to improvement in students’ performance (Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Harlen, 2007; Kennedy, 1999; Stiggins, 2004). On the other hand, review of the research evidence concerning the impact of Summative Assessment on students’ learning shows:


Whilst Summative Assessment is essential in some contexts a dramatic change in approaches to assessment has been the shift to view assessment not only as a means to an end, to determine measurement and thus certification but assessment to be used as “a tool for learning” (Dochy and McDowell, 1997, p.279).
2.1.4 Formative Assessment and Assessment for Learning

The terms Formative Assessment (FA) and Assessment for Learning (AfL) although used by many researchers interchangeably (Wiliam, 2011b), it is wrong and simplistic to equate Assessment for Learning with Formative Assessment (FA) and Assessment of Learning with Summative Assessment (SA) (Bennett, 2009). AfL and AoL are usually used to describe the purposes for which an assessment is carried out and initially designed for whilst FA and SA are used to denote the way they are eventually used (Wiliam, 2011a,b).

The definition as described by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2004, p.10) is:

“Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information that teachers and their students can use as feedback in assessing themselves and one another and in modifying the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes ‘Formative Assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs.”

There are several reasons for deciding to use the term Formative Assessment instead of Assessment for Learning and the term Summative Assessment instead of Assessment of Learning in this thesis (except when the studies under discussion do differently).

Terminology used in Cyprus is not so advanced nor is it used in consistency. Commonly, the term ‘concurrent’ assessment is used almost as a synonym of assessment for learning. They do not consistently use any umbrella terms beyond in some individual occasions like the NNC training and the pre-service training of teachers where they used the term FA to denote some interventions to be used. Those interventions are the use of questioning, peer and self-assessment, the formative use of summative tests and feedback. These were interventions mentioned even prior to the NNC thus teachers were relatively familiar with them.
2.1.5 Formative Assessment

Although Formative Assessment has become popular the past two decades, an analytical discussion will follow with historical sequence on the development of the terminology of Formative Assessment as it starts as early as 1967 initially addressed by Scriven.

Scriven makes the distinction between Formative and Summative assessment by arguing that although assessment is a single process, SA is a process of assessment which encapsulates all the evidence given up to a certain point while FA is the same process as Summative Assessment (SA) with feedback which indicates the gap between the actual and the desired level (Scriven, 1967). Though Scriven gives importance to feedback as being the central element which distinguishes the two, Bloom, Hastings and Madaus (1971) communicate the distinction between FA and SA based on different purposes, timing and level of generalisation. They state that the differences are not in the assessment per se but to the functions they serve. Thus by ‘purpose’ they basically mean that FA focuses on helping the students learn while SA focuses on giving students grades. As far as timing is concerned, Formative Assessment is considered to be more frequent, focusing on smaller units of instruction thus it could be argued that it is continuous while Summative Assessment occurs at the end of a course. Furthermore, FA is considered to focus on narrow components of proficiency while SA focuses on broader abilities and thus the level of generalisation would be different.

Another initial study was published by Sadler (1989) aiming to establish a general theory on Formative Assessment which was until then, absent. Sadler also considers feedback to be one of the main elements of Formative Assessment. Feedback is considered as information on how to close the ‘gap’ between the actual level of a child and the desired level of achievement. Feedback becomes formative only when the procedures to close the gap are made and the gap is altered to achieve the desired level (Ramaprasad, 1983, Sadler, 1989). Sadler gives importance to the fact that students must hold a concept of quality, shortly to know the criteria that they must acquire to achieve the desired level, acknowledge on what stage/level they stand and have strategies to monitor their learning as it is happening. These skills have to be built by students and thus teachers have to firstly
communicate their knowledge to students as to what constitutes quality (Sadler, 1989; 1998). In this context feedback must involve both the teacher and the child. According to Askew, 2000 the teacher is responsible for defining the goal, judging the achievement and giving effective feedback on how to close the gap but the child has to take advantage of the feedback and actually recover, or develop the new knowledge (Askew, 2000). Though assessment will be over by this stage, the Summative tests can be used in a Formative way when certain criteria are in place. The criteria for using summative tests in a formative way are discussed later on this chapter while trying to maintain the focus of this section in a more general definition of Formative Assessment with historical sequence.

The difference between Scriven’s and Sadler’s terminology is not very obvious as they both emphasise ‘feedback’. As stated by Taras (2005, p.474) “…the greatest difference between Scriven and Sadler is that the latter presents SA and FA as having distinctive ideals and processes (although the differences in process are never stated explicitly), while the former accepts different roles, but notes that one inextricably leads to the other”.

Though the discussion on Formative Assessment starts as early as 1967 with Scriven, the preliminary force for change in the assessment system, at least in England, came from Ofsted in 1996, an external inspection agency which highlighted the lack of day to day assessment and the ineffective use of comments in feedback. This report also raised the issue of a lack of informing pupils through marking of the standards they need to achieve and the lack of information given to pupils in order to know what they need to do to improve (Ofsted, 1996). In addition, the influential studies of Black and Wiliam (1998a, b) had an impact not only in the modification of the English educational context but it had an impact to the whole research community and consequently in educational systems in other countries as well.

Black and Wiliam (1998a) reviewed the international literature on Formative Assessment concluding that it is an important classroom intervention which can lead to significant learning gains by all age groups, subjects and levels (especially helping low achievers) and thus raise standards of students’ attainment. In England the Assessment Reform Group (1999) played a dominant role in changing classroom assessment making it more linked to learning. In the international context Formative Assessment is supported by the authorities
of each country responsible for assessment and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which considers it a powerful tool for learning (OECD, 2005 cited in Kennedy et al. 2008). The OECD’s policy support for Formative Assessment is an action that can also be found in many Western countries and U.S (Kennedy et al. 2008). In Cyprus there is no single authority responsible for classroom assessment, though the impact of several Educational European organisations participating as a member and the emphasis given by these organisations regarding FA affected the ‘Committee for the configuration of the curriculum’ to give emphasis to changing the assessment framework to a more Formative nature as part of the New National Curriculum.

Though Formative Assessment was uncritically accepted for many years, studies since 2005 have begun to critique the notion of Formative assessment as unproblematic as well as questioning the distinctions between Formative and Summative assessment. It seems that the one aspect characterising FA which all researchers agree on is that it could be an ongoing, everyday process (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, b; Black et al. 2003; Broadfoot, 2007; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Harlen and James, 1997; Harlen, 2007; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008; Singh, 1999; Rowe, 2006; Stiggins, 2007; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). All the other elements of FA and even its nature have led to a great deal of debate.

2.1.6 Critiquing Formative Assessment and its relationship with Summative Assessment

The distinction between Formative and Summative Assessment is prioritized in theoretical discussions (Newton, 2007). Taras (2008, p.174) claims that “It is this desire to suppress the negative and destructive side effect of assessment which devalues personal worth and future prospects, that has prompted many educationalists to see Summative Assessment in a negative light and promote Formative Assessment”. It seems that Brooks, (2002), Torrance, (1993), Black and Wiliam (1998a), Wiliam, 2000, Torrance and Pryor (2001) also share the same belief.

Newton (2007) makes an attempt to clarify the conceptual framework around the term Formative Assessment and its distinction with Summative. He claims that Summative Assessment is a form of assessment result while Formative Assessment applies to the kind
of use of an assessment result. Newton also suggests that “the distinction that has been drawn between Formative and Summative Assessment has been extraordinarily effective in carving an identity for assessment undertaken by students and teachers in the service of learning ... though the distinction has been extraordinarily ineffective in carving the nature of assessment at its joints” (Newton, 2007, p.151). Newton’s argument is that the distinction between Summative and Formative Assessment helped teachers and students to see assessment as an on-going process which is not separated from teaching and learning though the distinction, to some extent was unsuccessful in advancing the theory of assessment itself. Newton in his attempt to advance the theory of assessment suggests that we should not talk about ‘summative purpose’ or a ‘formative judgment’. There is not any summative purpose there is just a summative judgment/ result/ a sum up. “The term ‘summative’ basically evokes the nature of the assessment judgment typically used to support these purposes: a summing up” (Newton, 2007, p. 156). In the same way we cannot talk about a formative judgment but there is a judgment that might be used for formative purposes. Thus we have to use assessment language with greater accuracy. He also emphasises the fact that different purposes require different assessment design decisions and that there is an importance for system designers to clarify the primary purpose for which results are intended to be used.

Taras (2008, 2009) argues that in addition to having functions and products of assessment both Summative and Formative Assessment are processes. This is in disparity with the definition given above by Newton who does not seem to believe that Summative Assessment is a process but rather just a judgment (a summing up of evidence). Process according to Taras is the mechanism which carries out a judgment. “Assessment can be uniquely summative when the assessment stops at the judgment. It is not possible for assessment to be uniquely Formative; Summative Assessment may be implicit and only the formative focus made explicit, or both can be explicit” (Taras, 2009, p.58-59). By functions of assessment Taras means its intended use (Wiliam, 2000 cited in Taras, 2009). Functions affect the choices of parameters and therefore the criteria and to a lesser extent goals and standards.
Besides the debate going on about Formative and Summative assessment, their relationship and functions, we cannot underestimate the work of Black and Wiliam (1998a, b), Torrance and Pryor (2001) and other researchers and practitioners who promoted Formative Assessment in practice benefiting teachers by giving them concrete examples and tools for using assessment as an integral part of learning. Consequently, in the chapter to follow the main elements of Formative Assessment as described by leading theorists of the field are revealed as well as their role in the NNC.

2.1.7 Main interventions of Formative Assessment and their role in the NNC

As one of the aims of this study is to investigate the reform of assessment within the NNC in the Greek language subject, the specific assessment approaches suggested for this are discussed here. In Cyprus there are no official government or non-government bodies responsible specifically for assessment, and not much literature exists in this area within Cyprus. As a consequence, most of the information given here is from official documents from the Ministry of Education’s website as well as policy announcements.

In the NNC it is stated that ‘Besides evaluating the knowledge achieved, the whole presence of the student in the school should be in mind too: her/his effort, participation, and development of initiatives, creativity and cooperation” (Committee Documentation, Document. No 7.12.02/12. 7.12.15/2; National Curriculum for Greek, 2010, p10 my translation; Eurydice, 2008/9). While summative assessment is criterion referenced or norm-referenced Formative Assessment combines criterion referencing with pupil-referencing (Butler and McMunn, 2006). “This means that a judgment of a pupil’s work or progress takes into account such things as effort put in, the particular context of the pupil’s work and progress that the pupil has made over time” (Harlen and James, 1997, p.370).

It is stated that assessment should be seen as “An integral part of everyday educational procedures” (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010, p.15 my translation) and this again is in the general attitude of Formative Assessment which considers assessment as a minute to minute, day to day process (Bennett, 2011). In the philosophy of the Greek language subject, which is reformed according to the NNC, the relationship between learning and
teaching is being viewed as a dynamic process rather than a one way transmission of knowledge. Children are expected to interact in the classroom, raise questions and actively participate avoiding the notion of being passive learners. Some specific actions for the children to undertake are that students should be responsible to indicate those characteristics and strategies that will allow them to write a specific kind of document with the appropriate tone. This shows an involvement not only in the learning process but in the teaching process too (Askew 2000). In addition the four main elements of Formative Assessment are apparent in the Modern Greek language curriculum.

The work of Black and Wiliam (1998a, b) is central for understanding and implementing Formative Assessment. It highlights four main elements that can be commonly applied. These elements were redeveloped through the KMOFAP King’s Medway Oxford Formative Assessment Project which involved teachers in shaping and developing the initial ideas concluding that Formative Assessment mainly involves:

1) Questioning
2) Feedback through marking
3) Peer and self-assessment and
4) The formative use of summative tests (Black et al. 2003).

Each of these elements is discussed in detail below in light of their role in the Modern Greek language syllabus within the NNC.

1) Questioning

Questions represent a significant investment in time and energy within the classroom. Oral and written questions can be used to establish baselines, test recall, reinforce ideas, monitor progress, challenge misconceptions, and scaffold learning (Wragg, 2003). Brooks stresses the importance of questioning in scaffolding. She claims that oral questioning should build on students’ contribution and challenge their thinking to develop productive areas of investigation and thus extend their learning as well as assessing it (Brooks, 2002). In developing questions for Formative Assessment considerations need to be made to the kind of questions asked.
A great discussion is held on the distinction between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ order questions. ‘Higher’ order questions have been described using alternative terms such ‘rich’ or ‘good’ questions by Wiliam (1999) who claims that they are the questions that provide a ‘window of thinking’ (Wiliam, 1999, p.16 cited in Baroudi, 2007, p.39). On the other hand ‘lower’ order questions are most commonly associated with ‘closed’ questions which do not demand great thinking but only a recall of information. Simple answers arise from lower order questions, while more complex answers arise from higher order questions which demand the recall of information as well as a lot of thinking and reasoning (Wragg, 2003). Marshall and Drummond (2006) also suggest that:

“The questions the teachers ask, which arise from the task, demands that pupils’ progress in their learning, and then apply that new understanding in the next activity in which they engage. In this way a virtual cycle is created” (Marshall and Drummond 2006, p.143).

Questions should not only come from teachers, children should also be encouraged to ask questions in their attempt to understand and self-assess themselves to what they have understood or not. Thus teachers should ensure students that by asking questions they show that they want to learn and understand further (Cowie, 2005). Students should feel that the classroom atmosphere is positive and should not live in fear of negative judgments (Heritage, 2013). By encouraging and training children to ask questions both their understanding and learning can be supported (Black et al. 2003).

Teachers can use several methods to support students’ questioning. The ‘hands down’ method could be one of the methods used where a teacher makes a question and asks for children to keep their ‘hands down’ in order to give a chance to all students to contribute to the lesson. This method also prevents teachers ending up with just a few children talking. Similar to the ‘hands down’ method, is the ‘wait time’ method which was tested by the teachers in the KMOFAP (Kings Medway Oxfordshire Formative Assessment project) and was found to be have a positive impact on learning (Black et al. 2003). Increasing the ‘wait time’ is considered to lead to more students being involved in question-answer discussions and the length of their replies seems to increase (Black et al. 2003).
When techniques such as the above are in place questioning frameworks seem to shift from a behaviouristic model where recall answers were prioritized to a more social constructivist framework taken from cognitive psychology, where a complex construction of factors are apparent and learners are expected to explore their own understanding (Taras, 2009).

Both prior to the NNC and again emphasised through this major reform, questions are considered as a major part of the educational process both orally in the classroom and written in tests. It is stated in the Cypriot context that they should reflect what the students are supposed to learn as well as giving them the opportunity to express their understanding. In addition, it is stated that questioning should demand higher level answers from children for example not just recalling information but elaborating on former knowledge and use metacognition (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010, p.20 my translation). Questions should cover all levels of learning and not just memory recall. The types of questions should be both closed and open ended demanding the development of subjects where students will present knowledge as well as opinion (MoEc: [http://www.schools.ac.cy/eyliko/mesi/themata/nea_ellinika/gym_deigmatika_kritiri_a_axiologisis.html](http://www.schools.ac.cy/eyliko/mesi/themata/nea_ellinika/gym_deigmatika_kritiri_a_axiologisis.html)).

The strategy of children in developing the “ability to raise questions for information they didn’t understand” (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010, p.18, my translation) is explicitly mentioned. This can be seen in a larger pattern on the strategy to promote critical thinking and self-regulation as stated in the international literature (Black and Wiliam 1998b; Klenowski, 1996). For this to be accomplished, one strategy suggested is giving time to children in expressing their understanding as well as giving them space for questioning. It is further suggested for teachers to proceed with the syllabus according to the pace of each classroom (National Curriculum for Greek, 2010 my translation).

2) Feedback

Feedback is considered to be one of the most important elements of FA (Baroudi, 2007; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Black et al.2003; Kennedy et al.2008; Ramaprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1989; Scriven, 1967; Taras, 2005). As discussed earlier Scriven (1967) who was
one of the first to identify Formative Assessment, emphasised that it differs from SA in that it includes feedback (Scriven, 1967). Feedback is basically comments usually from the teacher to the students about their attainment. It can be given orally every day in the classroom process and written after a classroom assessment occurs (Askew, 2000; Black and Wiliam, 1998, Sadler, 1989, Scriven, 1967, Taras, 2005). It is supposed to help children take actions and enhance their learning and understanding. If the appropriate strategies about closing the gap are not taken by students assessment remains summative even when feedback is given and learning is not advanced (Marshall and Drummond, 2006). It can be argued that not all feedback is effective thus there has been a lot of debate about the format of feedback (Brooks, 2002; Heritage, 2013; Smith and Gorard, 2005; Wiliam, 2011).

Feedback is considered to be effective when given in certain ways. Feedback, when provided inappropriately, can lead to negative effects. As stated by Pophan (1987, p 681) “Of course, any effective tool can always be misused. A scalpel that can save lives when used by a skilled neurosurgeon can become a murder weapon in the wrong hands. That possibility, however, should not incline us to outlaw scalpels”. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) by their study confirm the aforementioned statement as they found that feedback actually decreased student performance in a third of the studies analysed when not used in appropriate manners. Emphasis was given by studies investigating feedback’s content and form, as well as how it can be less time consuming while at the same time being helpful for children (Brooks, 2002). For example for less time consuming feedback it is suggested for teachers to make referencing at the end of an assessment paper and use numbers for the relevant mistakes to draw the attention of pupils to specific matters that can be addressed (Brooks, 2002). Some other suggestions for effective feedback are to avoid telling students that they need to improve their work even if that is true, but giving them specific guidance on what they need to do to improve (Wiliam, 2011b). In terms of the contents of feedback it could be evaluative or descriptive as categorised by Tunstall and Gipps (1996).

Evaluative feedback strategies include:

- Giving rewards or punishments,
- Expressing approval and disapproval
Descriptive feedback strategies include:

- Telling children they are right or wrong
- Describing why an answer is correct
- Telling children what they have and have not achieved
- Specifying or implying a better way of doing something and
- Getting children to suggest ways they can improve.

Descriptive feedback is considered as superior to evaluative. As suggested by Crooks (2001), Black and Wiliam (1998b) and Black et al. (2003) feedback should not be given as rewards or grades which enhances ‘ego’ (comparing themselves with others and focusing on their status) but it should stimulate the thinking about their work itself and how to improve it. In that sense task-involving evaluation is more effective than ego-involving evaluation “to the extent that even giving praise can have a negative effect with low achievers” (Black and Wiliam, 1998b, p.13). Additionally, feedback should inform students about both their strengths and weaknesses as well as the appropriate next steps for improvement often referred to as feed-forward (Askew, 2000; Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Black et al. 2003; Broadfoot, 2007; Crooks, 2001; Wiliam, 2011b).

Feedback can include verbal, non-verbal and written comments or a combination of these (Askew, 2000). Research on whether oral or written feedback is superior is divided. Someone could claim that oral feedback is more effective than written (Brooks, 2002) because it is immediate, it is given while it is still relevant, it can be frequent, it gives student immediate chance to respond, it can be given individually as well as in groups. Furthermore, it usually allows the work to be improved before being finalized. On the other hand oral feedback can easily be forgotten while written feedback stays and children can use it in their own space and time (Brooks, 2002). Rawlins (2006) casts doubt about the superiority of oral feedback and in his research students seem to claim that they do not prefer oral feedback and they do not perceive it as effective as written (Rawlins, 2006).

There is a debate in research on whether only feedback should be given on classroom written assessment or only grades or a combination of both. Butler (1988) (cited in Taras, 2009) and Black et al. (2003) seem to argue that feedback by comments but without marks
improve learning gains. Marks in these studies are accused of interfering while children give more attention to the mark and they rarely see the comments. Smith and Gorard (2005) though seem to find opposite results in their study. Their study took place in 2005 in Wales taking as a sample 104 Year 7 pupils from mixed ability groups. Their study seems to suggest that children not only disliked receiving comments only but their progress also seemed to be inferior to those receiving only grades or a combination of both. The journal ‘Research Intelligence’ revealed that Smith and Gorard in their attempt to replicate the study of Black et al (2003) misunderstood the principles of this Formative Assessment procedure while they had not communicated its reality to either the staff or pupils involved in the study (Taras, 2009).

Within the Cypriot context it is suggested that teachers should regularly give oral feedback to children. Teachers having in mind the objectives of the subject should be able to observe children while they are learning and help students who are challenged by one or more aspects of the goal. Subsequently teachers should be able in the term report and ‘final’ assessment not to evaluate the performance of the students as an end product but the improvement and progress of each child (National Curriculum for Greek, p.20, my translation).

Though feedback is named explicitly in the NNC no actual strategies of helping children in taking advantage of it, and actually using it ‘to alter the gap’ (Sadler, 1989) are apparent. Thus no coherent framework for developing learning through feedback is given. The lack of strategies is important because according to the literature as discussed above, several researchers (Black and Wiliam, 1998, Sadler, 1989, Scriven, 1967, cited in Taras, 2005) state that when the appropriate strategies about closing the gap are not implemented assessment remains summative even when feedback is given.

3) Peer and self-assessment

Pupil self-assessment is placed at the heart of Formative Assessment by Black and Wiliam (1998a). “Self-evaluation is a formative process leading to self-development” according to Klenowski (1996, p.3). For self and peer assessment to develop they must take place in an
environment where teaching and learning recognizes the central role of students in the learning process (Broadfoot, 2007). For assessment to shift toward a formative approach, it will require a fundamental shift of emphasis at the level of both policy and practice. Showing the major role self-assessment has to play Stiggins argues:

“If you wish to appear accountable, test your students. If you wish to improve schools, teach teachers to assess their students. If you wish to maximize learning, teach students to assess themselves (Stiggins, 2004 cited in Broadfoot, 2007, p.144).

Peer assessment is not only complementary to self-assessment (with added advantages) but it may even be a prior requirement for self-assessment (Black et al. 2003). According to Black and Wiliam (1998b) students perform better if they know that their peers are going to be involved in their marking. Also students use a more understandable and easy language when talking to each other than the language the teacher uses. According to Wiliam (2011b) students have distinctive insights into learning, and because the power relationships between peers are dissimilar from those between teachers and students, there will be instructional strategies open to them that would not be open, or would be less efficient, when used by teachers (Wiliam, 2011b). In addition to this, peer-assessment gives the teacher a more manageable situation as this can also be time saving (Wood, 2009). Moreover, students were found to learn more by taking the roles of teachers and examiners of each other (Black et al. 2003).

Self-assessment is all about students ‘reflecting on past experience; evaluating it and attempting to articulate what has been learned; and identifying in the light of this reflection, what still needs to be pursued’ (Broadfoot, 2007, p.135). According to Broadfoot (2007) it is also important to have in mind that self-assessment should contribute directly to an explicit judgment of performance or else children will not probably take the process seriously. The most informal approach to self-assessment is questioning by the children to the teacher which intends to promote understanding. When a child asks a question it usually means that he/she assessed himself/herself before asking and that he/she is determined to understand, although this procedure is not as conscious as it may seem. On the other hand, portfolios are a more complex action for children, as they need to select from the work they
have done, which is better to be included in a portfolio. Thus children need to re-assess and evaluate their previous work and decide which one represents them the most. When children are assessing their own written work or some of their peers, the issue is that they need to have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets they need to attain (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Stiggins, 2007). “Pupils can achieve a learning goal if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it” (Black et al. 2002: p10 cited in Wood, 2009).

Students to develop their skills in self-assessment will need time and development of certain skills. Clarke indicates these skills by the framework shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 2-1: Developing Self-Assessment (Clarke, 2005 p.110-111; cited by Wood, 2009)](image)

Stage 1: students identify their own successes
Stage 2: students identify a place for improvement
Stage 3: students identify their successes and make an ‘on the spot improvement’.

When a child knows how to evaluate itself, it means that he/she knows where he/she has a gap in learning. However, this does not mean that he/she always knows how to close it. The closure of the gap is another process/skill that has to be learned by children. When both procedures are applied then children have excellent chances to become deep learners and be ready for lifelong learning (Klenowski, 1996).

When pupils are trained, they have been found to be truthful and able to assess their own work and that of others with a logical level of accuracy (Brooks, 2002). Students build up their ‘pool of strategies’ by learning to revise and filter their own work in collaboration with the teacher, and by editing and helping other students to enhance theirs (Sadler, 1989).

So, as can be seen by the discussion, for self-assessment to occur students need training and understanding of targets while they will need time to build the necessary skills to judge specific problems. This is also necessary in peer assessment.
Both self and peer assessment methods are promoted by the NNC. The procedure named ‘laboratory of writers’ within the Greek language syllabus suggests that “Students should find the subject by themselves, the appropriate tone and elements that constitute that kind of subject-document, write it and assess it. This is a form of self-assessment. In this procedure the teacher is expected to have the role of a coordinator” (National Curriculum for Greek, p.19, my translation).

It is suggested that for the aforementioned to be implemented there is need for forms of continuous diagnostic assessment beyond tests involving the collection of meta-cognitive comments, the establishment and improvement of self-assessment and peer-assessment methods in and outside the classroom (National Curriculum for Greek, p.20, my translation).

For the written essays by children, it is suggested that the teacher should choose some students with differing levels of capability to assess each other’s essays. This could be seen in the pattern of peer assessment.

4) The Formative use of Summative tests

The idea of using summative tests formatively breaks down the distinction between Summative and Formative Assessment, something that both Taras (2008, 2009) and Newton (2007) discuss as a critique of the notion of Formative Assessment as simple and standardized. “This approach includes suggestions that pupils be encouraged to redraft work, and to set and mark summative questions” (Priestley and Sime 2005, p.480).

Some of the approaches for using summative tests in a formative way as described by Black et al (2003) are to use the aftermath of tests as opportunity for formative work by concentrating on questions that were generally poorly done. In addition, students can be trained for revision for examinations by setting and answering their own questions as well as marking those (Black et al. 2003).

If Summative Assessment is to be used formatively, some specific characteristics should be in place as it is not possible for all Summative Assessment to be used in a formative way.
Firstly, the extent to which the information gathered can guide teachers in helping students towards specific lesson goals should be considered. Also it depends on the frequency such tests and special tasks are undertaken, if the tasks are designed to summarize learning related to general criteria they will probably not have the detail needed to be diagnostic to the extent that can help students with their learning. Thus, specific criteria need to be in place for assessment to serve both purposes (Gardner, 2006). As stated by Newton (2007) according to the primary purpose for which assessment results are going to be used different assessment designs are needed.

The Assessment Reform Group gives specific suggestions on when a summative test can be used to serve learning. “Some principles of assessment for learning (ARG, 2002) provide a means of checking the extent to which evidence from a Summative Assessment can be used formatively:

- Does it focus on how students learn?
- Is it sensitive and constructive?
- Does it foster motivation?
- Does it promote understanding of goals and criteria?
- Does it help learners to know how to improve?
- Does it develop the capacity for self-assessment?
- Does it recognize all educational achievements?” (ARG, 2002 cited in Gardner, 2006, p.102)

For example it is difficult to use external tests and examinations in a formative way because the teacher has little or no control over them (Black et al. 2003; Gardner, 2006). Although they can make a contribution to helping identify further learning, they can never be sufficient to meet the requirement of assessment for learning for several reasons such as:

“The collection of summative evidence does not occur sufficiently frequently;
The information is not sufficiently detailed to be diagnostic;
Using external tests in this way risks teaching to the tests (...)” (Gardner, 2006, p. 109)
Generally the limitation of using evidence which has initially been gathered for summative purposes is that it is not rich enough and readily available to be used for formative purposes (Gardner, 2006). Thus, the idea of using summative assessment formatively, though useful and interesting, it can only be accomplished when specific criteria are in place.

Within the New National Curriculum summative (final) assessment is expected to play a minor role but useful for determining achievement levels and evaluating broader parts of learning as well as informing parents and students in an end of term report. As mentioned earlier for Summative Assessment in Cyprus the teacher is solely responsible both for deciding the content and assigning the grade.

The New National Curriculum attempts to make assessment more linked to learning and instruction. Formative and continuous assessment are mentioned in national reports as functions of assessment which should have a major role in the NNC. Though these functions are mentioned in official government documents concerning the educational policy the lack of a sufficient number of research papers or debate on the assessment framework does not allow the researcher to gain adequate insights.

Thus two of the research questions forming this study, namely:

3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

4) What are students’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

were answered through specific questions in the questionnaire around the four interventions avoiding any umbrella terms which are not used within the Cypriot educational context and teachers and students might have been unaware of those. More details on how these interventions are perceived and the challenges for implementing them as well as the extent to which they are used were gained through the interviews where teachers and students had the chance to elaborate.
2.2 Discussion on terminology used: conceptions, perceptions, perspectives, beliefs.

The term ‘perceptions’ is used in this study encompassing the meaning of views or opinions held by an individual resulting from experience and external factors acting on the individual (Susuwele-Banda, 2005). It is also the word used for various important studies for this thesis discussed in the literature. The decision to use the terms conceptions and perceptions interchangeably was made due to the fact that a large number of studies uses these terms interchangeably not discussing the differentiation in their meanings. Some of the studies that this thesis was based and influenced by are Berry, 2004; Hargreaves, 2005; Jane, 2012; Priestley and Sime, 2005; Torrance and Pryor, 1998, 2001 to mention just a few. Also the book of McInerney et al 2009 which encompasses thirteen chapters of thirteen different studies undertaken by several researchers uses as its title ‘Student Perspectives on Assessment’ but includes studies with titles such as ‘Accessing Primary Pupils’ Conceptions of Daily Classroom Assessment Practices’ or ‘Students’ Voices in School-based Assessment of Hong Kong: A case Study’ which has as a subtitle ‘Students’ Perspectives about assessment’. This is only one example showing that the terms are usually used interchangeably without discussing their differentiated meaning. I am not implying that these terms mean the same or that we should continue using them inaccurately. Some studies may have to occur defining the meanings of these terminologies in the field of education and when trying to investigate teachers’ and students’ perceptions whilst advising the researchers how the different terms should be used. This, however, goes beyond the research questions of this study though the researcher gave some thought to this issue and decided to use the term ‘conception’ when referring to studies using the ‘TCoA’ (Teachers’ Conceptions of Assessment Inventory) and ‘SCoA’ (Students’ Conception of Assessment Inventory) and using the term ‘perceptions’ in the general discussion.

The use of the word ‘belief’ as a key word for searching the literature and as a terminology was largely avoided as the word itself is considered as just a little more than opinion with a character to act (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984). The terminology ‘perspectives’ was
preferred for searching the literature as encompassing a stronger meaning including both the beliefs teachers have about their work (goals, purposes, conceptions) and "the ways in which they [give] meaning to these beliefs by their behaviour in the classroom" (Pajares, 1992, p.314-315, emphasis given by author). Tabachnick and Zeichner (1984) differentiated the meaning between teachers' beliefs and teacher perspectives, with researchers referring back to Janesick (1978) who was one of the first ones to define perspectives as "a reflective, socially defined interpretation of experience that serves as a basis for subsequent action ... a combination of beliefs, intentions, interpretations, and behavior that interact continually" (Clark and Peterson, 1986, p. 287 cited by Pajares, 1992, pp.314).

Brown and colleagues have developed a comprehensive research program on teachers’ conceptions of assessment since the early 2000’s. They grounded their research on Thompson’s definition of conceptions as: “a more general mental structure, encompassing beliefs, meanings, concepts, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences, and the like” (Thompson, 1992, p. 130). Furthermore, it is believed that conceptions represent different categories of ideas held by teachers behind their descriptions of how educational things are experienced (Pratt, 1992a). Thus, conceptions act as a framework through which a teacher views, interprets, and interacts, with the teaching environment (Marton, 1981). Conception as a term encompasses beliefs and views regarding assessment (Fulmer et al, 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to investigate students’ and teachers’ perceptions of assessment because no matter how hard policy makers try to implement some changes it is unlikely that the practitioners will incorporate them into their practices unless their perceptions are in alignment with those changes. In addition, it is important to investigate teachers’ and students’ perceptions at a time of change where emphasis is given to Formative Assessment elements. An overview of the literature on students’ and teachers’ perceptions will follow justifying how the author arrived at the research questions.
2.3 Teachers’ perceptions

2.3.1 Introduction

Teachers’ perceptions are important because teaching is a personal endeavour; therefore, any changes in teaching or assessment strategies can only be accepted when seen as practical and positive and can only be digested by teachers who are willing to apply them (Dixon and Haigh, 2009; Sato et al. 2005; Jones and Moreland, 2005). Teachers’ perceptions of assessment are important because they affect their practices (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992 cited in Harris and Brown, 2009; Kyriakides, 1996) which in turn may affect students’ outcomes (Harris and Brown, 2009). Teachers’ perceptions of assessment are influenced by the social and educational contexts surrounding them while their personal experiences of assessment also influence their perceptions (Fulmer et al., 2015; Jane, 2012). Moreover, teachers’ beliefs about students, learning, teaching, and subjects influence their assessment techniques and practices (Brown et al. 2011; Duncan and Noonan, 2007). One of the difficulties in researching teachers’ perceptions of assessment is that they appear to hold multiple and possibly even contradictory perceptions at the same time. A major factor in this plurality of perceptions is that assessment itself serves multiple purposes, which may be complementary or contradictory (Brown et al. 2011).

The impact of Brown’s research is so wide in the research of this field that the literature available could be divided into studies using the Teachers’ Conceptions of Assessment inventory (TCoA) developed by Brown since 2002 and studies which are not using this instrument. Although these studies may overlap I suggest they take different pathways in investigating teachers’ perceptions. Thus studies using the TCoA suggest that there are some universal beliefs about assessment purposes that may reflect the shared low-stakes policy environment for assessment. Using the TCoA survey instrument, Brown and colleagues have investigated New Zealand (Brown 2002, 2004); Queensland, Australia
Brown 2006, 2008); Hong Kong (Brown, Kennedy et al. 2008), Spain (Remesal, 2011) and Cyprus (Michaelides and Brown, 2010) teachers’ attitudes towards four major purposes, with those being; improvement of teaching and learning, student accountability, school accountability, and irrelevance. The Teachers’ Conceptions of Assessment (TCoA) inventory (Brown 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008) is a self-report multidimensional survey instrument designed to elicit teachers' level of agreement with the aforementioned four competing purposes of assessment. This instrument was used in this study for answering the research question:

1) a. What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?

On the other hand, several studies investigating teachers’ perceptions (some of them undertaken before the development of TCoA but some later) take a different pathway in investigating teachers’ perceptions. These latter studies are usually concerned with teachers’ perceptions on the development and implementation of Formative Assessment in schools as a whole, or some elements of FA for example, investigating feedback or how teachers cope with the need to implement self and peer assessment strategies as part of the use of assessment in a formative way. These studies were useful for forming the questions in the latter part of the questionnaire given that discussion centred around the interventions of FA imposed through the NNC. These studies were useful for forming the questions of the questionnaire seeking to answer the third main research question of this thesis which was:

3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

2.3.2 Teachers’ perceptions on assessment

Research on teachers’ perceptions solely on Summative Assessment is limited. This may be due to the fact that research giving emphasis to perceptions started with the rising popularity of Formative Assessment and generally the view of assessment as an on-going process linked to learning. The small amount of research on Summative Assessment suggests that the most common belief is that it is used at the end of a period of learning.
When trying to give examples of Summative Assessment tasks teachers include the words ‘tests’, ‘exams’ or ‘essays’ and ‘assignments’ all related to ‘high stakes testing’ (Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Harlen and James, 1997).

A project called TASK (Teacher Assessment at Key Stage 1) was developed in England to investigate the interrelation of assessment and learning and more specifically what teachers believed to be ‘Teacher Assessment’ (TA) and how they put it into practice in the classroom. ‘Teacher assessment’ was introduced in 1998 when the UK government introduced the new National Curriculum. This created a programme of National Assessment intending to measure how much children were learning and how efficient schools were in implementing the National Curriculum. The primary study involved 40 primary teachers in nine schools and five advisory staff in two local education authorities. The data was derived from semi-structured interviews. Though not generalisable due to the small sample included, the study showed that teachers viewed TA as a part of the formal activity oriented to produce valid and reliable summative measures of performance. Their perceptions of TA lie in the ‘measurement paradigm’ believing that assessment is used for making students and schools accountable. Classroom assessment was “conceptualized in terms of teacher-controlled data gathering about the pupil, rather than as an interactive process which affects the pupil” (Torrance and Pryor, 1998, p.25). TA was also seen as producing Summative Assessment for third parties rather than a Formative process to support learning (Torrance and Pryor, 1998).

The latter stage of the project by Torrance and Pryor (2001) involved eleven teachers (two also participated in TASK). In this they studied the social nature of assessment and power relationships in a number of English primary schools. The main aim of the research was to put ideas generated by research into practice, considering classroom assessment, a project called ‘Primary Response’. The ‘Primary Response’ study took place in two phases. In the first phase (first six months) the intention was for teachers to gain awareness of how complex classroom interactions are through observing their own audio and visual recording by taking notes on diaries and examples of students’ work; while they were also video and audio recorded. Consequently in the second phase (next six months) they began to
operationalise changes in their practices for a more improved classroom assessment according to the FA elements. Only five of the teachers completed both phases.

At the initial stages of the study (the first phase), the meetings with the TRs revealed that teachers had a narrow view of what constitutes ‘assessment’ and their role in it although they were all assessment coordinators. They were all very positive to the idea of developing Formative Assessment although they approached it as a formal requirement like officially sanctioned tests. Regular assessment routines were seen as separated from teaching and they were unclear about how they can constantly use assessment data to help plan for the needs of all children. In the second phase of the project teachers tried harder to use open ended questions and give carefully judged feedback.

This study though including a small sample is important to the extent that it shows how teachers need the opportunity to monitor and reflect on their own practices before being ready to think about intervention strategies (Torrance and Pryor, 2001). Another major conclusion that can be made through this research is that teachers can develop more positive perceptions and ways of on-going classroom assessment which is more directly linked with learning when given the right guidance and opportunity to reflect on their teaching. As teachers’ knowledge on FA gets deeper their perceptions also seem to change while they do not view assessment as separated from learning over time (Torrance and Pryor, 2001).

Hargreaves (2005) explores the conceptions of Formative Assessment of 83 teachers and head teachers in England. She divides the conceptions of teachers into six main categories.
According to Hargreaves all conceptions are included explicitly or implicitly in Black and Wiliam’s report (1998a) but we can see that the perceptions on the form and purpose of assessment between teachers still contrast. The perceptions vary from those who believe that assessment is teacher led to those who see assessment as involving students in the procedure, and assessment as embedded in the learning procedure.

Moreover, according to Hargreaves the above six definitions reveal some implicit perceptions of assessment and learning that can be categorised into two main categories.
Assessment as measurement

Assessment is equated with measurement.
The dominant verbs used by the teachers were: marking, checking, identifying, showing a level, monitoring.
Though “A distinction can be made between measurement and testing, in that tests are the instruments by which measurement are made” (p.218).
Data collection methods can differ but if they are used to report the amount, extent or level of students’ learning then they fall into the measurement paradigm.

Assessment as inquiry

Making a search or investigation.
The dominant words used by the teachers were: reflecting, reviewing, finding out, discovering, learning about, examining, looking at, engaging with, and understanding.
Deeper understanding of the individual as learner, not just performer.
Assessment is viewed as part of the learning process and not separated from it.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Implicit perceptions of Learning as attaining objectives</th>
<th>Implicit perceptions of Learning as constructing knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>Such a model lends itself to assessment as measurement.</td>
<td>Such a model lends itself to assessment as inquiry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In this sense learning is seen as something measurable, predictable and observable.</td>
<td>In this sense knowledge is not out there but constructed through each learner trying to make sense of their own experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The main phrases used were: ‘next steps’, ‘closing the gap’, ‘move forward’.</td>
<td>The main phrases used were to describe learning: ‘process of development’, ‘individual ways of doing things’, ‘individuals are making sense of their own world’.</td>
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Table 2.2 Implicit perceptions of assessment and learning

It seems that some teachers believe in collecting quantitative data thus have a view of assessment as measurement while others seem to perceive assessment as an investigation into students’ learning which is not separated from instruction. Through the work of Hargreaves (2005) we can see that although FA has been an element of official educational dialogue for some years teachers still hold various implicit perceptions about learning, assessment and assessment for learning. According to Hargreaves some teachers hold the measurement/objectives model of assessment/learning as does the literature (Hargreaves, 2005). The dominant conception is dominant not because it is best for children nor because it makes most sense but it is the result of historical reasons such as the long history of the dominance of Summative Assessment. However, we should bear in mind that this research does not include a sufficient sample (N=83) to be considered as representative of the whole teacher population so whilst relevant and interesting cannot be taken as generalisable.
Priestley and Sime (2005) investigated FA as one of the initiatives of the Scotland national project for assessment innovations named Assessment is For Learning (AiFL) (LTScotland, 2002). Priestley and Sime (2005) focused on one of the projects objectives (Support for Professional Practice for Formative Assessment) by studying one primary school that has adopted a whole-school approach to enacting the FA principles of AiFL since 2004. For the implementation of FA they take the four main characteristics as developed by Black et al. 2003 (Questioning, Feedback, Peer and self-assessment and the Formative use of summative tests). The case study intends to find what drawbacks may occur and the contribution factors for success in a Scottish school while developing FA. The data included analysis of policy and school documents of assessment, observation of the classroom practice of 4 teachers teaching two classes, small discussion with each teacher and interviews with teachers. This study has shown that teachers have positive perceptions about FA, they were enthusiastic and the approach was popular. All teachers seemed to improve their FA strategies although some of them improved more than others. The whole school approach, meaning the collaboration of all teachers through meetings led the strategies into a group approach and team effort. Teachers perceived Formative Assessment as enhancing some of the strategies they were already implementing but without knowing they were called FA (Priestley and Sime, 2005). According to teachers another important factor is the enthusiasm of the students who accepted the initiative very well and thus were more motivated to learn and fancy the idea of independent learning. Generally the interviewed teachers found many benefits in FA including giving children autonomy and motivation while they were feeling more active as learners (Priestley and Sime, 2005). This study is mentioned here because it is considered as an important work cited by many other researchers of this field although not primarily focused on perceptions and while having a small sample cannot be considered as generalisable.

Similar to Priestley and Sime (2005), Berry’s (2004) study suggests that teachers need support to improve their FA strategies over time. Berry (2004) investigated teachers’ perceptions of their roles and their pupils’ roles in the Formative Assessment process. The study took place in Hong Kong and had as a sample 1116 teachers from primary and secondary schools who completed a questionnaire while 12 of them were also interviewed. Teachers feel that they need more support and professional development to help them
improve their roles in FA (Berry, 2004). Furthermore, teachers seem to know that they should involve students in their learning but they rarely do so. According to Berry (2004), most of them know the correct way of giving feedback but they rarely implement it in real practice. The same unfortunately applies for self-assessment which teachers value and perceive as important but they rarely actually use it. As teachers argue this is mainly because of the workload and lack of time for completing the job the school demands. In this study teachers’ responses indicated that there is limited involvement in students setting and marking their own work or discussion on the marking scheme (Berry, 2004). This is in agreement with what has been discussed earlier as one of the critiques of FA by Bennett (2011), one of the issues he raised is the teachers’ need for professional development and it seems by this study that teachers themselves acknowledge the fact that they need more training.

A paper delivered in 2010 by Simon et al reveals the perceptions of pre-service teachers in Canada about assessment. The study helped to understand the frame of mind of the pre-service teachers as they enter the profession and emphasize the magnitude of balancing the practical and theoretical bases of assessment in assessment courses offered in teacher development programs. Although useful we shall bear in mind that they may differ to a great extent with the perceptions of experienced teachers. The study included 31 participants. The larger group in this study identified group work, test failure, accommodation, fairness, multiple and varied assessments, and academic enablers as key areas of concern. Particularly notable in the study, was the greater importance pre-service teachers attached to assessment as currency for classroom management, student motivation, and social justice, as opposed to assessment to support learning. It appears that the topic of academic enablers (i.e. effort, participation) and student dispositions was recognized as one of the key concerns and may continue to plague measurement principles that currently dictate assessments and grading of academic enablers and learning achievement (Simon et al, 2010).

One of the sole studies to be found in the Cypriot context was undertaken by Kyriakides (1996) to investigate Cypriot primary school teachers’ perceptions on students’ assessment. The study involved a mixed methodology approach including both questionnaires and
interviews. Interviews were used for examining which facts affect the ways teachers assess and they were used to develop the questionnaires. The sample included 238 primary school teachers in total. Some of the most important findings of this study suggested that teachers are dissatisfied because the New Curriculum of 1994 did not suggest specific approaches of assessment. Teachers suggest that the assessment information should be used mainly for finding out about students’ needs and for teachers to assess their teaching efficacy. Teachers believe assessment to be utterly related with instruction. In addition, teachers argue that there should be different approaches of assessment for different purposes as it is impossible to accomplish both formative and summative assessment with one assessment approach. They also believe that assessment results should have a main role in teachers planning their long and short term goals thus teaching would have to be based on those results. Another major finding of this study is that teachers believe that some ways of improving assessment are to reduce the number of students in the classroom. In addition they would like to be trained as they feel incapable of using assessment strategies effectively in order to be used formatively (Kyriakides, 1996). Teachers’ need for professional development and training is a matter also raised by Simon et al (2010), Priestley and Sime (2005) and Berry (2004).

A significant impact for the development of this thesis came from Brown and colleagues who devoted their research since the early 2000 in exploring Teachers’ and Students’ conceptions on assessment whilst trying to construct the most effective questionnaire to be applicable to educational systems with low stakes assessment policy. Four major conceptions of assessment as found in previous studies are:

- assessment improves teaching and learning (Improvement)
- assessment makes students accountable for learning (Student accountability)
- assessment demonstrates the quality of schools and teachers (School accountability)
- assessment should be rejected because it is invalid, irrelevant and negative (Irrelevance) (Brown 2002).

For the first conception, when learning is viewed as continuous development enhanced by structured and meaningful educational experiences, the resulting assessment selection is
more likely to yield documentation and feedback associated with the improvement belief (Delandhsere and Jones, 1999, p. 219). Thus improved orientation is usually associated with Formative Assessment in contrast to an accountability conception which is usually associated with the term ‘Summative’ assessment (Brown, 2003). In some occasions though teachers do not perceive the purposes related to the summative and those related to the formative as very distinctive (Segers and Tillema, 2011). A translation of the Brown Conceptions of Assessment Inventory conducted by Segers and Tillema (2011) in the Netherlands including 351 teachers from the last two years of Dutch general secondary education concluded that teachers seem to make a distinction between classroom assessment serving summative and formative purposes on the one hand and school accountability on the other. This might be a reflection of the Dutch secondary school assessment system, where classroom assessment serves formative as well as summative purposes.

In Spain, a new General Educational Act was put in force gradually during the 1990s. This system did not involve the use of standardized tests for external evaluation, which remained as an irregular school policy measure. The focus of the reform was formative school-based assessment. In the paper of Remesal (2011), results of a research on primary and compulsory mathematics secondary teachers’ conceptions of assessment functions in basic education were investigated with 50 teachers in Spain. The four perceptions were considered as interwoven; they can hardly be considered separated from each other. The results of this study show that the way in which assessment affects teaching and learning are two distinct aspects in teachers’ conceptions, which can but may not be coherent with each other. In many cases, the interviewed teachers showed contradictory beliefs about how assessment affects teaching and learning. Beliefs related to a positive monitoring of teaching through assessment often did not come together with beliefs concerning positive effects of assessment on the monitoring of learning. Results have a twofold significance, related to previous research. First, teachers’ conceptions of assessment functions might be related to the structure of the educational system, tending either towards more pedagogical or more accrediting conceptions with regard to the external assessment demands on school. Second, teachers’ conceptions of assessment functions might be composed by different, and sometimes even contrasting, beliefs concerning the role of assessment in teaching and in
learning considered separately. This last point might help understand the difficulties for the implementation of assessment for learning inventive practices (Remesal, 2011).

The second conception of assessment (certification of students’ learning), argues that students are individually accountable for their performance and achievement. Brown (2002, 2004) specifically emphasizes the positive and negative consequences related to students’ performance results such as graduation, grade retention, grades, and tracking. By inspecting inter-correlations among the four factors, it appeared Queensland and New Zealand teachers conceived of student accountability as being irrelevant (i.e., as scores on student accountability increased, so did the values for irrelevant), while school accountability was positively correlated with improvement. In contrast, the Hong Kong teachers had strong positive correlations between improvement and student accountability. There were moderate differences between primary and secondary teachers in New Zealand and Queensland especially around the importance of student accountability. Together these studies support the claim that teacher conceptions are likely to be influenced by their sector and school system (Harris and Brown, 2009). Thus for assessment in making students accountable for learning it may be considered as an irrelevant purpose of assessment or a positive purpose based on background, educational level and policies.

The third conception of assessment ‘accountability of teachers and schools’, underscores society’s use of data to determine school and teacher quality (Brown, 2004). Delandshere and Jones (1999) determined when teachers’ assessment view is predominantly summative and external in nature, teachers regard assessment as a required means of conveying information to an external audience (Calveric, 2010). A recent paper by Brown and colleagues (2011) based on a questionnaire survey involved both primary and secondary government schools in Queensland where questionnaires were administered to all teachers in 92 state schools and this resulted to 1525 teachers participating in total. The same questionnaire was administered in November 2003 in New Zealand. Like New Zealand, Queensland teachers in this study work in a context of low-stakes assessments designed to improve classroom practices or inform central agencies about the quality of the system. New Zealand teachers since 2003 have been given a wide array of voluntary-use, non-centrally controlled, diagnostic, quick feedback, teachercontrolled assessments that have
allowed teachers to improve learning in a self-managed manner (Brown et al. 2011). In that context, Brown (2008) reported that New Zealand primary teachers actually associated the use of assessment for improvement with school accountability. On the contrary Queensland teachers do not believe that school accountability is valid because central agencies administer annual tests which cannot effectively hold students or teachers accountable, since the national tests are not aligned to the classroom curriculum, nor are they timely in their reporting to schools. The message to policy makers is that radically different, low-stakes, richly informative, highly aligned assessments may be needed to produce a vigorous conception among teachers that assessment improves teaching and learning and that it can also be used to demonstrate accountability (Brown et al. 2011).

Assessment as irrelevant is representing teachers’ view of assessment as unrelated to the work of educators and students (Brown, 2003). Typically associated with formal testing, educators who adopt this assessment conception reject assessment due to its perceived harmful impact upon teacher autonomy and professionalism (Brown, 2003). Supporters of the irrelevance conception believe assessment detracts from student learning and excludes the inclusion of teachers’ intuitive evaluations, student-teacher relationships, and in depth knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy (Brown, 2003).

Across countries and sectors, teachers consistently had positive agreement means for both improvement and student accountability conceptions and low means for school accountability and irrelevance conceptions (Harris and Brown, 2009). Generally, relationship trends document that those who believe in either the irrelevance or the improvement belief will not traditionally endorse both (Calveric, 2010)

The paper by Michaelides and Brown (2010) is the most recent and rarest of attempts to investigate teachers’ perceptions of assessment in Cyprus. This study is based on a survey undertaken by the former within the Cypriot context a year earlier. No publications were made from Michaelides survey in 2009 but only a poster presentation. From the presentation we are informed that the sample included 249 teachers from pre-primary, primary and secondary schools as well as head teachers. The major findings of this study are that (a) the most popular assessment practices reported were the use of teacher-designed assessments, and written assessments given in class. The least popular practice was the use
of standardized tests or large-scale exams. Essay-type questions are not common in Cypriot classrooms. (b) Teachers expressed strong agreement with the use of assessment for improving teaching and learning and endorsed conceptions of assessment for holding students accountable. Assessment for school accountability purposes found only slight support. There was slight disagreement to the belief that assessment is irrelevant to education (c) Demographic factors did not appear significant in shaping teachers’ assessment conceptions. (d) The conceptions teachers hold seems to relate to the practices of assessment they report (Michaelides, 2009).

The research of Michaelides in collaboration with Brown (2010) extends the research on teachers’ perceptions using the TCoA III model modified to fit the Cypriot educational context, with the main aim to make a contribution to the cross-cultural discussion on perceptions. Though this study was useful as an initial attempt to explore teachers’ perceptions it involved teachers from very different levels and this might be one of its limitations as primary and secondary teachers’ beliefs have been shown to be different (Remesal, 2011). The overall conclusion from this study is that there are some universal beliefs about assessment purposes that may echo the low-stakes assessment policy. It is suggested that teachers can hold at the same time positive and negative conceptions of assessment simultaneously due to the plurality of beliefs and the complexity of the nature of assessment and its many uses. Teachers hold positive and constructive set of beliefs that empower them to conduct “educational” assessment that is, assessment that leads to improved teaching and learning. They do not believe that assessment is bad or that it should be rejected as being invalid, irrelevant and negative. Teachers in Cyprus do not regularly believe that assessment is used for making schools accountable, a reflection of the general educational policy which does have specific strategies for this purpose (Michaelides and Brown, 2010).

It is difficult to establish main trends and ideas about teachers’ perceptions of assessment as studies come from several educational backgrounds, levels and countries taking different pathways and thus difficult to be comparable or lead to any universal conclusions. An assumption that can be made is that although studies prior to and in the early 2000’s show that teachers could not see even regular routine classroom assessment as embedded in the
learning procedure, far more positive views incorporating classroom assessment have been developed in recent years. It seems that in the period of 2000 the dominant use of assessment was as a summative tool and teachers tended to separate it from teaching and learning (Black, 1993; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Clarke and Gipps, 2000; Singh, 1999). More recent research undertaken after the influential study of Black and Wiliam (1998) and subsequent to the emphasis in developing FA in schools in the UK, by the formal announcements-papers of Ofsted, 1998; DfES, 2003 and QCA, 2003, but also emphasis given to FA in the US, China and Western/ European countries it seems that there is a shift in teachers’ views about assessment. As a result many teachers have developed their practices in far more positive ways (Berry, 2004; Brown et al. 2011; Priestley and Sime, 2005; Segers and Tillema, 2011; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). Even though Formative Assessment has been given great attention through research and official government documents the past decade or so we can see there is still great variability in the perceptions teachers hold. As my study is going to give equal emphasis to teachers’ and students’ perceptions the section to follow will consider the literature on the latter.

2.4 Students’ perceptions on assessment

2.4.1 Introduction

Students’ perceptions are important to the extent that educational change can only be effective if students’ perceptions are also changed accordingly as these will affect the orientation and effort they will give to learning. This is particularly true in on-going classroom assessment practices which need their active involvement. Heritage (2013) stated that students should be seen as equal stakeholders with teachers especially in assessment if it is to be used for developing their learning. Learning can only be achieved by students; teachers cannot learn for them (Harlen and James, 1997, Van de Watering, Gijbels, Dochy, and Van der Rijt, 2008; Struyven, Dochy and Jahnsen, 2005). Investigating students’ perceptions is not easy because “As long as assessment is used for multiple purposes and have differing consequences, students will develop complex and highly contingent conceptions of assessment” (McInerney et al.2009, p.8). While emphasis has been given to
students’ perceptions about school improvement and their evaluation of teaching, students’ perceptions on assessment is a relatively under researched area (McInerney, 2009).

A study undertaken by Dixon and Haigh in New Zealand (2009) has shown that not only teachers can improve, through listening to what their students have to say about their learning but students themselves while involved in the inquiry they seem to improve their learning and thus perform better (Smardon and Bewley, 2007).

Heritage (2013) states “No two children are the same” (p.5). The background of children can have an impact on their perceptions on education and assessment and ultimately their school performance. Some ingredients of what we call background are student motivation and attitudes towards school as well as some variables such as sex, age, ethnicity and students’ ethnic groupings (Alkharusi, 2010; Black, Swann and Wiliam, 2006; Brown and Harris, 2009; Smith and Gorard, 2005). When investigating students’ perceptions of assessment we shall have in mind that they are conditional according to the different society and cultural priorities for educational policies and practice. For example, Jones’ research (1991) showed how minority and majority culture students perceive the nature of assessment differently and thus these beliefs had an impact on their assessment practices as well as their teachers’ practices causing different examination results for each group (cited in McInerney et al. 2009). Students’ perceptions on an assessment task can be affected by students’ perceptions on broader areas like how interesting and important they believe the task is and each student’s goal orientation (Brookhart and Bronowicz, 2003).

In this study variations on background tried to be minimised as much as possible. In the Cypriot educational context especially in public schools (which form the sample of this study) the matter of minority and majority groups, differing ethnic and cultural groups is not a big issue as the great majority of the students are Greek-Cypriots. In addition, only students from lower secondary schools form the sample thus minimizing the fluctuation in perceptions by focusing on one level of schooling. For answering the research questions about the assessment reform through the NNC the focus was further narrowed to one subject (Modern Greek language) as perceptions of assessment are proven to vary according to the subject.
2.4.2 Literature Review on Students’ perceptions on assessment

Important insights come from a study carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which draws together the work from a six year project spanning literature from 1989 to 2005. In total, 314 publications from the UK have been summarised for this review. The review was aiming to examine and categorise the key themes, findings and methodologies employed in the educational research on students’ experiences and perspectives of the national curriculum and assessment (Lord and Jones, 2006). The research review was undertaken for the Qualification and Curriculum authority in the UK. One of the research themes in this study was assessment. 48 of the total 314 studies are relevant to assessment and more specifically students’ perceptions and experiences on national assessment as well as in-classroom activities in primary and secondary schools within the UK. “Findings cover: pupils’ values and awareness of ‘tests and testing’; the impact of assessment on pupils (including issues relating to stress and self-esteem); their preferences for different assessment methods (e.g. coursework, examinations, continuous assessment, etc); their opinions on actual assessment instruments and questions and areas related to Assessment for Learning, such as Formative feedback and target setting” (Lord and Jones, 2006, p.54).

The study named above concludes based on the 48 inquiries relevant to assessment that students’ enjoyment of the curriculum is linked with a sense of ease, fun, newness, progressive accomplishment and appropriate challenge. Students enjoy subjects and activities where teaching and learning are active, participatory and have practical application. Pupils enjoy a range of teaching and learning approaches and activities. A balance and variety of assessment methods is also desirable (e.g. formal and informal; teacher- self- and peer-led evaluation; formative and summative) (Lord and Jones, 2006).

In this study, pupils’ experiences of assessment reveal the following:

• “Assessment is important to pupils – national tests provide points of motivation for pupils. However, pupils are also anxious about national tests throughout their school careers.
• **A range of assessment methods** is appreciated. **Coursework** is felt to provide opportunity to demonstrate individual interest and capability, although more guidance is requested on what is expected and how marks are gained. **Written exams** are valued for their ‘clear-cut’ indication of how pupils are doing, although concerns over the pressures of the day are evident. **Modular courses** perhaps offer a best fit – breaking up the work into manageable portions and offering the potential for the accumulation of marks.

• **Discussion about learning** is also important to pupils. Learners would like **more opportunity to talk to their teachers** about their progress. However, ordinal, **clear-cut marking and ranking** of their work and progress is also desired.” (Lord and Jones, 2006, p58-59, emphasis by original paper).

The statement that children must have a clear idea of criteria and desired standards is also supported by other studies such as Black and Wiliam (1998a), Broadfoot (2007) and Wood (2009). Students in Torrance and Pryor (2001), a study undertaken in English primary schools, felt negative about assessment when having implicit criteria. This means that children feel bad when they do not actually know the task and quality criteria of assessment.

In the study of Cowie (2005) coming from New Zealand, 75 pupils in total were interviewed to generate information on their perceptions and experience of how teachers found out about their learning and their wider experience of classroom assessment. Students seem to believe that tests and teacher assessment activities are the main ways for teachers to find out about their learning while they also identify some interactions in the classroom, questioning and comments on bookwork to also inform teachers about their learning (Cowie, 2005). These strategies can be divided into broad categories which are not mutually exclusive; students perceive assessment to be ‘test’ like as well as ‘informal-interactive’.

Another theme emerging in students’ perceptions is the desire for a variety of assessment approaches to be used. This is supported by several studies coming from different levels such as the study of Lord and Jones (2006) mentioned above but also Cowie (2005) having primary school students as a sample and Manman in a small case study undertaken in Hong
Kong (2009, chapter 5 from McInerney et al, 2009) and Smith and Holterman (2009, chapter in McInerney et al, 2009) including 154 university students in New Zealand. Seale, Chapman and Davey (2000) state that students are more motivated when having a range of assessment opportunities. Dochy and McDowell (1997) declare that, students find newer forms of assessment ‘intrinsically interesting and motivating” (cited in Dochy and McDowell, 1997, p.291). Furthermore, they claim that students act and learn differently when using new forms of assessment rather than in courses where traditional tests and exams are used. According to the same study research shows that substitute methods of assessment are less threatening to most students than traditional testing. “Moreover, students seem to find meaning in assignments such as projects, group exercises and portfolios perhaps because they are seen as more like real life activities, more appropriate to Powerful Learning Environments, than examinations” (Dochy and McDowell, 1997, p.292). The low stress environment of school-based assessment contributed to a more authentic, communicative interaction and association amongst students throughout the assessment process (Manman in McInerney et al. 2009). While assessment is meant to be a planned, focused activity that is integrated with teaching and learning, students do not always have this holistic view.

In some occasions, as mentioned earlier, assessment is typically seen by students as a formal event or task, completed by them individually and marked by teachers. Informal assessments (e.g., observation, quizzes), peer and self-assessment are not always acknowledged and understood as genuine assessment forms. Students in the study of Peterson and Irving (2008) when referred to assessment they talk about tests. Students frequently talked about assessment as a formal event or structured exercise that led to a mark. They made only a few references to informal assessment such as teacher observation, class discussion with the teacher or peers, or assistance with class work. Peer assessment and self-assessment were hardly ever mentioned. Students realise that assessment can be more than summative tools and that feedback from assessments can be powerful in influencing their learning. These findings suggest that students’ perceptions of the purpose of assessment and feedback echo those of the current educational trend for assessment to be used for learning and improvement. Yet, the students gave little indication that assessment information actually helped teachers teach students differently, or that students themselves
directly benefited from feedback. Although students understood that assessment could be used to help improve their learning, little was found to indicate that they autonomously acted on that information. Instead of accepting responsibility for learning, students shifted the responsibility to the teacher. Several students ascribed their poor grades to the teacher as being mean or not liking them. Success on the other hand was often regarded as a deputy for effort (Peterson and Irving, 2008). The majority of students in this study indicated that their parents were interested in their school performance and felt under pressure to meet their expectations. Students also thought that assessment results could inform future employers about their abilities but the idea was not at the front position of students’ minds, but they were aware of the outline that assessment has over their futures. In general, there was an acknowledgement that there were different types of assessment and some were more serious, formal and fair than others. Considering the effect assessment could have on some students, poor assessment results led them to feel “stink”, “angry” and could lead to avoiding work while for others, poor assessment results acted as a motive to do better. If assessment results were good, students generally reported being happy, content and proud (Peterson and Irving, 2008).

The idea of assessment to be used for learning is welcome to students as they show appreciation to Formative Assessment practices which involves given information about their learning and feedback (Lord and Jones, 2006). One of the reasons they appreciate FA based on Lord and Jones (2006) is because it motivates them and enables them to improve their performance. Students while appreciating formal evaluative process they also expect teachers to use some tests formatively. Miller’s and Lavin’s (2007) study in Scotland having as a sample 370 upper primary school children (age 10-12 years) used questionnaires, individual interviews and group discussion. The schools under investigation were using Formative Assessment as an integral part of their day-to-day teaching and one third of the children were experiencing FA for the first time while the rest had experienced it in previous classes. This allowed the study to make some inferences about new and old ‘participants’ of FA. The findings suggest that it takes time to establish the desired patterns of working. Children’ comments suggest that “it is not just learning the techniques that is important; beginning to see the value of them, and internalising the messages received, may
be of central importance” (Miller and Lavin, 2007). Furthermore, students have shown enthusiasm for the elements of FA and namely those involving working with peers and a clear sense of reflecting the processes of learning. Children were also seen to be attending more quality of their work according to their responses (Miller and Lavin, 2007). As students’ knowledge of Formative Assessment strategies increases they become more demanding and they have more specific procedures to suggest (Manman in McInerney et al. 2009; Miller and Lavin, 2007).

Due to the popularity of Formative Assessment over the past two decades, many studies have emerged exploring students’ perceptions on specific elements of Formative Assessment. Emphasis was given to investigating students’ perceptions of feedback as one of the main elements of FA. Rawlins (2006) examines the mathematics students’ perceptions of the formative potential in New Zealand using questionnaires and interviews. The study reveals that students have mixed feelings about feedback practices. They find written feedback that suggests strategies for improvement very valuable while they want teachers to give them “constructive criticism, not just plain old criticism” (Rawlins, 2006, p.7) or feedback that just tells them the correct answer or has the form of evaluative comment. There are some contradictory feelings for oral feedback which they do not appreciate much. Moreover, students give great emphasis on quality feedback which will help them understand things better and it is timely given. Students also responded that they do not only see the grade but they make use of feedback for revision purposes which helps them with future work. Students even from primary schools expect their teachers to be well trained and have the appropriate skills for giving effective feedback as well as use a cycle of teaching-learning-assessment rather than treat assessment as a once for all process, a conclusion also made by Manman in McInerney et al (2009). According to Cowie (2005) there is a correlation between students’ preferences on certain formative strategies according to the goals they set for themselves as students. For example children with performance goals prefer feedback that will help them on how to complete the task and children with learning goals prefer feedback in the form of suggestions in order to maintain the active role they have through FA methods in making sense of ideas (Cowie, 2005). Furthermore, the latter group of students viewed FA as a teacher-pupil responsibility while the former group views assessment as a teacher’s sole responsibility. Very young students
even from primary school can distinguish feedback as ‘evaluative’ or ‘descriptive’. Usually when feedback is evaluative and the judgment is not positive it seems to de-motivate children. When feedback is informational it is considered as a guide to future learning (Cowie, 2005). Mutual trust and respect were considered as a vital fact for accepting feedback. Pupils reported that they are more likely to act upon feedback given by teachers who respected them (Cowie, 2005). This can also be found in Ladson-Billings (1994) saying that one of the key elements for students’ having generally a positive relationship with their teachers in the classroom is the teachers’ expression of respect and caring (cited in Heritage, 2013). Finally, while students say that feedback from assessment is to help them improve, there are signs that they do not always convert this into action. Targeted, task-specific goal setting, which encourages students to reflect and act on feedback, may help address this widely acknowledged problem (Peterson and Irving, 2008). What is disappointing is that students rarely reported acting on the assessment and feedback information and they tended to hold the teachers accountable for their poor learning rather than accepting responsibility and acting on it (Peterson and Irving, 2008).

Students’ perceptions about questioning as one of the elements of assessment to be used for learning has also been a matter of interest. Teachers seem to believe that they must impose to children gradually the belief that questions are helpful and not threatening. It seems that children themselves separate the questions to “testing” questions and “helping” questions (Torrance and Pryor, 2001, p.624). Questioning is a sensitive matter also because the same question can be perceived differently by a child according to their personality. Consequently a clarifying question can be seen by a less confident child as an insult or a sign that he/she answered the question incorrectly. Furthermore it is also seen as important by children for teachers not rushing into judgment but listening to them and trying hard to recognize what they really understand through dialog and how they approach a task (Torrance and Pryor, 2001). This is in the pattern of FA which supports the idea of students making questions as an indication of self-assessment as well as in the pattern of ‘wait time’ procedure for all students to have a chance to think and respond as well as in the larger outline of Formative Assessment as a procedure which needs the active involvement of
students and teachers and not the teacher monopolising the conversation and giving guiding questions accepting only the correct answer (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Little research has stepped back and asked the more inclusive question about the overarching purposes of assessment. A step in this direction are a series of survey studies conducted in New Zealand by a specific questionnaire to determine important aspects of students’ attitudes and beliefs about assessment (Brown, 2006; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2005, 2007, 2008; Hirschfeld and Brown, 2009 cited in McInerney et al. 2009). The Students’ Conceptions of Assessment questionnaire by Brown (2004) was developed by making a content analysis of the empirical studies on students’ perceptions mainly in New Zealand but also in other countries identifying four major purposes of assessment which are similar to teachers’ conceptions of assessment. According to the literature, first and foremost, students are aware that assessment exists in order to improve teaching and learning, secondly students are aware that assessment is used to evaluate external factors outside their own control such as the quality of schools and their future. Thirdly, students are aware of an affective purpose for assessment, impacting on their emotional well-being and the quality of relationships they have with other students while finally, students are aware that assessment can be unfair, negative, or even an irrelevant process in their lives.

Studies undertaken after the influential study of Brown 2004 relate their findings to these major conceptions. Purposes can be categorised as:

1) **Negative** conception is centred around two sub conceptions, namely
   a. Assessment is bad and
   b. Assessment is ignored

2) **Affect** conception is centred around two sub conceptions, namely
   a. Assessment is affecting the class and
   b. Assessment is affecting myself

3) **Improvement** conception is subordinated by the conceptions
   a. Assessment helps teachers improve and
   b. Assessment helps me (students) improve

4) Assessment is used for external factors consists of the conceptions
   a. Assessment is used to evaluate schools and
   b. Assessment is used for my personal future. (Brown et al. 2009).
Assessment may be considered as negative by students if they think of it as unfair or related to teacher subjectivity (McInerney et al. 2009). Teacher subjectivity was discovered as a great issue by high school students in Australia (Muni, van Kraayenoord and Baker, 2002 cited in McInerney et al. 2009). In another study undertaken in African American and Latino high school students showed that high stakes university entrance exams were perceived as unfair because of their impact upon student life chances (Walpole et al. 2005 cited in McInerney et al. 2009). Students in New Zealand perceived assessment as irrelevant when academic success was not related to career aspiration (Peterson and Irving, 2008).

The affect notion is geared around the idea that students perceive assessment as enjoyable and motivating their class to cooperate as well as affecting themselves in a positive way. This was seen earlier with studies such as Lord and Jones (2006) Dochy and McDowell (1997) and Cowie (2005) where students seem to enjoy a variety of assessment approaches to be used while they also appreciate high stakes tests for their clear-cut measures of progress.

The concept of assessment to be used for improving learning is clear for New Zealand students according to a large scale survey undertaken in the compulsory sector (K-12) (Peterson and Irving, 2008). The notion of assessment to be used for improving learning is associated with assessment as having clear and not implicit criteria and communicate to students what still needs to be pursued (McInerney et al. 2008). Interestingly in the study of Peterson and Irving (2008) students perceive both summative and formative assessment to be a useful source of information as to how they can improve. The study of Peterson and Irving (2008) investigated secondary school students’ conceptions of assessment and feedback. Five focus groups were conducted with 41 Year 9 and 10 students (equivalent to Grades 8 and 9 in other countries) from 4 diverse New Zealand schools. Generally, students perceive assessment as something useful because it led to information and feedback. It is believed by students that information, given in the right form, could benefit themselves and, to a lesser extent, the teachers to improve. A recent study of Segers and Tillema (2011) was conducted in the last two years of Dutch general secondary education with a sample of 712 students. To measure students’ conceptions of the purposes of assessment, they translated
and shortened the Students’ Conceptions of Assessment Survey SCoA-V by Brown et al (2009). The students’ conceptions that resulted from their analyses are to a large extent comparable to the four conceptions identified by Brown et al (2009) mentioned earlier. Students conceive the purpose of assessment as personal enjoyment, benefiting the class climate and making the school accountable. Moreover, like the New Zealand students, the Dutch students hold the conception that assessment serves the purpose of improving learning. This means among other things that they do not ignore information gained from assessment activities and do not throw away any of the assessment results. Students also express that assessment serves the purpose of student accountability. What is different though, is that Dutch students connect this student accountability purpose to the belief that assessment is unfair to students.

Students also perceive assessment as something used for external factors such as counting the quality of schools (Brown et al. 2009). It is further suggested that “students who attribute academic consequences (i.e, assessment outcomes) to external (e.g, my teacher or my school), unstable (e.g, luck or teacher whimsy), or uncontrollable (e.g my parent’s wealth or my intelligence) causes consistently do worse (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2006 cited in McInerney et al. 2009, p.137). Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) in a research study undertaken in New Zealand with 3469 secondary schools students concludes that between students’ perceptions and academic achievement there is a non-chance relationship. “It is clearly suggested by this research that children who maximise their conception of assessment as something that makes them personally accountable, who de-emphasise blaming the school or the teacher, who treat assessment seriously and who pay attention to it will achieve more” (Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008, p. 14). Unlike Brown there was no evidence that students thought that assessment should make them or their school accountable in the study of Peterson and Irving (2008). Rather than holding schools, teachers or themselves accountable as Browns’ model suggests, most students thought that assessment and feedback information shows learning progress to teachers, parents, employers, and to the students themselves. The favorite way of showing this progress was with grades (Peterson and Irving, 2008).

Generally studies considering students’ perceptions as an emerging theme in research are more recent than studies considering teachers’ perceptions. Some broad conclusions that
can be made are that students like subjects and activities where teaching and learning are active, participatory and have practical application. Pupils enjoy a range of teaching and learning approaches and activities. A balance and variety of assessment methods is also popular. All in all, students appreciate Formative Assessment which involves given information to on their learning and feedback (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) while at the same time they appreciate formal evaluative process (Bloom, Madaus and Hasting, 1981). As students’ acknowledgment of Formative Assessment methods increases they become more demanding and they have more precise actions to recommend (Cowie, 2005; Lord and Jones, 2006; McInerney et al. 2009). Students perceive as helpful the elements of FA and namely those involving working with peers and a clear sense of reflecting the processes of learning (Miller and Lavin, 2007). Students seem to believe that tests and teacher assessment activities are the main ways for teachers to find out about their learning while they also identify some interactions in the classroom, questioning and comments on bookwork to also inform teachers about their learning (Cowie, 2005).

2.5 Synthesis of students’ and teachers’ perceptions

It seems that there is a great variability in perceptions both within students and within teachers due to the plurality of the term assessment itself as well as the great variability of educational policies and assessment systems thus making it difficult in making any firm conclusions that will be universal. However, it can be said that there are more commonalities than differences between students’ and teachers’ perceptions on assessment. In general, literature supports the view that students’ and teachers’ perceptions of assessment can be categorised in four major categories:

- Assessment improves teaching and learning
- Assessment makes students and schools accountable for learning
- Assessment demonstrates the quality of schools and teachers
- Assessment should be rejected when considered as invalid, irrelevant and negative
While students seem also to believe in some cases that assessment is enjoyable (Brown, 2009).

Both teachers and students seem to like a variety of assessment methods to be in use while at the same time they perceive most of the FA elements as motivating and interesting. Both seem to appreciate that formal evaluation process is essential for external reports. They both understand that for FA to be in place lots of work, time and training from both sides needs to occur. Students seem also to highlight the importance of trust and respect between themselves and their teacher in order to correspond positively and act on some of the methods of FA such as feedback and peer assessment. High stakes tests are also appreciated for their clear cut indications and perceived to be important for reasons such as informing third parties.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature review provided a short historical overview of assessment development within the last two decades and particularly formative and summative assessment. Then a discussion was held on the reform of the assessment system in Cyprus as part of the change of the National Curriculum. A review of the current literature about teachers’ and students’ assessment perceptions was held. The review highlighted mostly international research because there is a lack of studies in Cyprus on this area. These resulted to the research questions.

2.7 Research Question

The research questions arising from the literature and which form the research questions for this study are:

1) a. What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?

   b. What assessment methods do Cypriot teachers associate with the term assessment?

2) a. What are Cypriot students’ perceptions of assessment purposes?
b. What assessment methods do students associate with the term assessment?

3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

4) What are students’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?
3 Methodology

This chapter considers the research design of this project. It will discuss some main ontological and epistemological beliefs as well as why a mixed methodology approach was chosen in addition to why the specific sample was chosen. Details are going to be given on the methods used, their sequence, their drawbacks and advantages. Data analysis is then covered after considering how this study was conducted ethically ensuring validity and reliability.

3.1 Ontology

Ontology reflects on the question ‘to what extent is reality external to our consciousness or is reality simply a construction of our consciousness?’ (Guba, 1990). Ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions which in turn give rise to methodological considerations and these in turn give rise to issues of instruments to use to collect data (Cohen et al., 2007). “Ontology is about the nature of world what it consists of, what entities operate within it and how they are interrelated to each other” (Stainton-Rogers, 2006, p.79 cited in Bahari, 2010, p.43). The main beliefs concerning the nature of reality are described through objectivism and constructionism as opposing positions which lead to different epistemological and methodological approaches (Scott, 2000).

3.1.1 Objectivism

Objectivism is based on the idea that social phenomena are external facts beyond the researchers’ reach or influence (Bryman, 2012). Researchers supporting objectivism believe that the truth is external to humans and (Creswell, 1994) assume that social phenomena and the categories that we use in everyday discussions have an existence that is independent or separate from actors (Bahari, 2010, p. 26). This notion is associated to the belief that the methods used in the natural sciences can also be used by the social sciences referring especially to the use of quantitative analysis in order to measure the relationship between variables. Furthermore, it implies that the social world is as concrete and ‘real’ as
the natural world. Objectivism is related to the positivist paradigm and quantitative research (Bahari, 2010).

3.1.2 Constructionism

Constructionism is an ontological assumption which argues that reality is the result of our own beliefs and consciousness and that people are responsible for creating their own realities. Furthermore, it implies that social phenomena and categories are not only shaped through social contact but they are in a continuous state of change (Bahari, 2010; Bryman, 2012). Constructionism also acknowledges the researchers’ own perceptions as a factor that affects the way the researcher views the construction of the world (Bryman, 2012). Thus constructionism argues that the only reality is the one constructed by the people involved in the research (Creswell, 1994). This ontological belief is associated with an interpretivism paradigm and qualitative research.

As a researcher I do not feel that my beliefs fit within the aforementioned paradigms but they are more closely aligned with the ‘pragmatist’ point of view; which is going to be discussed in the next section. Generally ‘pragmatists’ believe that instead of searching for metaphysical truths, they consider truth to be ‘what works’ (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

3.2 Epistemology

Epistemological assumptions arise from the questions ‘what is knowledge?’ and ‘how do we know what we perceive is real?’ Thus how one perceives the nature and form of reality and how it can be acquired will affect the ways he/she will uncover knowledge (Cohen et al. 2007; Opie, 2004). Three major epistemological perspectives have resulted in post-positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism as central paradigms. Although we can discuss some of their main features, giving a clear picture for each and one of them or even of the term ‘paradigm’ is an utopian attempt considering that Thomas Kuhn who was as one of the first ones to communicate this discussion gave himself approximately 21 definitions (Guba, 1990).
3.2.1 **Positivism**

Positivism, alternatively called ‘experimental’ or ‘empiricist’ is founded in the ontological belief that knowledge is tangible, hard, objective and out there (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell, 1994; Opie, 2004). Thus positivism implies that knowledge is external to us and by observing the world carefully and objectively we can understand it. Furthermore, based on epistemological assumptions, this paradigm holds the belief that the researcher should remain distant from what is being researched, thus being as objective as possible and controlling bias, though post positivism acknowledges that objectivity of the researcher is an ‘ideal’ that cannot be achieved in an absolute sense (Guba, 1990). Post-positivism is a revised form of positivism which addresses some of the most common criticisms accepted yet remaining its original orientation (Guba, 1990; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Thus post-positivism acknowledges that it is impossible for humans to truly perceive the reality which is out there because of their imperfect sensory and intellective mechanisms’ (Cook and Campbell, 1979, p29 cited in Guba, 1990, p.20). According to a researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions certain methodologies are more likely to be developed. It is considered as a ‘from top to down’, ‘deductive’ research which starts from a theory to create a hypothesis, which is then measured to be confirmed or challenged (Creswell and Plano, 2007). Quantitative approaches are associated with the positivist paradigm. Answers to the research questions of quantitative approach are given by numerical data and the analysis of it usually includes describing a phenomenon of interest, showing trends, looking for differences among groups or variables. Hence it tends to include statistics as an ‘objective’ way of gaining the ‘truth’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

It is suggested that a positivist approach fails to take into account the unique ability of humans to interpret their experience of the world (Cohen et al. 2007). There are a variety of schools of thought opposed to the positivist approach united by their belief that human behaviour is not governed by general, universal laws and are not characterised by underlying regularities. They emphasise the idea that each human holds their own beliefs of the world surrounding them and these beliefs in turn shape their world (Cohen et al. 2007).
3.2.2 **Interpretivism**

The interpretivism paradigm is founded on the ontological belief that knowledge is subjective, unique and personal, thus multiple realities exist in a certain situation (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell, 1994; Guba, 1990; Opie, 2004). It is an approach to research which is ‘from the bottom up’, ‘inductive’ meaning that investigating individual perspectives can build and lead to broad patterns and, eventually, a theory (Creswell and Plano, 2007). Epistemologically, this paradigm rests on the principle that the researcher interacts with those in the study while trying to minimize the distance between oneself and the people under study and there is an acceptance that the researcher impacts on their surroundings and the subjects on their research (Creswell, 1994). This paradigm is predominantly associated with a qualitative research approach which focuses on the gathering and analysis of narrative information.

The interpretivism paradigm is not without criticisms. As stated by Layder “the danger of interactionist and interpretive approaches is their relative neglect of the power of external – structural- forces to shape behaviour and events” (Layder, 1994 cited in Cohen et al. 2007, p.26). Anti-positivists may have gone too far in leaving out any possibility for generalisations to be made. Thus, as positivists have been criticised for their macro-sociological persuasion believing in objectivity and in universal laws, so interpretive and qualitative theories were judged for the opposite and namely, the micro-sociological persuasion which gives too much emphasis to the multiplicity of perceptions and impossibility of generalising findings (Cohen et al. 2007).

3.2.3 **Critique of positivism and interpretivism**

Since the 1980s further research has emerged arguing that even if there are some differences in the philosophical assumptions of positivism and interpretivism, the two paradigms are not mutually exclusive (Bryman, 1998; Niglas, 2009). Pring (2000) critiques the dualism between positivist and interpretivism paradigms as mutually exclusive or as paradigms and beliefs one must hold exclusively thus following certain methodologies and
methods. Quantitative and qualitative, positivism and interpretivism are not so clearly or fundamentally distinct. Instead Pring suggests that ‘qualitative’ research is necessary for acknowledging constraints in humans’ activities according to their social structure. He acknowledges that people hold different beliefs “However, such differences in the organisation of experience, such different conceptions of the world, such reconstructions of how we understand reality are possible because there are stable and enduring features of reality, independent of us, which make such distinction possible (...). However much of the understanding of reality shapes the reality itself ... which enable generalisations to be made” (Pring, 2000, p. 259).

3.2.4 Pragmatism

The discussion on mixed methods gave rise to a paradigm debate. Several schools of thought arose in this debate during the 1970s and 1980s with the first two opposing groups being the ‘pragmatists’ and the ‘purists’ (Creswell, 1994; Creswell and Plano, 2007; Firestone, 1987; Rocco et al. 2003). ‘Purists’ believe that positivism and interpretivism and their associated methods should not be mixed. They also believe that the two types (quantitative and qualitative) are incompatible because of their philosophical assumptions about ontology and epistemology (Creswell, 1994; Firestone 1987; Greene, Caracelli, V.J. and Graham, 1989). On the other hand the ‘pragmatists’ see a more instrumental relationship between paradigms and methods. Generally researchers supporting mixed methods approaches believe that paradigms are socially constructed and thus they are not unchangeable (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). Thus pragmatists were the ones who initially used mixed methods approaches and believed in the most efficient use of both paradigms in considering social phenomena (Creswell, 1994). Pragmatists believe that the primary importance is in the research questions under study rather than the methods and that multiple methods of data collection might inform the problem under study (Creswell, 2005). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) name this the ‘dictatorship of the research questions’ referring to the central and preliminary role the research questions play and are the ones which give the basis for specific methodologies and method strategies to be selected. The best way to understand pragmatism is to acknowledge their belief that ‘the essential criteria
for making design decisions are practical, contextually responsive and consequential’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p.101).

According to some researchers mixing methodologies is not preferable although mixing methods from a sole paradigm is very welcome (Guba and Lincoln, 2005 cited in Niaz, 2008). This is illogical according to Creswell as “if we cannot mix paradigms (...) then mixing methods is untenable” because certain methods are associated with certain methodologies which are in turn associated with certain paradigms thus Creswell and Plano can see a link between paradigms and methods (Creswell, 2009). We can see that a debate exists among educational researchers on the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of mixed methods. Researchers supporting the mixed method design suggest that is the research questions that will define a good research study and whether a mixed methods approach is appropriate in order to answer these questions and not its selected paradigm a priori (Sahedi and Golafshani, 2010; Symonds and Gorard, 2010; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). Similarly Rocco et al (2003) based on the assumptions of Patton (2002) claim that the challenge is to match paradigm and research method to the specific purpose of the study, questions and issues raised (Rocco et al. 2003).

3.3 Research Design

As Kaplan (1973) suggests, the aim of the methodology is to help us understand the process of the research. Thus the term methodology is used to denote the overall approach to a particular scientific inquiry and the general strategy adopted (Opie, 2004). Certain methodologies lead then to specific methods to be used (Cohen et al. 2007). Methodology has also been described as an approach which involves a theory on how a research question should be analyzed (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). There are two major paradigms, quantitative and qualitative.

The quantitative researcher views the reality as objective, ‘out there’ and holds the objectivism ontological assumption which is related to the positivistic approach as its epistemological follow up. Certain methodologies are associated with the quantitative paradigm, the most common of them being the survey, experimental, quasi-experimental
and correlation designs (Creswell, 1994; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Moreover, certain methods are said to be more appropriate according to the methodology chosen. Structured interviews, structured observations and questionnaires including closed questions are the most common methods associated with the aforementioned designs. The quantitative paradigm has accepted some criticism either in general as a research strategy or because of its epistemological and ontological assumptions. An example of criticism of the quantitative paradigm is its approach to the social science in the same way researchers tread ‘the world of nature’ (Schutz, 1962 cited in Bryman, 2012, p.159). In addition, the quantitative approach has accepted criticism on the way it analyses the relationship between variables as a static view of social life, independent of people’s lives (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative research is associated with constructionism as ontological belief and interpretivism as the basis of its epistemological belief. Specific methodologies are related to this paradigm, the most common being case studies, ethnographic research, grounded theory, action research and phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1994). Unstructured interviews, unstructured observation and open ended questionnaires as well as documentary analysis are associated with the aforementioned methodologies. As with the quantitative paradigm, the qualitative paradigm has accepted some criticism. Qualitative paradigm is claimed to be very subjective as its findings rely too much on the researchers’ own views and the relationship he/she shapes with the participants. In addition, qualitative studies are very hard to replicate and they are accused of over relying on the researchers’ subjective interpretations. Moreover, as qualitative studies usually involve a smaller number of participants it is hard to claim that their findings are generalizable to the wider population (Bryman, 2012).

Although for many years it was believed that here is a clear distinction between quantitative and qualitative research which have many differences based on contrasting ontological and epistemological assumptions, and both implying different research strategies, the distinction is not ‘a hard-and-fast one’ (Bryman, 2008, p.23). This statement leads us to the discussion on mixed methodology approach which refers to studies which combine characteristics from both paradigms for the overall project. Mixed methodology approach was considered the most appropriate research design to meet the needs of this study.
3.4 Mixed Methodology approach

The mixed methodology approach was first seen as two separate strands of research (quantitative and qualitative) with an obvious division between the two. In the mid-1990s a discussion began focusing on mixing, linking and connecting the two (Creswell, 2009). The originality of mixed methods stands by the fact that both forms of data are put together as a research design or methodology (Creswell and Plano, 2007). Currently we understand the term ‘mixed methods’ as an umbrella term where qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection are combined in one way or another in various designs to investigate a certain phenomenon (Niglas, 2009). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie describe it as ‘the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17 cited in Symonds and Gorard, 2010, p.121). Mixed methods research has also been called ‘the third path’ by Gorard and Taylor (2004), ‘the third research paradigm’ by Johnson and Onweagbuzie (2004) and ‘the third methodological movement’ by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) all conceiving positivism and interpretivism as the major, first two (cited in Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This approach though is challenging as it requires the researcher to be aware of both types of methods (quantitative and qualitative) in order to combine them. This led also to the term ‘methodological bilingualism’ as necessary for effective mixed methods research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). By ‘methodological bilingualism’ the researchers refer to the knowledge a scientist should have of basic qualitative and quantitative contexts and terminologies in order to use them successfully when combining methodologies (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

3.4.1 Rationale for combining methods

The term ‘combination of methods’ is used in a general sense of combining methods and methodologies between paradigms. Although triangulation per se is an important reason for combining methods some more important factors exist for combining methods. Some of these factors as suggested by Greene et al (1989) are:
• “triangulation in the classic sense of seeking convergence of results
• Complimentary, in that overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon may emerge (e.g. peeling the layers of an onion)
• Developmentally, wherein the first method is used sequentially to help inform the second method
• Initiation, wherein contradictions and fresh perspectives emerge
• Expansion, wherein the mixed methods add scope and breadth to a study” (Creswell, 1994, p.175).

Andrew and Halcomb (2007) add a further factor which is triangulation to enhance the significance of the findings (cited in Salehi and Golafshani, 2010).

3.4.2 Designs of Mixed Methods

There are more than forty mixed method designs reported in the literature (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) and typologies of mixed methods designs, while valuable, can never be exhaustive. Creswell and Plano (2007) use a classification made up of four major types of mixed methods design:

• Triangulation design
• Embedded design
• Explanatory design
• Exploratory design.

Triangulation design is the most popular approach for mixing methods. “The purpose of this design is to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic” to understand the research problem (Morse, 1991, p.122 cited in Creswell and Plano, 2007, p.62). With this design a researcher can directly compare and expand statistical results with qualitative findings. It has also been called ‘concurrent triangulation design’ as the methods are used at the same time with equal weight (Creswell and Plano, 2007). Concurrent design can also be found in the terms ‘parallel’ mixed methods design and ‘simultaneous’ design (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).
In Embedded design one data set “provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type” (Creswell et al. 2003 cited in Creswell and Plano, 2007, p.67). In this design the results of the secondary data are meaningful only because they are a part of the primary data set.

Explanatory design (or Explanatory Sequential design) is a two-phase mixed methods design which starts with the collection and an analysis of quantitative data followed up by collection and analysis of qualitative data which depends on the results of the first phase. The emphasis is typically on the quantitative data (Creswell and Plano, 2007).

Finally, there is the Exploratory design. This design starts from the qualitative data and is followed by the collection of quantitative data for exploring a phenomenon. This design is suitable when there is no guiding framework or theory (Creswell and Plano, 2007). It is also a two-phase approach like the explanatory design.

3.4.3 Implications for this study

One of the situations in which mixed methods is the preferred approach in addressing research problems as described by Creswell and Plano (2007) relevant to my study is where the quantitative results typically play a dominant role because they involve a large sample. Thus I was led to an Explanatory design (or Explanatory Sequential design). The quantitative element occurs first and it is used to make decisions about the qualitative phase. In this study a questionnaire instrument was addressed to students and teachers in a large sample in order to gain general findings and uncover tendencies in what constitutes assessment according to teachers and students, the extent to which they agree or disagree with the four competing purposes of assessment as summarised by Brown (2006, 2009) and perceptions regarding the assessment developments within the NNC. This will produce quantitative data, which can partially answer the research questions of this study.

For the quantitative results to be understood and for more specific information to be gathered in order to enrich the data, address more issues concerning assessment and explain the quantitative results a qualitative instrument including interviews with the teachers and
group interviews with children was perceived as essential. As a consequence an Explanatory sequential design of mixed methods is used here where qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results. Some of the strengths of this design are that it is quite straightforward because the two methods are conducted and analysed separately and the final report can be written in two phases making clear which results are occurring from the one phase and the other and how they are related in order to have a more holistic view of the theme under investigation (Creswell and Plano, 2007). Some of the disadvantages of this strategy are that it is time consuming and adequate time must be given to the quantitative and qualitative phases. It can also be difficult to explain and justify how the participants of the second phase are going to be selected and gain approval as they are not known prior to the quantitative phase. In this design it is suggested that the same individuals should be included in both data collections although the sample size in the qualitative phase is reasonably going to be much smaller.

3.4.4 Multilevel Mixed Method Sampling

Mixed Method sampling usually includes both probability and non-probability (purposive) sampling which are typically associated with quantitative and qualitative data respectively (Cohen et al. 2007, Opie, 2004). One of the characteristics of the Mixed Method approach is the creative combination of these sample strategies. ‘Combining the two orientations allows the researcher to generate complementary data bases that include information with both depth and breadth’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p.180). Quantitative sampling is expected to be larger and it is estimated based on mathematical calculations in order to estimate the characteristics of a population within a prescribed margin of error. Taking into account the qualitative sample, although there are no correct patterns, some general guidelines are given for the sample size according to the type of study selected. Sample size in Mixed Methods research mainly depends upon the design and whether the quantitative or qualitative stage is more dominant, the exchange between the depth and breadth required; the swapping between the requirements of external validity and transferability and what is practical (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). There is not a large literature on Mixed Methods sampling but some major strategies are considered to be:
• ‘Basic mixed methods sampling strategies
• Sequential mixed methods sampling
• Parallel mixed methods sampling
• Multilevel mixed methods sampling
• Sampling using multiple MM sampling strategies’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p.185).

A discussion of these complex sampling strategies is beyond the scope of this text. I am going to discuss only the strategy selected for this study which was the multilevel mixed method sampling. Multilevel mixed methods sampling is very common in the educational research where different units of analysis are nested within one another. These usually include state school systems, school districts, schools, teachers or classrooms and students (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Figure 3.1 illustrates the structure of the sample decisions made having in mind the example given by Teddlie and Tashakorie, 2009, p.191.
There are 64 lower secondary public schools in the whole island which include 25,785 students in total, 13,147 of them are boys and 12,638 are girls. The distribution of lower secondary public schools and students by district are clear in table 3.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>Total Number of schools</th>
<th>Total Number of pupils</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicosia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4,404</td>
<td>4,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammochostos</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larnaca</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,403</td>
<td>2,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limassol</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,785</td>
<td>3,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pafos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,705</td>
<td>1,493</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-1 Number of pupils in lower, public secondary schools by district and gender.
Considering the difference between the number of schools and pupils by districts, in order to have a representative sample from all Cypriot lower secondary public schools it was considered as appropriate to use stratified sampling. By stratified sampling we mean a non-probability sample which represents significant characteristics of the wider population in the proportions in which they can be found in the wider population (Cohen et al. 2007). In stratified sampling the population is divided into sub groups that are relatively homogenous with respect to one or more characteristics and the sample is selected randomly from each stratum (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Thus the schools were selected proportionally according to the number of schools by district (non-probability sample) but the specific schools and classes to visit were based on convenience (probability sampling). This is not unreasonable in the Cypriot context as schools are not ranked, they are considered to be at the same level and classes are not divided based on ability but are considered to be mixed ability based on their age and they are also mixed by gender. Consequently probability sample was used in some of the levels and purposive sample for other levels.

A total of approximately ten schools to participate were considered appropriate for the time available in this study. So based on the strata the proportion was purposefully selected to be representative of all secondary schools in Cyprus but the subjects were randomly selected while the schools were selected based on convenience for the researcher to travel, larger school in urban areas were preferred and of course which were willing to participate. Questionnaires were planned to be administered to one from each Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9 classroom. The proportion of schools to participate by district is made clearer in the table 3.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total number of schools</th>
<th>Percentage of schools</th>
<th>Number of schools visited</th>
<th>Number of students participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicosia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammochostos</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larnaca</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limassol</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pafos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-2 Proportion of schools to participate by district and sample of students.
The actual sample involved was 599 students in total thus lower than expected but still a lot for the Cypriot context. This is due to the fact that some students did not want to participate while some returned the questionnaire blank. Moreover, some of the classes were composed with less than 25 students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>4.363</td>
<td>4.553</td>
<td>4.696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>4.094</td>
<td>4.239</td>
<td>4.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.457</td>
<td>8.792</td>
<td>9.323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-3 Total Number of pupils in lower secondary public schools by grade and gender in Cyprus

The student sample gender distribution shows an almost equal number of boys and girls in all lower secondary schools (Table 3.3). This is consistent with the overall composition of classrooms in all public schools within the Cypriot context which attempt to have the same number of both genders in the classrooms.

There is no significant difference between the number of Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9 students participating which ensures that results across the age range are generally comparable at a demographic level (Table 3.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-4 Number of Students participating in this study from each school year

In addition there is a general balance between the number of girls and boys participating in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-5 Total students’ gender proportion
The total number of Greek language teachers in secondary (lower and upper) schools in the last estimation in 2003/2004 was 1578 teachers including full time and part time teachers as well as head teachers. The exact number of Greek language teachers in lower secondary public schools is not apparent. Making though some logical calculations we are led to the conclusion that approximately half of them are in lower secondary and half in upper secondary. This conclusion was made due to the fact that there are a total of 127 public secondary school which 64 are lower and 63 are upper secondary and due to the fact that the ratio of pupil per teacher is 11.0 suggesting that there are approximately 789 Greek language teachers (full time, part time and head teachers) in lower secondary schools. It was decided that in each school visited for the distribution of questionnaires to students, questionnaires will be given to all Greek language teachers. Anecdotally there are approximately 13 Greek language teachers in each school. This was supposed to give as a number of (11 x 13) 143 teachers (n=143). This is a proportion of 18.1% of the total Greek language teachers in lower secondary. The actual sample N=95 though is smaller due to a very low response rate which even led the researcher to visit more schools than planned to but again quite large for the Cypriot context.

The proportion of teacher participants from each city was based on a stratified sample according to the total number of schools in each district. The initial attempt was to visit 11 schools in total but the response rate of questionnaires was smaller than expected thus some changes needed to be made during the field work. Beyond the four schools participating from Nicosia in which were administered both teachers’ and students’ questionnaires, three extra schools were visited from this city (based on convenience) only to be given teachers’ questionnaires. Thus a total of 47 questionnaires from this city were collected and seven schools were given teachers’ questionnaires. The number of schools participating from the other cities remained the same as intended (Table 3.6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of lower secondary schools in total</th>
<th>Percentage of total schools</th>
<th>Number of schools visited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicosia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammochostos</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larnaca</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limassol</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pafos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-6 Number and percentages of schools participating from each district

Most participants were female (84%), consistent with the overall composition of the Cypriot teacher body where females constitute 81% of the elementary teacher population (Statistical Service, 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-7 Male and female composition

As suggested earlier the number of teachers and students participating in the qualitative phase of the study was intending to involve people from the same sample selected after the analysis of the quantitative data based on contradictory or extreme perceptions. Unfortunately, only 7 teachers agreed to be interviewed and they were all included in the qualitative phase while only three group interviews with children have taken place giving us a total of 15 students participating. This is not an uncommon case according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009). More details on the sample for the qualitative phase are given later.

3.5 Questionnaires

3.5.1 Introduction

Questionnaires are a self-report instrument for gathering information about variables of interest to the researcher. Questionnaires are a popular way of gathering information relatively easy with low cost and minimum time especially when given in groups of people (Munn and Drever, 2004).
3.5.2 Advantages and Drawbacks

Some of the major advantages of questionnaires are that they can save time in a number of ways. The researcher can conduct the questionnaire in its own time while the respondents too can complete it in their own space and free time (Cohen et al. 2007; Munn and Drever, 2004). Thus, in this study teachers completed the questionnaires in their own space and time. This was not feasible for students while they completed the questionnaire in the classroom. Questionnaires were used because it is an instrument which helped collect information from a large number of people and especially because the questions included were closed and the analysis of the responses was straightforward and analysed through a software package. The main reason why questionnaires were chosen for this study is because of the lack of research in Cyprus on students’ and teachers’ perceptions on the purposes of assessment and the NNC. Thus this instrument allowed the researcher to investigate a large sample of the aforementioned groups in a relatively easy, quick and not very expensive way. In addition, due to the large sample included some generalisations can be made as a basis for more studies to occur.

As any kind of research method, questionnaires have also some drawbacks with some of those being their descriptive character giving information unexplained. Thus they are usually considered to give superficial information especially when they are structured in character. To overcome this barrier, interviews were also used for this study. Another main drawback is that the response rate of the teachers’ questionnaires in this study was relatively small that is why some changes needed to be made during the field work and more schools than planned were visited as shown in previous tables.

3.5.3 Types of questionnaires

There are several types of questionnaires but according to Cohen et al. (2007) the simplest ‘rule of thumb’ is that the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire may have to be. The smaller the sample size, the less structured, more open ended and word based the questionnaire might be. In general,
questionnaires can be classified as structured, semi-structured and unstructured as in the case of observations and interviews (Cohen et al. 2007). In this study, structured questionnaires were used both for teachers and students on a six point likert type scale, see appendices F and I.

3.5.4 Types of questionnaire items

There are numerous kinds of question modes in questionnaires including, multiple choice questions, rating scales, constant sum questions, open-ended questions, dichotomous questions and the like. Open-ended questions are more appropriate when the study has a generally qualitative approach and seeks to capture the specificity of a particular situation. Furthermore, open ended questions give the freedom to the respondent to answer as they wish and are useful especially when investigating complex issues to which simple answers cannot be given (Cohen et al. 2007; Foddy, 1994; Munn and Drever, 2004; Oppenheim, 2000). Some of the drawbacks of open-ended questions are that the respondents may write irrelevant or useless information and need much more of their time to answer them compared to the closed questions. Open ended questions were considered as unsuitable for the quantitative phase of this study.

On the other hand there are the closed questions which restrict the respondent into questions he/she might choose. Closed questions are useful in that they produce frequencies of answers open to statistical treatment and analysis. They are also useful when the researcher wants to be able to make comparisons between groups in the sample and they are quicker to code and analyse rather than open-ended questions (Cohen et al. 2007). Closed questions are also quick to complete and straightforward to code but they do not usually allow the respondent to make comments, give explanations while there is also the risk that the categories might not be exhaustive (Cohen et al. 2007; Converse and Presser, 1986; Foddy, 1994; Oppenheim, 2000).

The style used for the quantitative phase of this study was the rating scale, closed questions. The most common rating scales are Likert scale, semantic differential scales, Thurstone scales and Guttman scaling. They are very useful to a researcher who wants to produce
numbers but at the same time building a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response (Cohen et al. 2007). A Likert scale provides a range of responses to a given question or statement usually from 1-5 with 1=not at all, 2=very little, 3=a little, 4=quite a lot, 5=a very great deal, or according to the type of answer needed it might be categorised as 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. Researchers do not agree whether a middle alternative should be included as there are some advantages and disadvantages in this approach (Converse and Presser, 1986; Foddy, 1994). Furthermore, the scale should be measuring only one thing at a time and this was the foundation stone of Likert’s thinking. Rating scales data is treated as ordinal data. While rating scales are a useful and powerful instrument in research they have some limitations that the researcher should be aware of. There are no equal intervals between the categories, we have no proof that the researchers are telling the truth and there is no way to know if the respondents might have wished to add any other comments about the subject under study (Cohen et al.2007). For this study the likert type was used following the example of the previous Teachers’ Conception of Assessment used (Michaelides and Brown, 2010) and Students’ Conception of Assessment (Brown et al. 2009) with 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Slightly agree, 4=Moderately agree, 5=Mostly agree, and 6=Strongly agree. This gives us a non-balance scale because according to literature teachers and students tend to respond positively to all items thus a positively packed rating scale generates variance and precision (Brown, 2004; McInerney et al. 2009). The same scale was used for the extra questions included in the aforementioned questionnaires to answer the research questions considering the NNC for reasons explained later in the piloting section.

For the writing of the questions concerning the NNC I have followed some general but important guidelines. First of all, it is suggested not to use leading questions which typically suggest one answer to be the correct one. Avoiding difficult language is also important as well as avoiding complex question (Cohen et al. 2007; Foddy, 1994; Munn and Drever, 2004; Oppenheim, 2000). Making questions clear and straightforward can be accomplished by using simple language, common concepts, manageable tasks and widespread information while avoiding acronyms, abbreviations, jargon and technical terms (Converse and Presser, 1986; Oppenheim, 2000). Thus questions should be phrased
in a way that matches the vocabulary of the participants (Munn and Drever, 2004; Oppenheim, 2000). In addition, it is also central to avoid irritating questions or instructions and questions that use negatives and double negatives (Cohen et al. 2007; Converse and Presser, 1986; Foddy, 1994; Munn and Drever, 2004; Oppenheim, 2000). The aforementioned suggestions were carefully considered while writing my questionnaire items first in English and then translated and administered in Greek.

3.5.5 Administering questionnaires

Questionnaires can be administered in several ways, including self-administration, post, telephone and internet with all the aforementioned having their advantages and disadvantages. Self-administered questionnaires can be completed in the presence or in the absence of the researcher. Self-administered questionnaires were chosen for the purposes of this study. One of its advantages is that when the researcher is present it is helpful for the sample because they can ask for queries or further indications. Moreover, it ensures a good response rate and ensures that most of the questions will be completed and filled correctly as the researcher can check it before going away (Cohen et al. 2007; Oppenheim, 2000). One of the major drawbacks is that it is time consuming and travel costs could be expensive (Cohen et al. 2007). For this study, expenses were considered as manageable while the process of travelling to all the cities and administering questionnaires lasted for approximately two and a half months. In this study though the teachers were approached at the longest school break which lasts 25 minutes, a large majority of them did not want to complete the questionnaire at that time so they asked me to wait for one to three hours at the school in order to complete it and give it back. Some of them also wanted to take it at home and bring it another day, thus I have been going to each school for more than once or even twice to collect the questionnaires. Schools which were in cities far away from my home volunteered to post the questionnaires and they actually did although without all teachers who were given questionnaires completing it.
3.5.6 **Piloting**

Piloting which is also known as pre-testing is an important procedure before any study. Piloting as a procedure has several functions while primarily it aims to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire (Cohen et al. 2007; Converse and Presser, 1986; Robson, 2002). It is a useful method for gaining feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items, difficulties in wording, checking readability for the target sample, identifying omissions and checking the time taken to complete a questionnaire. It is useful to the extent that it can show which questions are misunderstood or not completed and to try the coding system for data analysis (Cohen et al. 2007; Converse and Presser, 1986; Oppenheim, 2000). Piloting can be attributed to a small sample and be relatively informal in order to see the flow of the questions and be able to transform them before the actual study proceeds. On the other hand the pilot phase can be attributed to a large sample followed by a detailed analysis of the responses. This is in most of the cases unfeasible in matters of time and expenses needed but useful for novice researchers wanting to familiarise themselves with data collection and analysis (Cohen et al. 2007; Munn and Drever, 2004).

Taking into consideration all of these advantages the pilot stage has to offer, I decided to pilot the questionnaire with as many active Greek Language Teachers as possible starting with one relative and a friend who are active Greek Language teachers and were willing to participate. A school was also visited and questionnaires were given to all Greek language teachers of that school. This resulted in 6 teachers participating in the pilot stage. The pilot stage has shown that teachers did not want to complete the questionnaires in the longest school break as asked. At this point the pilot has shown that I should give them the option to complete the questionnaire in their own space and time and set another day to collect it back. Once the questionnaires were completed, the teachers were asked for some feedback which led to some modifications of the final questionnaire item. One of the modifications was to reconstruct the scale of the questions considering the NNC. As half of the questionnaire was based on a non-balanced scale because of the TCoA used, the other half of the questionnaire which was formed by my own questions on the NNC was based on a
balanced likert type scale. The teachers thought it was confusing and they did not believe it is reasonable to have two types of scales in a single questionnaire. Some of them even complained that they realised it after completing the whole questionnaire and then had to go back and redo their answers (although bolded and was clear and obvious on the top of the page). This was not the only reason why a non-balanced scale was used for all the questions in the final questionnaire but also the suggestion of the literature as mentioned earlier that teachers tend to respond positively to all items considering legitimate purposes of assessment (Brown, 2004; McInerney et al. 2009).

In order to pilot the questionnaire with the children, permission from the MoEC was needed. Permission was also needed from the head masters and teachers. Although it is hard for any teachers to give some of their teaching time for this it is even harder to keep the children busy for any longer in order to ask them for feedback. Thus the researcher while present observed how long it took children to complete it leading to some modifications. In addition, children were asked to ask any kind of question while completing it. The pilot stage proved useful to the extent that I did notice that some of the children needed a pen or a pencil and I had to provide it to them. I have also noticed that some clippers were needed because children tended to undo the pages. I also needed some sort of files in order to put all of the questionnaires of a classroom together in order not to mix them up. I also realised that I needed some small papers to take notes about where the classrooms were located, the names of the teachers who were willing to give their teaching time and the exact time I needed to be in each classroom. Furthermore, the key gatekeeper to approach was the secretary who was responsible for giving me the names of the teachers and finding the timetable for appropriate classrooms as well as the available teachers. The pilot stage has shown that the cover page was not useful and not many children did actually read it but those who did lost valuable time. Thus I decided that I should inform them orally very briefly about the purpose and procedure, thus the cover page was excluded. A reminder that it should last about 10 minutes is important and reminding them how much time is left after 5-6 minutes proved helpful. Some nominal questions such as name and surname were making them feel uncomfortable so the pilot stage showed that I had to explain from the beginning why their personal information was needed and ensure them that they were not going to be exposed. In the final questionnaire I even put a watermark in
the background of the page saying ‘confidential’ in Greek. Children were encouraged to ask me if they had any queries and I noted which questions were difficult for them to answer in order to change them slightly or even delete them. Two questions were deleted for the final questionnaire. Furthermore, the questionnaire piloted was based on a likert type balanced scale, with five options, where the middle one was ‘neither agree nor disagree’. It was observed that too many children, either because they were bored, or did not want to think too much, were seeing this as an easy option and there were too many answers given to the middle column. For the final questionnaire this option was not given thus it was decided to use a non-balanced, likert type response where 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Slightly agree, 4=Moderately agree, 5=Mostly agree, and 6=Strongly agree following the example of the original SCoA of course translated in Greek. The same scale was used for the NNC questions included in the same questionnaire.

3.6 Ethical Issues for quantitative data

All stages of any kind of research should consider and ensure ethicality. For this study ethicality was first ensured by asking for permission by the relevant authorities and gatekeepers. Thus the researcher firstly gained permission from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in Cyprus as well as the Pedagogical Institute as obliged by Cyprus legislation through completing an online form. In addition, the head masters of the schools to be visited were given a consent form to sign agreeing that the researcher can involve some of the teachers and students of the schools (Appendix E). The researcher strongly encouraged participants to participate but in no way could she force them (Cohen et al. 2007). They were also given the choice to withdraw at any stage. I guaranteed the participants that the research will not harm them and even because their names were needed for the qualitative phase they were not going to be exposed while pseudonyms were given. The reasons for giving their names and contact information were explained though they were given the option not to exploit them. For involving children below the age of 16 in Cyprus, when the MoEC and the headmasters, and the teachers give their consent then permission of children themselves or their parents is not considered as necessary especially
while the study does not involve sensitive matters such as abuse, or alcohol consuming, sex, drugs and the like. Considering the questionnaire itself, there should be reassurance that it is going to be valid and reliable avoiding bias (Cohen et al. 2007). How validity and reliability were ensured is explained in the sections to follow.

3.6.1 Validity

Validity starts with the question, ‘Are we measuring what we want to measure?’ (Muijs, 2004). It may sound really obvious but actually it is not when investigating issues in education and especially questions that have a ‘latent variable’ meaning that they cannot be directly measured (Muijs, 2004). It is important to have validity in mind when designing any measurement instrument because if we gather ‘Garbage In then Garbage will come Out’ (GIGO). Results will be meaningless if they are not measuring what they were supposed to measure (Robson, 2002). Validity has mainly three distinct aspects, those being content validity, criterion validity and construct validity. Content validity refers to the appropriateness of the contents of the questions in order to measure what they are saying they are going to measure. This study was conducted mostly with straightforward, direct questions thus measuring exactly what it was intending to. It can be said that the better the understanding one has for the theory under the investigated topic, the better the content validity could be (Bryman, 2012; Muijs, 2004). Criterion validity is also related to the theory and it has two main types, the predictive validity and concurrent validity. As the name suggests predictive validity refers to whether or not the instrument predicts the outcomes you would expect it to (Muijs, 2004). The TCoA and SCoA used were not intended to predict the outcomes and it was not intending to confirm a theory. Concurrent validity refers to whether the scores on the instrument agree with the scores on other factors you would expect it to be related to (Muijs, 2004). ‘Construct validity is a slightly more complex issue relating to the internal structure of an instrument and the concept it is measuring’ (Muijs, 2004, p.68). Because TCoA and SCoA were used in several other countries by several other researchers and thousands of participants it was trusted for its construct validity. The questions of the questionnaire constructed by myself for answering
the research questions for the NNC were independent and not constructing scales thus there were not any serious issues considering construct validity.

3.6.2 Validation of TCoA inventory

Using the Teachers’ Conceptions of Assessment (TCoA) survey instrument which has been used extensively by Brown and colleagues in research in New Zealand, Turkey, Hong Kong, Netherlands, China, Cyprus and Australia was considered as a useful and important instrument to be used in this preliminary study within the Cypriot education context with some modifications. The TCoA version for this study uses 24 statements organized into four major conceptions. The TCoA-IIIA measurement model has been found to have acceptable fit for samples of primary and secondary teachers in both Queensland and New Zealand (Brown 2008). The process for validating the instrument in the Cypriot context was undertaken in 2010 by Dr. Michaelides in collaboration with Dr. Brown. The New Zealand model was found to be inadmissible for the Cypriot teachers, and after exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, a hierarchical, inter correlated model of positive and negative conceptions of assessment was developed.

Thus, beyond the 24 questions taken from TCoA, 22 more questions were added in a single questionnaire to answer the research question of this study on perceptions about the NNC. The questions were carefully designed having in mind the suggestions for constructing effective questions taking the advice of several researchers as presented earlier. I have initially used a balanced six point scale for these questions in the pilot study but it was considered as unreasonable and confusing according to teachers’ comments so in the final questionnaire the positively packed likert type scale was used for the whole questionnaire. Another reason for making the whole questionnaire based on a non-balanced scale was the literature suggesting that teachers seem to be in agreement with the legitimate purposes of assessment thus giving them more agreeable options is not unreasonable. Positively packed scales give respondents more options in the positive agreement region which allows them to express more finely grained levels of agreement while generating greater discrimination.
among the various constructs (Brown 2004). The whole questionnaire given to teachers can be found as an appendix (Appendix F).

3.6.3 Validation of SCoA inventory

I was the first researcher to use the SCoA inventory within the Cypriot context thus a procedure needed to be followed. Firstly, I carefully translated the questions forming the Students’ Conceptions of Assessment inventory from English to Greek. Two of my friends who are English language teachers and whose native language is Greek were also asked to translate the SCoA inventory separately. Very similar translations were made by all three of us and then when further discussed some more modifications were made in order to finalise the translated questionnaire. Very useful for the terminologies was also the translation of TCoA made by Michaelides (2010) so the same words were translated identically in the students’ questionnaire. A cross check of the final translation was also checked by a bilingual friend. After careful consideration and discussions with colleagues and supervisors it was decided that no exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis should be used at this point to validate the instrument. Nevertheless, the instrument was considered to have great validity while used by several other researchers in other countries having as a sample thousands of students for several years. This inventory and the dimensionality of it was again tested by Weekers et al. 2009 (chapter in McInerney et al, 2009) while analysing other models including an a) uncorrelated unidimensional model, b) non-hierarchical multidimensional model and c) bifactor model concluding that again the previously used SCoA V by Brown et al. 2009 which is multidimensional with its four major conceptions and eight sub-conceptions is valid and the one that “Researchers should have confidence in using” (McInerney et al, 2009, p.153). “The model with the four major conceptions and eight sub conceptions as found by Brown, Irving, Peterson and Hirschfeld (2009) has been estimated using MPlus (Muthen and Muthen, 1998-2006), resulting in values for fit statistics $\chi^2 (df) = 3797.585 (481)$, and $\chi^2 / df = 7.90$, with a $p$-value of < .01, CFI=.95, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.10, SMRM=0.07, and gamma hat =.77” (McInerney et al, 2009, p.153). The researcher trusted the validity of the instrument whilst analysed and presented the
results using only descriptive statistics to answer the research questions of the study and gave the mean scores and response distribution of every question separately but also as part of the scale of sub conception. Thus the latest version of SCoA V was used, the same one used in New Zealand by Brown et al (2009) which also has a low stakes assessment policy in general.

As with TCoA the same non-balanced, positively packed scale was used following the example of all the previous SCoA used (Appendix I).

3.6.4 **Reliability**

‘Reliability in quantitative research is essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over group of respondents’ (Cohen et al. 2007, p.146). According to Muijs (2004) reliability in quantitative research has two main types. The one is repeated measurement which refers to our ability to measure the same thing at different times having the same scores if we include the same sample every time (Muijs, 2004). Cohen et al. (2007) refer to this type of reliability by the term ‘stability’. The second type is ‘internal consistency reliability’. This refers to how homogenous are the items of a test or how well they measure a single construct. This is of course applicable only to instruments that have more than one item (Muijs, 2004). Reliability is an important feature of analysis as we need to know how reliable the instrument of data collection we are using is. Reliability has two main forms which both measure internal consistency. The one is the ‘split-half technique’ and the other is the ‘alpha coefficient’ (Cohen et al. 2007). The calculation for coefficient reliability lies between 0 and 1 and the higher this number is, the higher the reliability is. Some researchers such as Bryman and Cramer (1990) suggest that only at 0.8 reliability level is acceptable although other researchers suggest that 0.67 and above are also acceptable (Cohen et al. 2007).

3.6.5 **Ensuring Reliability for TCoA**

While apparently ordinal, the rating scale options reflect responses on an underlying continuum of agreement and that parametric factor analysis within the psychometric
approach is appropriate (Himmelfarb 1993). Though the instrument used for this study was validated in 2010 in Cyprus and found reliable to be used in this country, due to the different sample and time, some simple statistics for reconsidering the reliability of each scale were undertaken. More specifically the check of the Cronbach’s Alpha value was calculated for each scale in order to reassure that there was internal consistency within this sample. Usually values above .7 are considered acceptable however values above .8 are preferable. The five scales were examined separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of teaching</td>
<td>.768</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of learning</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is bad</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is irrelevant</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8 Reliability measures of TCoA

The results are in Appendix J. Generally we should always keep in mind that since the sample size was less than 300 (n=95), it is possible that there was insufficient power to accurately estimate opinions or make permanent adjustments to the instrument concerning the reliability of its scales.

3.6.6 Ensuring Reliability for SCoA

The check of the Cronbach’s Alpha value was calculated for each conception in order to be sure that there is internal consistency within this sample. The number of our sample (N=599) can give a meaningful Cronbach Alpha value. It was decided to evaluate the scales as a whole and not their sub concepts because then the number of items of each scale would be extremely small for giving a reliable Cronbach Alpha. Usually values above .7 are considered acceptable however values above .8 are preferable as mentioned earlier. The Cronbach’s Alpha of each scale is displayed in Appendix K.
### Table 3-9 Reliability measures of SCoA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is used for external reasons</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment has a good affect</td>
<td>.816</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is bad</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is used for improvement</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No items for any of the scales needed to be excluded from SCoA as they all had good internal consistency and were considered as reliable.

### 3.7 Analysis of quantitative data

As the questionnaire is based on rating scales it is associated with ordinal data. Ordinal scales classify the data and give an order although, as mentioned earlier, it is wrong to assume equal intervals between the scales. This means that one cannot believe that the distance between each point of the scale is equal (Cohen et al. 2007). The other types of data which are not going to be given great attention in this paper are nominal scale, interval scale and ratio scale. Nominal data is present in a great number of studies including this one as it denotes categories such as male and female (sex) and age groups. Nominal data denotes discrete variables, completely separate categories (one cannot be a girl and a boy at the same time). Some nominal data was also used for this study including questions such as gender, school and grade received (Cohen et al. 2007; Muijs, 2004).

It is suggested that ordinal data is classified as a non-parametric data which makes no assumptions about the population (Cohen et al. 2007; Muijs, 2004). Parametric data is usually derived from experiments and tests while non-parametric data from questionnaires and surveys. This distinction is important to the extent that different statistical tests are used when including parametric or non-parametric statistics and it is incorrect to apply parametric statistics to non-parametric data although the reverse is possible (Cohen et al. 2007; Oppenheimer, 2000).

In this study I have no dependent or independent variables which are usually seen in experiments using t-tests and analysis of variance, regression and multiple regressions.
(Cohen et al. 2007). Although these are usually used in interval or continuous variables they can sometimes be used with ordinal and nominal data (Muijs, 2004). For analysing my data and familiarising myself with SPSS the ‘SPSS survival manual’ (Pallant, 2010) and ‘Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics’ (Field, 2013) proved very useful. I firstly formed a codebook where I defined and labelled each of the variables and assign numbers to each of the possible responses. Then I checked and modified where necessary the options that SPSS uses to display the data and the output that is produced. The next step was to set up the structure of the data file by defining the variables and then to enter the values obtained from each participant for each variable. I imported the data as soon as it was collected. On a later stage, after all the data was imported I have checked for errors, for example if the scores for the variables were not within the range of possible scores. I have checked the internal consistency (reliability) of the scale, which can be found in the appendices J and K. Then I started the analysis of the data. The most simple and first thing to do was to observe the individual variables such as how many girls and boys have participated in the study. Looking at individual variables it is called ‘univariate analysis’ (Muijs, 2004). These formed the ‘demographic characteristics’ of the study as analysed in the sample section above. Then I have calculated the frequency distribution of the variable for observing how many people have answered in a certain way in one of the questions for example how many children believe that assessment is enjoyable. The researcher used descriptive statistics (also known as summary statistics) to summarise the features of the samples and more specifically what are the teachers’ and students’ conceptions about assessment and no attempt was made predict or make inferences. Thus only descriptive statistics were used for this study mainly giving the mean scores, standard deviation and the exact response distribution of answers on each question. In the case of TCoA and SCoA the statistics of each answer was given as part of the scale it was constructing. These are all exposed in the results chapter.

For the presentation of the data there are many visual techniques offered by the statistical packages especially for presenting frequencies and percentages in graphical forms. Some of them are for example frequency and percentage tables, bar charts, histograms, line graphs, pie charts, high and low charts, scatterplots and the like (Cohen et al. 2007; Robson, 2002).
Not all graphical forms are suitable for any kind of data and choosing the most appropriate one and keeping it simple is the wisest decision for making the reading of data clear to all readers. For our data the most suitable graphical form was considered to be simple tables showing the mean scores for each answer, the standard deviation and the response distribution (Cohen et al. 2007; Muijs, 2004; Robson, 2002). This was considered as the most appropriate form because it clearly mirrors in a graphical form what the researcher discussed in words.

The chapter to follow will have a similar structure as this one, giving all the relevant information on the second phase of this study which included qualitative data and more specifically interviews with teachers and group interviews with children.

3.8 Interviews

3.8.1 Introduction

While the quantitative instrument helped find variations among perceptions a qualitative tool helped enhance the overall findings and make sense of these variations. This is in the scope of the Explanatory sequential design of mixed methods used, as explained earlier where qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results. Interviews with the teachers and group interviews with children were perceived as essential.

As Kvale (1996) remarks, interviews are basically an ‘inter-view’, an interchange of views between the participant and the interviewee of a topic of a mutual interest so it is never completely subjective or objective but intersubjective (Cohen et al. 2007). Interviews though are a flexible tool for data collection as they allow different sensory channels to be used such as verbal, non-verbal, body language, eye contact, while giving space for the interviewee for spontaneity and answering complex and deep questions. Interviews are a very common and useful way of gathering data from participants. It is based on the belief that knowledge is generated by individuals who are active, interpreters and construers of their own world and reality is not external to them (Tomlinson, 1989).
3.8.1.1 Purposes of the interview

Interview as a research technique may be used for several purposes. It can be used for testing hypotheses or to suggest a new one when used in a quantitative research design. Secondly, it can be used as the major means of gathering information in order to answer the main research questions or thirdly it can be used as a complementary method for explaining unexpected results, validating other methods and getting an in-depth view of the phenomenon under investigation, something that can be a drawback in using other methods (Cohen et al. 2007). Interviews were used in this study for explaining quantitative results and specifically perceptions about purposes of assessment in general and the reformatations suggested for the NNC in the Greek language subject. In addition, it was used for getting an in-depth view and explained the meanings teachers and students make of their experience, something that would not have been possible by using only the questionnaire items (Bergman, 2008; Cohen et al. 2007; Seidman, 2006).

3.8.1.2 Types of interviews

The major distinction which itself reflects the purposes of the interview is the degree of structure (Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al. 2007; Seidman, 2006). It can be said that semi-structured interviews are between the two edges of unstructured and structured interviews. Between these extremes are semi-structured interviews which share advantages and disadvantages from both sites. Semi-structured interviews were considered as the most useful instrument especially in the framework of this research. In the semi-structured interview the researcher has a specific framework of questions to be answered and topics to be covered while the interviewee has a great deal of flexibility in how to reply. Questions may not follow exactly the way they are outlined in the schedule while some questions that are not included initially may be asked depending on the conversation (Bryman, 2012). Another distinction that can be made depends on how the interviews will take place. There can be one-to one interviews, telephone interviews and Electronic E-mail interviews (Cohen et al. 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). One-to one interviews are the most time
consuming and costly although a popular approach to educational research. One-to-one interviews are ideal when the participants are willing to co-operate, are not hesitant to speak, can share ideas comfortably and of course if the researcher has the sufficient amount of time and money.

Although the initial attempt of the study was to undertake one-to-one face to face interviews with teachers while audio recorded at the same time the study did not exactly proceeded as planned. Only 7 teachers agreed to be interviewed. One of the teachers seemed extremely busy and cancelled the appointment we made several times so we decided to undertake the interview through telephone. It was interesting although one of the drawbacks was that I could not see her reactions. I used the loud speaker of my phone when undertaking the interview and she was informed that I was recording our discussion. Two of the other teachers preferred to undertake the interview together for convenience reasons and I was not able to refuse, considering that the sample was already small. This approach resulted to an interesting discussion and debate between them as they were challenging ideas and it was proven useful and even giving more insights than the individual interviews. The remaining four teachers were interviewed one to one while the place and time of the interview was their choice.

The outline of the interview questions are given in Appendix G. These questions were then reformed based on the information of the piloting stage and according to each teacher’s perceptions as stated in the questionnaire. More details are given on the next section.

3.8.2 Group Interviews

Group interviews are becoming a popular means of data collection in educational research (Cohen et al. 2007). A group interview can facilitate a survey when used to inform questions in a questionnaire taking place on a later (second) stage of a two phase study. Furthermore, group interview can stand as a method alone or it can be used in conjunction with other qualitative methods. In addition, it can be used in a mixed methods study for giving an in-depth view of a larger quantitative study. This last purpose of the group interviews is the one taken into account for this research. This was considered as the most
appropriate method for the time given in this study and to collect data from more students. The sample included 15 students in total in three different groups. Each group was composed of girls and boys of the same school year, same classroom and similar opinions in the questionnaire. This decision was made due to literature (Cohen et al. 2007) supporting the idea that homogenous (in perceptions) groups help the discussion occur more naturally mainly because the students share the same teacher and experience of assessment. Only children who have expressed similar opinions in the questionnaire were in the separate groups while the researcher did not try to compose a confrontational group as this method was criticised and found to have many drawbacks (Denscombe, 1995). The Year 7 group was composed of five children, three girls and two boys, the Year 8 of six children, three girls and three boys while the Year 9 of four children, two girls and two boys.

3.8.2.1 Benefits and drawbacks

Watts and Ebbutt (1986) raise important methodological and pragmatic issues on group interviews. One of the problems when using a group interview is how to handle the people who dominate a discussion and people who are too silent. In this study indeed there were some children who were too silent and others who wanted to dominate the discussion. I have tried my best to encourage all children to participate in the interviews and tried to have a balance by giving them turns. Furthermore, there may be some technical problems when trying to transcribe and analyse the data from voice-recorder such as the sound might not be very good and you might not be able to understand who says what (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). This latter disadvantage was overcome through listening several times to the audio because indeed there was too much noise. For overcoming the barrier of not knowing who speaks I have coded the participants with numbers and when the interview was taking place I was taking notes writing the number of the student talking.

There are practical and organisational advantages when using group interviews. Their benefits are that a wide range of responses can be collected through the development of a discussion in fairly small cost and time (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). Furthermore, a variety of responses can be heard and contribute to a collective realisation of a phenomenon, a case
impossible in individual interviews (Cohen et al. 2007; Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). According to Arksey and Knight (1999), having more than one interviewee can lead to a more complete and reliable record when one complements the other about certain events (cited in Cohen et al. 2007). In addition, ‘the supportive environment of the group may also lead interviewees to try out relatively risky ideas which would not otherwise have been voiced’ while it is also more likely for extreme and strong views to become explicit in a group interview rather in a one-to-one interview where the interviewee may be more reluctant (Lewis, 1992, p.315). In this study, there were some occasions where children challenged each other’s ideas while also they were completing each other’s answers and gave the researcher a more holistic view of what is actually happening with assessment strategies and approaches.

3.8.2.2 Interviewing Children

Interviewing children is different in lots of aspects in respect to interviewing adults. “Children differ from adults in cognitive and linguistic development, attention and concentration span, ability to recall, life experience, what they consider to be important, status and power” (Arksey and Knight 1999 p.116 cited in Cohen et al. 2007, p.375). The same authors emphasise that when children are involved in interviews you have to gain their trust and use their language and not difficult or scientific words according to the age of the child to feel more confident, make interviews enjoyable. Keats (2000) has different chapters referring to interviews with children, adolescents (age 12-18) and adults as different procedures need to be in place.

Group interviews are considered as particularly useful when interviewing children as it encourages interaction between them. Additionally, group interview with children enables them to confront each other and contribute in a way that may not happen in a one-to-one adult-child interview and using language that the children themselves use (Cohen et al. 2007). Individual interviewing is useful though when the researcher is concerned with sensitive matters such as sex, family and relationships where the children are not likely to be honest in front of their peers.
It is suggested that, making the interview as informal as possible including stimulus such as toys and pictures is considered as useful especially when dealing with very young children. For older children though and adolescents, in our case ages 12-15 it is more useful and appropriate to make the group interview relatively formal in order for them to understand the seriousness of the situation without this meaning that it cannot be enjoyable or that it would be boring, harmful or threatening. With older children I believe that keeping a balance between formal and informal is the best approach. Moreover, using open ended questions is useful for avoiding single answer type of responses (Cohen et al. 2007).

Although interviews and especially group interviews are considered as a useful technique for gathering data there are some difficulties for the researcher to overcome especially when interviewing children. For example, children are easily distracted, avoid the researcher being seen as an ‘authority figure’, assemble a lot of information in short time, keep the interview relevant, keep children to the point, overcome the situation of the child saying anything for pleasing the ears of the researcher and as with adults handle how talkative children are (Cohen et al. 2007, p.375-376; Lewis, 1992). Furthermore, in interviewing adolescents it is difficult to communicate with them by the language they use which is like a foreign language to the researcher while attempting to use it might not turn out to be a wise choice (Keats, 2000). Above all, adolescents do not want to be treated as children according to Keats (2000) thus it would be logical to treat them as equal to you, treat them with respect and be pleasant and show that you understand and accept them.

3.8.3 Stages of an interview investigation

Different researchers divide the interview process in research projects variously. There are several stages suggested by various authors such as the twelve tactics by Miles and Huberman (1994), thirteen steps suggested by Brenner, Brown and Canter (1985) and Hycner (1985) (cited in Cohen et al. 2007). I have followed the framework of Kvale (1996) evaluating it as the most straightforward and useful while he divides the stages into seven broad categories. These are: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysis, verifying and reporting following this exact order.
I have started by the preliminary stage which is thematizing, considering the purpose of the research and the research questions seeking for answers transforming the more general goals of the research into more detailed and specific objectives. This is considered as one of the main stages as it requires careful formulation of objectives which will produce the right kind of data (Kvale, 1996). Both individual interviews and group interviews were thematized based on the themes of the questionnaires.

Designing the interview itself involves translating the research objectives into questions and it is important to the extent that only the accurate questions can produce accurate answers. The question format was taken into consideration at this point and the response mode having in mind ‘fitness for purpose’. In this stage the researcher has considered how open-ended or closed the questions should be and designed them taking into account central suggestions such as: the questions should have a clear meaning, avoid ambiguous questions, avoid double meanings in a question, the vocabulary to be used, the avoidance of sensitive or personal questions and the like (Cohen et al. 2007). Generally the interviews had an overall semi-structure character in order to be more manageable for the researcher in the process of the interviews as well as in the process of analysing them. Though the basic questions to be asked were created, the final questions of the interviews were formed after a preliminary analysis of the answers in the questionnaires. As this phase of the study was based upon initial quantitative results, the researcher needed to form different interview questions for the interviewees based on their prior answers to the questionnaire.

A pilot stage took place with 2 active Greek Language Teachers, the same teachers who were included in the pilot phase of the questionnaire and who were asked to make some useful comments and give feedback about the interviews as a whole. This gave the researcher some practical information on the time needed for the interviews; to find difficult or misunderstood questions, to change the sequence of the questions and the like. Thus question two as can be seen in the appendix G was withdrawn because it was not building on the questionnaire, nor answering the main research questions while it was also taking too long (around twenty minutes) for teachers to discuss all those elements included. With the first teacher although the interview questions were modified according to her answers on the questionnaire, I did not give her the questionnaire to hold and this was
proven as a drawback. The teacher could not remember the answers she gave to support or reject and had forgotten what the questionnaire was about. Thus, with the second teacher I gave her completed questionnaire to hold and it was proven useful as the teacher remembered why she answered in such a way and could give explanations, reject or support her answers. This led to a more fruitful discussion.

It was not feasible to pilot the group interviews and this made me suspicious of how easy it was going to be for teachers to give me time and allow me to take some of their children for group interviews in a school time. Though the approach of giving children their previously completed questionnaires to have in hand was considered as useful for the same reasons named above for teachers. The outline of students’ group interview can be seen in Appendix H.

During the actual interview I was not judgmental, avoided interrupting the respondent, kept eye contact, avoided answering the questions myself. I was polite and friendly without being too assertive and encouraged the respondent to feel secure and to respond freely. Further, the ethical dimensions of the interview were kept in mind by ensuring informed consent and guaranteed confidentiality. In addition, the interviewers gave the appropriate verbal or non-verbal feedback to the interviewee to keep the pace of the interview going and avoid boredom (Cohen et al. 2007).

The stage to follow was transcription. While the interviews were audio recorded, transcriptions were made immediately after the interviews took place while they were fresh in my mind and I could recall even some expressions they made.

The following stage was the analysis of the collected data. The analysis of qualitative interview research is almost inevitably interpretive involving a ‘reflexive’, ‘reactive’ interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data. In the analysis of the data is also important to have a holistic view as well as an adequate view of the themes emerged. For analysing the data, I attempted firstly to have a clear picture of what the teacher is supporting and if it is similar with the questionnaire answers. Then the interviews were triangulated with the quantitative data. There are several approaches in analysing qualitative data. One of the first decisions to be made is whether to use a software package
or not. As qualitative data in this study was not large the use of a software package was not considered as necessary. One of the approaches on analysing qualitative data is the quasi-statistical approach which relies largely on the conversion of qualitative data into quantitative format (Robson, 2011; Silverman, 2005). Other approaches are the thematic coding approach and the grounded theory approach. The former one is not necessarily linked with a specific theoretical perspective, all parts of data are coded and labelled, and codes with the same label are grouped as a theme. Codes and themes occurring can be determined inductively from the review of the data, or the research questions or previous research whilst the themes then form the basis for further analysis and interpretation making summaries of themes finally, this approach can be used on a purely descriptive or exploratory basis or surrounded by a range of theoretical frameworks (Robson, 2011).

I have followed some of the steps as suggested by researchers such as Robson (2011), Miles and Huberman, (1994), Silverman (2011) and Pole and Lampard (2002) though it was found hard to follow a certain step sequence and suggestions but rather as I may suggest you need to adjust your analysis and approach based on what suits best your specific study and data. For my study, I have first transcribed my data, while listening to the audio as soon as it was selected. This was because I was still able to remember reactions and body language, though these were also noted down on a paper as the interview was taking place. It was decided to transcribe the data directly to English, as they are reported in this language, though myself and the interviewees were talking in Greek. The translation was not difficult though for the terminologies used I have advised and followed the ones used for the questionnaires. After all data was transcribed I familiarised myself with it by reading it and re-reading it twice or even three and four times. Then I tried to find common themes and patterns in teachers’ answers having in mind the literature review and the research questions as well as the themes used for the questionnaire instrument. As stated earlier, the form of the interviewees was based on a preliminary analysis of the quantitative results and its purpose indeed was to triangulate them and get an in-depth view, explaining the quantitative results. A very straightforward and good example was taken from Rubin and Rubin (2005) who suggest in chapter 10 that a researcher should start the analysis of the interviews by a summary including the reason the interviewee was included, how long the interview lasted and main points, concepts or themes that emerged. I have done this
procedure while always having in mind the research questions. One random example to show the researcher worked at this phase can be found in Appendix L. For finding the concepts and themes it is suggested to code them systematically by labelling them to retrieve information and examine all of the data units that refer to the same subject across interviewees (Silverman, 2011). A fragment of the efforts to follow these steps by myself can be seen in Appendix M. For the analysis coding was not followed because it did not prove to be very useful. The researcher tried to use some coding at first, as can be seen in Appendix M but it was becoming more confusing than helpful. This was due to several reasons. First of all, the interviews were building on a preliminary quantitative data thus it was not so difficult to find the themes and concepts as they were straightforward. The interviews were semi structured thus made it easier for the researcher to compare and retrieve information on each theme/question. In addition, teachers’ answers were not very lengthy. Furthermore, the number of participants was not large and the transcription and analysis were done immediately after collecting the data and while listening to the recorded interviews several times, thus the coding system did not prove useful. Systematic coding may be very useful for analysing qualitative data in other contexts such as when the data are lengthy, or involves a large amount of participants, or when several researchers are involved.

The verification stage which follows the analysis stage according to Kvale (1996) includes reliability, validity and generalizability of data and should basically be in mind in all of the stages taking place. For example, there must be coherence and an obvious link between the theory and the research questions, all aspects of the research must be sound and accurate, the translation of the data from oral to written must demonstrate loyalty to key features of the interview situation and analysis should demonstrate devotion to the data while the way its presented should be considered as fair by the readers (Cohen et al. 2007). More details on how ethicality, validity and reliability were ensured are given in the next section.

The last stage which is the reporting of the data is actually based on the nature of the interviewing. In my case it was considered as useful to include some quotations in the discussion chapter (Cohen et al.2007). While the results from the quantitative data was reported, then a general comment on what teachers had to say in the interviews was stated
in order to triangulate and observe if they support or not the quantitative reports. This was presented and supported by some examples from fragments taking their own words. This is one of the indications of how the researcher tried to come to accurate conclusions, be as objective as possible and not manipulate the results.

3.9 Ethical Issues for qualitative data

Ethics is a crucial matter in every research. Various organisations and professions have their own codes of ethics (Opie, 2004, Bell, 2005). Ethical research depends on the integrity of the individual researcher and his/her values especially in qualitative research were results are more dependable on the meaning a researcher makes of them (Neuman, 2006). Ethical issues arise from the beginning, during and after conducting research (Opie, 2004, Neuman, 2006).

As stated earlier, consent forms were used and approval was gained by all relevant authorities and gatekeepers. An open role was considered as more appropriate where everybody involved knew that I was a researcher as well as the purpose of my study (Opie, 2004 p.27). Considering the data collection, I prepared the interview questions very carefully and of course I informed the interviewees on the amount of time for participating. In addition I assured confidentiality and anonymity. During the interpretation and analysis of the data I have not tried in any way to manipulate the results.

3.9.1 Validity

Validity usually refers to the degree to which the researcher has successfully measured what he/she intended to measure (Pole and Lampard, 2002). Validity, in qualitative research can also be a synonym for ‘truth’ (Silverman, 2005). Reliability is necessary for validity but a measure can be reliable but not valid ‘Validity means truthful’ (Neuman, 2006, p.196). ‘Validity refers to the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure’ (Wellington, 2000; cited in Opie, 2004.)
It is appropriate to think of the validity as the relationship between a claim and the results of the data gathered rather than the validity of them on their own (Opie, 2004).

One of the most common distinctions of validity is made between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ validity. Internal validity is where the claim is considered valid with the contents of the research study. External validity on the other hand is a pointer of the extent to which this is reasonable (Opie, 2004). To achieve internal validity I reflected carefully on the methods chosen and if they fit with the purposes of the study. Also by triangulating methods and sources I achieved internal validity. External validity has been achieved by indicating to what populations and settings the study can be generalised and to what extent (Cohen et al. 2007). Furthermore external validity has been achieved by exploiting all the main features of the study so comparisons can be made by the readers.

3.9.2 Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is a sensitive matter. It is something that all researchers should be concerned about as it can measure the ‘goodness’ or quality of their study (Bell, 2005). It is said that in qualitative research ‘there might be as different interpretations of data as there are researchers’ (Bell, 2005; Cohen et al. 2007 p.149). For qualitative research to be reliable it should have comprehensiveness, fidelity to real life, detail and honesty. As Opie (2004) suggests, reliability can be assured by the ‘test-retest’ procedure. That is to undertake the whole procedure of gathering data with the same subjects in a short time twice in order to compare the results. This is according to Neuman (2006) one of the three types of reliability and it is called ‘stability-reliability’ (Neuman, 2006, p.189). Unfortunately, it was not feasible for me to gather the data twice.

One way of maintaining the reliability of my interviews was to structure them carefully, with the same format and sequence of question themes for each respondent and to pilot them to two teachers (Neuman, 2006; Silverman, 1993; cited in Cohen et al. 2007). I also avoided the ‘leading questions’ which usually put words into the respondents’ mouth. Additionally I tape-recorded all interviews and transcribed them very carefully (Silverman, 2005).
3.10 Conclusion

Thus this section has made clear why the researcher has chosen to incorporate a Mixed Methodology approach supporting the ‘pragmatist’ paradigm and rejecting to support either the positivism or interpretivism. For the purposes of this study the Explanatory Sequential design was considered as the most appropriate one to shed light to the research questions. Furthermore, why probability and not probability sample was chosen in certain levels of the research was made clear while the number of participants was made explicit. The questionnaires as the dominant method of this stage was also considered as well why the certain type of questionnaire was chosen instead of others and what were the steps to follow in order to accomplish it. Piloting was also a part of this discussion as well as how ethicality, validity and reliability were ensured in this research. It was also explained how the data will be analysed. In a later section some consideration was given on interviews which compose the second stage of my research. Explanations were given on why this method was chosen as well as its drawbacks and advantages. The purpose of this method was made explicit as well as what type of interviews I have chosen to follow and the stages I have been through in order to compose it. Extensive discussion on the sample size of this stage was avoided as the sample was subsequent to the first stage of the research.
4 Teachers’ Results Chapter

4.1 Introduction

Data on perceptions by teachers was collected in an attempt to understand perceptions on assessment purposes in general and assessment change within the New National Curriculum in Cyprus (NNC). As described in Chapter 3 this was achieved through the use of two data collection methods. Firstly, the Teachers Conceptions of Assessment Inventory (TCoA) developed by Brown and Michaelides (2010) accompanied with more specific questions on the NNC was administered to a large sample (N=95) in order to gain a broader understanding. After analysis a small sample (N=7) was selected for interviews to gain a deeper understanding of perceptions. This chapter outlines the findings of teachers’ perceptions of assessment.

4.2 Teachers’ Conceptions of assessment (TCoA) based on the inventory

The TCoA (2010) inventory was used to answer the research question:

1)a. What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?

As mentioned earlier the TCoA inventory used suggests that there are some general beliefs about assessment purposes that may reflect the shared low-stakes policy environment of assessment. More precisely the three may loosely be categorised as ‘purposes’ and two as ‘anti-purposes’ (Brown, 2008). Here, the negative and positive attitudes of teachers concerning assessment are analysed. The negative conceptions consist of two main ideas (i.e., assessment is bad, and assessment is ignored). In contrast, positive conceptions consist of three main ideas (i.e., assessment improves teaching, assessment improves student learning, and assessment holds schools accountable).

To begin with, a summary of the total mean scores for each scale are given (Table 4.1). The responses were coded based on the original TCoA as 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Slightly agree, 4=Moderately agree, 5=Mostly agree, and 6=Strongly agree.
As might be expected teachers seem to be more agreeable with respect to the positive conceptions as to the three secondary ideas ‘Assessment improves teaching’ (m= 3.45), ‘Assessment improves learning’ (m=3.92), and ‘Assessment hold schools accountable’ (m= 3.34) translated to ‘slightly and moderately agree’. Teachers seem to be more inclined to disagree with the negative conceptions ‘Assessment is irrelevant’ (m=2.39) and ‘Assessment is bad’ (m=2.34) translated to ‘mostly disagree’. These results suggest that in general teachers value assessment though no strong feelings are apparent. The results of the questionnaire suggest that teachers generally believe assessment to be something good that improves teaching and learning whilst making schools accountable. Teachers show a general disagreement with the notion that assessment is bad or something irrelevant which should be ignored.

4.2.1 Negative Conceptions

4.2.1.1 Assessment is irrelevant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>1(S.D.)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6(S.A.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4) Assessment results are filed and ignored</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.419</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) Teachers conduct assessment but make little use of the results</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.109</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This scale was based only on two questions. Teachers disagree with the notion that assessment results are filed and ignored as more than half of them, (58 of 94) either mostly
or strongly disagree. Answers are spread between disagreeing and slightly agreeing to the notion that teachers conduct assessment but make little use of the results (q13) as 24 of 95 teachers ‘strongly disagree’, 33 of 95 ‘mostly disagree’ and 23 of 95 ‘slightly agree’ showing a variety of perceptions (Table 4.2).

The interview discussion with the teachers was helpful in explaining the variety of perceptions. It seems that as an ‘assessment result’ teachers perceive a variety of activities. More often as an ‘assessment result’ teachers perceive the image they construct for a child through all of the assessment approaches used including daily assessment and written assessment results which are all co-considered for the final/official mark on the semester to be given on a report. As explicitly stated by one of them:

“of course they are used...the results of all the kinds of assessment in order for the final mark on the semester to be representative” (6 years experience female).

Beyond conducting a final mark teachers do not mention using the results of the different approaches of assessment in order to improve teaching or learning as might be expected. However, two teachers from the interview data seem to realise that assessment results could have been used for Formative Assessment purposes but this is not happening in practice. As they argue, some restrictions of the educational system, such as the lack of time and pressure to cover the syllabus do not allow them to do so in practice and one of them stated precisely:

“The results could have been useful for changing the curriculum or the way we teach but we do not use them in this way...” (9 years experience male).

4.2.1.2 Assessment is bad

The answers to the questions constructing the scale of whether assessment is bad generally fall between disagree and slightly agree showing that teachers do not commonly believe that assessment is bad or harming themselves as teachers or their students (Table 4.3).
Table 4-3 Means and response distribution of assessment is bad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Deviation Statistic</th>
<th>1(S.D.)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6(S.A.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Assessment is an imprecise process</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.239</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Assessment is unfair to students</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.050</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Assessment interferes with teaching</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.062</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Assessment has little impact on teaching</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.239</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21) Assessment forces teachers to teach in a way against their beliefs</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.233</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering assessment as an imprecise process (q1) answers fall mainly between mostly disagree 28 of 94 and slightly agree 33 of 94. The interviews reveal that some teachers had in mind the assessment results when answering this question and not assessment per se as 5 of 7 teachers from the interviews referred to the final official grade when discussing this notion. Interviews give us more detail on why teachers believe assessment to be an imprecise process while they say that assessment results, using letters for the official semester grade (from A-E) and not numbers is imprecise by itself and to a certain extent unfair. One teacher stated:

“What happens at primary school and at lower secondary schools using letter for grades A, B, C etc is unfair and imprecise because if a child receives 15 at a test and another one 18 you will probably give them both a B at the semesters’ official report…..” (9 years experience male).

In (q2) teachers show stronger feelings with 66 of 94 either strongly or mostly disagreeing. While we do not have data from the interviews for this we can assume that teachers trust their judgment and do not feel that they are being unfair to students while solely responsible for carrying out assessment and assigning a grade to students.

Whether assessment interferes with teaching (q3) or has little impact on teaching (q18), in the former 61 of 95 teachers either strongly or mostly disagree while in (q18) more than
half of the teachers 53 of 95 either strongly or mostly disagree. Though the conclusions drawn from this data are that teachers generally disagree with these notions the interviews show something different. Thus although 9 years experience male teacher answers that he slightly agrees in q3 and mostly disagree in q18, in the interview he states something different:

“(...) indeed assessment interferes badly with my teaching because if I want to follow another model of teaching but it is against the test or does not want to lead or teach for the test...I cannot do it because tests are obliged....you end up teaching for the test (...)” (9 years experience male).

Another teacher also states:

“(...) actually with assessment in the form it has now....which we are forced to do tests and cover certain syllabus and knowledge in a certain way is leading to assessment. Because you always have in mind the test in order to teach.....” (6 years experience female).

Thus, there is a contradiction between the results of the quantitative and the qualitative instrument. Whilst the qualitative data suggests that assessment interferes with teaching, impacting it negatively, the quantitative instrument generally suggests that teachers do not believe assessment to interfere or impact their teaching. This may be because teachers had all of the approaches of assessment in mind when answering the questionnaires. In the interviews where they had the chance to elaborate they seem to mention only the test to be interfering badly with their teaching.

In the last question of this family of questions (q21) ‘assessment forces teachers to teach against their beliefs’ answers fall between strongly disagree 20 of 95, mostly disagree 27 of 95 and slightly agree 31 of 95 showing again a complex set of opinions. It is difficult to make any conclusions when in total 47 of 95 teachers generally disagree while 31 of 95 slightly agree though if we consider the question by itself it incorporates strong words such as ‘forces’ and ‘against’ which by themselves can affect teachers to be inclined to disagree, thus this impreciseness may lie on the strong wording. As discussed in the literature, teachers are not going to incorporate teaching or assessment techniques which are not aligned with their personalities and tested ways of teaching (Torrance and Pryor, 2001),
though the restrictions of each curriculum and the guidelines they need to follow might be restricting them to a certain extent in what teaching and assessment methods they use. This is also mirrored in the interviews, as one teacher argues:

“well...against their beliefs...not really...it’s just that sometimes you want to give some more information to your students but because you know that you don’t have enough time and you might not ask for anything like that on the test then...you skip it.....” (7 years experience female).

Thus generally we can observe a complex pattern with the quantitative instrument suggesting that teachers disagree with the notion that assessment is something bad but the interview data revealing the opposite mainly referring to tests and exams.

4.2.1.3 Discussion

The results from the questionnaire and the interview data demonstrate complex perceptions regarding assessment as a negative process. The quantitative instrument reveals that the idea of assessment results being filed and ignored is not consistent with teachers’ perspectives. Filing and using results are not compulsory in secondary education, and external monitoring policies are uncommon; rather, this rests with the individual teacher and the guidelines communicated by the school principal, who may or may not instruct the teachers to file assessment results in certain formats. The individual teacher may choose, for example, to share student results with parents or present them to an inspector, but that is entirely up to each teacher. The discussion with the teachers reveals that one of the reasons results vary is because they perceived differently the meaning of an assessment result. Some teachers perceived as an assessment result the judgment they make about each child while co-considering his/her performance in all of the approaches of assessment used for the official semester grade to be conducted. Some of these approaches include checking homework, oral participation, 15 minutes written assessment and period long written tests. Beyond considering the judgments they make from the approaches to set the official grade, there are not any indications that the final grade is used further nor that the everyday assessment and written test is used to help teaching and learning.
Again, there is a contradiction between the quantitative and qualitative instrument in the ‘assessment is bad’ element of the questionnaire. The qualitative data gives a view of assessment interfering and impacting teaching though the generalisations made from the questionnaire suggest the opposite. This might be due to the plurality of the term assessment itself as discussed in the literature. Thus we might suggest that assessment as a whole is not harmful and teachers value it and normally they do not feel that it is something bad or something that should be banned. In the interviews teachers mention only tests and exams, to be interfering with their teaching. In conclusion, teachers disagree with assessment as being bad but sometimes feel restricted by tests and exams in terms of what to teach and how. A number of studies show that teachers were indeed sacrificing learning for what will count as accountable and that pressure to improve students’ test scores caused some teachers to neglect teaching materials that the test did not include (Cheng 1999).

4.2.2 Positive conception

Positive conceptions consist of three main ideas; assessment improves teaching, assessment improves student learning, and assessment holds schools accountable. As stated earlier there is a general level of agreement between teachers in assessment as a positive instrument.

4.2.2.1 School accountability

For assessment as a useful accountability tool the total mean score is 3.34 suggesting that generally teachers slightly agree with this notion. This scale is constructed by six main questions, four of them directly relevant to school accountability while the remaining two indirectly imply that judging the quality of schooling depends in part on accurate assessments of student performance. The mean score for each answer as well as the response distribution are given (Table 4.4).
In the indirect questions (5 and 7) which imply that judging the quality of schooling depends in part on accurate assessments of student performance teachers generally moderately agree (m=3.61 and m=3.35 respectively) showing no strong feelings. Teachers’ answers about assessment as an accurate indicator of schools quality (q17) are widely spread between slightly agree 24 of 95, moderately agree 27 of 95, and mostly agree 20 of 95 showing no clear pattern. This might be due to the low stakes assessment policy held in Cyprus as we discussed earlier teachers are solely responsible for conducting assessment and assigning a grade to students. It seems that they trust their professionalism and capability in making consistent and trustworthy conclusions on students’ progress resulting in a grade that can be an indication on how well schools are doing.

As might be expected there is a complex set of opinions with the notion that assessment is a good way to evaluate a school (q20) as 30 of 94 teachers slightly agree while 29 of 94 mostly disagree. This might be reasonable taking into consideration that assessment is only classroom based and it is no further used for official classroom or school ranking. An explanation of this variety of perceptions could also be that though teachers may trust their judgments about each student’s performance as stated above, the lack of mandatory or
standardised assessment does not allow results to be comparable between students from the same level neither school wide or nationwide.

The same applies for (q6) ‘assessment provides information on how well schools are doing’ though it receives slightly more positive answers than the previous one with 36 of 93 teachers slightly agreeing; 36 of 93 either strongly or mostly disagree. As discovered through the qualitative data, information on how well schools are doing is only exchanged unofficially between colleagues. Interview responses suggest that only informal talking between teachers and stakeholders is apparent but not any formal or standardised procedures take place. In one teacher’s own words:

“Well, like in the exams of the students it shows....I think it’s something unofficial. It’s the discussion me and my colleagues and friends who work in other schools make when we talk about results I mean of tests or exams...if many students failed....you can compare the quality of the schools....where sort of...” (1 year experience female).

In (q19) ‘Assessment is assigning a grade or level to student work’ the mean score is 3.47 translated to moderately agree. As is going to be discussed later this may be due to the fact that teachers believe only one of the purposes of assessment is to assign a grade or level to student work but realise, assessment is not only that.

Thus for, teachers generally believe that the assessment they undertake though trustworthy and valuable cannot show exactly a school’s level while not standardised and thus cannot compare the level between classes or schools. As Cyprus is a very small country and teachers are obliged to work in a different school every four years, the unofficial discussion between colleagues is the only indication on how well other schools are doing.
4.2.2.2 Improvement of teaching

Improvement of teaching is geared around giving different students altered instruction, measuring their higher order thinking skills, giving them results that can be depended on and assessment in the use of improving learning. Popham (2000, p. 1) claims: “if educational measurement doesn’t lead to better education for students, then we shouldn’t be doing it…the only reason educators ought to assess students is in order to make more defensible educational decisions regarding those students” (cited in Michaelides and Brown 2010, p.14). No strong feelings are shown from the teacher’s point of view (Table 4.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Statistic</th>
<th>Std. Deviation Statistic</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8) Assessment helps students improve their learning</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Assessment allows different students to get different instruction</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.338</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Assessment results can be depended on</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.119</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) Assessment measures students’ higher order thinking skills</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.210</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-5 Means and response distribution of assessment in improving teaching

Through inspection of the items (Table, 4.5), it would appear that assessment improves teaching because it (q8) ‘helps students improve their learning’. Teachers’ answers are widely spread between slightly agree 31 of 95; moderately agree 23 of 95 and mostly agree 24 of 95. Based on the results from the quantitative data teachers seem to believe that assessment is about improving students’ learning. Through the in depth information elicited from the interviews interestingly teachers imply that in practice it depends on each teacher whether he/she uses assessment formatively in order to improve learning or if they only focus on the results of assessment (summative). As explicitly mentioned by one of them:

“Well…..if it is used as it is supposed to …yes (...) in some occasions assessment can improve learning...in some occasions no...Well…you need to insist in some parts (...) by giving them feedback on strengths and weaknesses” (25 years experience female).
Another teacher added:

“Well….assessment not as a threat...for the test...no definitely not.....but.....with the meaning of moving a step forward...to see what they’ve done wrong in order to correct it through...feedback…” (9 years experience male).

Conversely, one other teacher stated that assessment helps if seen somewhat as a threat for students to be forced to study in order to perform well:

“Students are forced because of written assessment to study...if there wasn’t for tests they wouldn’t study...they are lazy...They might do their homework but totally mechanically and typically just to do it and not to learn and get the whole picture.....they also care a lot about the final grade.” (7 years experience female).

In (q14) teachers’ answers have a mean score of 2.88 and answers fall mainly between mostly disagree 21 of 95 and slightly agree 36 of 95 implying that assessment in general is measuring lower order thinking which involves memory recall. The explanation given to these answers through the interviews are that higher order thinking is measured only to a small extent by the tests which are classified to higher and lower order questions according to the instructions of the Ministry of Education and Culture. One teacher stated:

“The test I guess....if it’s done properly....it can assess higher order thinking.....” (8 years experience male),

Another added:

“like through assessment there is a delegation especially in the written one so you can assess students from different levels and all students can answer at least some of the questions and this is obliged by the ministry” (1 year experience female).

Thus teachers do not believe assessment measures higher order thinking skills to a great extent beyond some questions in written assessment.

The answers to (q9) are almost equally spread from strongly disagree to mostly agree showing a wide spread in teachers’ views. The discussion in interviews revealed that as far as dealing with extremely weak students, teachers feel unable to help and thus extra lessons
were implemented recently in the Cypriot curriculum and are called ‘supportive lessons’. These extra lessons usually include students from foreign countries who have lately entered the Cypriot educational system. Considering the rest of the students, teachers feel that by using several methods of assessment thus giving children many chances in contributing and showing their knowledge together with receiving differentiated feedback assessment becomes part of differentiated instruction. One teacher answers:

“yes but there are classes especially for very weak students where they go for extra lessons….so the only way of differentiating the teaching is by weak students to go to another classroom and have extra lessons…..but they still have the same test....I do not think it is possible to differentiate your teaching because 25 students in a single class are a lot.....you can do it up to a certain extent by giving different homework and exercises....I did it once or twice.... But it’s a struggle” (8 years experience male).

In conclusion, the questionnaire reveals that teachers seem to realize that assessment can have a major role in improving teaching but in practice it is up to each teacher to use assessment either just for the result (summative) or formatively to improve teaching and learning or even as a threat for children to be forced to study. Furthermore, they feel that assessment measures students’ higher order thinking skills only to a very small extent through the classification of questions in tests. In addition, they do not believe assessment to allow different instruction to different students beyond the use of individual feedback.

4.2.2.3 Improvement of learning

This notion is focused on giving students knowledge about their performance for the explicit purpose of improving their learning and the teaching they receive. The seven questions in this scale receive a mean score of very close to m=4 translating to moderately agree.
Table 4-6 Means and response distribution of assessment in improving learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10)  Assessment information modifies ongoing teaching of students</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>2 9 28 36 12 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11)  Assessment is integrated with teaching practice</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.256</td>
<td>2 6 27 23 22 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15)  Assessment provides feedback to students about their performance</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.238</td>
<td>3 4 29 26 20 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16)  Assessment determines if students meet qualifications standards</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>1.182</td>
<td>4 6 25 30 24 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22)  Assessment establishes what students have learned</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.163</td>
<td>2 6 37 22 19 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23)  Assessment feedbacks to students their learning needs</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.100</td>
<td>0 7 32 23 25 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24)  Assessment is a way to determine how much students have learned from teaching</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.076</td>
<td>1 3 29 27 27 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to assessment information modifying the ongoing teaching of students (q10), teachers generally demonstrate no strong feelings either way. This is also mirrored in the interviews where teachers argue that even if they wanted to constantly modify their teaching according to students’ needs there is not always enough time and it is hard to take into consideration each child’s needs in mixed ability classes of 25 students as occurs in the Cypriot educational context.

When teachers are asked about assessment in establishing what students have learned (q22) the mean score is 3.79 translated to moderately agree. The answers to a parallel question (q24) is m= 4.05 showing again a moderate agreement. In the interviews though it is argued that they can never be sure about what a child really knows no matter how many different assessment methods they use and how often. As one teacher mentions:
“You will never know exactly what a student hides inside him/her…..at some point I should get it out of them and observe their potential but….there are 25 people in each classroom and you cannot have your full attention to all of them all the time…..” (9 years experience male).

Answers to (q15) ‘assessment provides feedback to students about their performance’ and (q23) ‘feedbacks to students their learning needs’ are positively skewed. However, though teachers value feedback, the interviews show that they and students rarely take advantage of it or use it formatively in order to cover ‘lost’ knowledge. Feedback is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

With respect to teachers’ perceptions on assessment being integrated with teaching practice (q11) answers are skewed positively showing rather strong feelings as it is the question which received the most strongly agreeing answers 14 of 94 from the whole TCoA inventory while 22 of 94 mostly agree, 23 of 94 moderately agree and 27 of 94 slightly agree. Teachers specifically state that:

‘You are going to assess what you teach’ (9 years experience male)

or as stated in reverse:

‘You are going to teach what you intend to assess’ (8 years experience male)

“Of course it is a part of teaching...while you teach something you need to assess it both for yourself and for the students” (25 years experience female)

Though the question (11), was intending to elicit information about assessment’s role in improving learning and teaching no teacher in the interviews seem to discuss assessment in this sense.
4.2.2.4 Discussion

The section 4.2.2 analysed teachers’ perceptions on positive assessment conceptions as categorised in the literature supported by the notions that assessment is making schools accountable for learning and it is improving teaching and learning. In the Cypriot context there are not any specific policies for making schools accountable through assessment or any other method. The fact that Cypriot Greek language teachers slightly agree with assessment in making schools accountable might be because teachers share a conviction that their assessments are a valid basis for evaluating school and performance. Teachers seem to argue that because Cyprus is a very small country, the number of schools in each level is not large and teachers teach in several schools during their career talking to each other about the quality of the schools which is usually translated with assessment results (for example; how many students received an honours degree how many students failed the final exams and thus failed to proceed to the next level). “Moreover, the lack of centralized policies for school accountability and unfamiliarity with unintended consequences of such policies that have been observed in other countries may render this conception attractive given the generally positive stance toward the classroom assessment process” (Michaelides and Brown 2010).

With regards to the idea that assessment should be helpful to teachers differentiating their teaching, teachers argue that it is difficult to be implemented especially in a mixed ability classroom of approximately 25 students which is considered as a big number. That is probably why in Cyprus the MoEC recently created extra lessons which are called ‘supportive lessons for weak students’. In addition they feel that it is up to each teacher whether he/she uses assessment information formatively to help students. A small indication of helping students individually based on their needs is the oral and written feedback but as going to be analysed later, it is not given very often nor are children encouraged to act upon it.

The total mean score for assessment in improving learning is 3.92 showing that teachers generally moderately agree. As the triangulation of data reveals teachers’ answers to the questionnaire show how ideal assessment should be and not what is actually happening in
practice. This can sometimes be a completely different story. According to the interviews, teachers believe that the educational system is not very supportive in using alternative methods of assessment neither changing the teaching according to students’ needs and progress. It is interesting that when trying to support the idea that learning is enhanced through assessment they refer back to the test and that the questions are classified to higher and lower order for all students to be able to perform well to a certain extent. Some teachers feel that it would have been very constructive for students to do more projects but there is a lack of time both for completing projects and then for giving productive feedback to each student separately.

With respect to teachers’ perceptions on assessment as integrated with teaching practice teachers show relatively strong feelings. The interview data throws light on why this is strongly supported revealing that teachers feel that assessment is integrated with teaching practice not in the Formative Assessment sense but because teachers always have the summative assessment in mind when thinking what and how to teach leading them to teach to the test:

“I had in mind the test when I answering this question because......the test...it is so specific and you teach to it (...)”(9 years experience male).

It seems that teachers tend to be agreeable with the positive conceptions of assessment but when they had the chance to elaborate in the interviews they seem to have some complains and mention restrictions which do not allow them to put what they believe to be ideal into practice. Nonetheless, as Brown (2008) has argued, policy makers would need to consider the strong commitment teachers have to the improvement-oriented purposes of assessment and seek to take advantage of this dedication by improving the quality of feedback to teachers so that truly “educational” assessment can be implemented.
4.3 Differences in assessment conceptions of teachers due to experience

For the assessment conception subscales derived from the TCoA, parametric statistics were used and more specifically one-way ANOVA tests to explore whether there are differences between some major background characteristics such as the teachers’ years of experience and their conceptions of assessment.

Five one-way between groups analyses of variance were conducted to explore the impact of teachers’ years of experience on their conceptions about assessment (assessment is bad, and assessment is ignored, assessment improves teaching, assessment improves student learning, and assessment holds schools accountable). Thus, for this analysis teachers were grouped according to years of teaching as shown in table 4.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups by years of teaching</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 Years</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 Years</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 Years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 Years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 21 Years</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-7 Number of teachers grouped by years of teaching

No statistically significant differences were found for any of the groups; a Bonferroni correction was used for an alpha level of 0.05/5=0.01. This result may suggest that no matter how many years teachers teach there is an agreement and similarity in their conceptions at least in the five competing purposes investigated in this study based on Brown’s TCoA inventory.

4.4 Teachers’ perceptions about the term ‘assessment’

The following questions were developed by the researcher and go beyond the TCoA inventory as they are more focused on the Cypriot educational system and the New National Curriculum reforms. The questions in this section focus on how formal or informal teachers believe assessment to be. This will answer the research question:
1) b. What assessment methods do Cypriot teachers associate with the term assessment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stat</td>
<td>Stat</td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41) Assessment means a standardised test</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.464</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42) Assessment means a teacher made written test</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.453</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43) Assessment is a formal process</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.329</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44) Assessment happens every day with oral questions and answers</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>1.301</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45) Assessment is happening everyday by observation</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.328</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46) Assessment is an informal procedure</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.396</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-8 Means and response distribution of perceptions of the term ‘assessment’

Responses to (q41) show a general disagreement that assessment equates to standardized testing (m=2.35) with 62 of 95 teachers strongly or mostly disagreeing. This is reasonable taking into consideration that Cyprus generally maintains a low stakes assessment policy in all stages with no standardised tests for internal or external purposes. For assessment as a teacher made written test (q42) the mean score is only slightly higher 2.87 with the majority of teachers slightly agreeing (29 of 94). Though this might seem to contradict the previous question, it is possible that teachers see assessment as the test they create rather than external, standardized tests set by authorities. We cannot ignore the fact that 39 of 94
teachers either strongly or mostly disagree (in antithesis with the former question where 62 of 95 do so) maybe because, as stated later through the analysis of the interviews teachers believe assessment to be wider than merely testing, with other methods being used alongside the development of tests.

Though there are not any formal or standardized procedures for assessment beyond suggestions and examples of testing material given by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) the mean score is 3.82 translated to moderately agree to (q43) ‘assessment is a formal procedure’. As expected in (q46) ‘assessment is an informal procedure’, which is the opposite of the former one, 62 of 95 teachers either strongly or mostly disagree. This may suggest that although assessment is classroom based and the tests are teacher made, teachers do not take the procedure lightly and they have belief in their capability of constructing assessment and making judgments about students’ performance thus believing assessment to be formal.

The questionnaire data suggests that teachers agree with assessment being an everyday, classroom based process taking place through oral questioning and observation (questions 44 and 45). Both questions received response of $m=4.47$ and $m=4.49$ respectively translating to mostly agree. These perceptions are also supported by the interviews where teachers state that assessment is mostly the attempt to judge a child through his/her daily performance. By daily performance they typically mean the contribution of a child to the lesson, his/her participation and interest as well as willingness to learn. As one of the interviewees argues:

“assessment means the everyday interaction and the interest children show especially after a chapter is completed where they should be able to show what they have learned, we use mainly oral and written forms of assessment but I also give emphasis to my everyday contact with children” (5 years experience female)

Another teacher stated that:

“(...) assessment has many parameters; there are many ways for assessing a child....like....in the modern Greek 1) orally in the class, if he/she participates or not in the
classroom (…) 2) written, like…the test, the most common type of assessment expected t or unexpected 3) homework and 4) projects” (6 years experience female).

There are four methods commonly mentioned by teachers in the interviews:

1) Tests

2) Oral participation in the classroom, contribution to the lesson

3) Projects and assignments and

4) 15 minutes written assessed exercises on the lesson of the day.

In the Cypriot context ‘15 minutes assessed exercises’ on the previous lesson used to be called ‘unexpected test’ because neither now nor prior to the NNC were children warned for this written form of assessment. This is a written form of assessment to test if children came to the lesson prepared and if they have been studying. It is also a form of having a written proof of children’s’ level when forming the final grade of the semester and if asked to justify it by their parents or their supervisors. Usually teachers undertake this at the end of a unit or chapter and after having done a small revision to see what and if children have learned so they can move on to the next unit. Accordingly they may or may not spend time covering lost knowledge on important issues they observed children did not understand. This method prior to the NNC and now is taking place once or twice per semester per subject.

In the interviews all teachers mention tests to be the most important form of assessment in students’ minds and maybe their parents’ minds while also tests are what count the most for making up the final semester grade as it is the only written proof they have of a student’s progress together with the ‘15 minutes assessed exercises’. This shows a complex set of opinions and contradicts to a certain extent the perceptions elicited from the questionnaire which suggests that assessment does not equate to testing. In one teacher’s own words:

“but maybe that is why we use all of these methods…hoping that in one of them children will be able to express themselves and show their knowledge….but the truth is that if a
child is not good at the main assessment which is the test and the 15 minutes assessed exercises...he/she is screwed” (laughing) (8 years experience male).

Teachers in the interview mention several times the word ‘fair’. They are trying to be fair by using several methods of assessment. Frequently when they mention the word ‘fair’ they mention it accompanied with the phrase ‘in order to have a holistic view about a child’. They argue that some students are better at writing and some are better at oral assessment so they want to give them the chance to express knowledge in both ways. As summarised in a teacher’s own words:

“because there are students that react to these methods differently and I do not want to be unfair to any of them....someone can fail on the written test but be really good in oral...some students feel really stressed with written assessment and some others feel very shy and do not participate in the classroom so....by using several methods I can be more confident about my judgments.....” (7 years experience female).

As we have seen earlier teachers seem to believe assessment to be an everyday procedure. The purpose they have given for this is for being fair and for assigning a representative official semester grade to students.

“The results of all the kinds of assessment are used in order for the final mark on the semester to be representative....” (6 years experience female).

When not asked directly teachers never mention assessment as being used in a formative way or for helping teaching or learning though when they were asked explicitly they seemed to agree that one of the purposes might be to improve teaching and learning. Generally, they appear to know that assessment can have a major role in enhancing teaching and learning but they do not seem to know how to do it nor are they trained for such actions. As stated by one of the interviewees:

“The results could have been useful for changing the curriculum or the way we teach but we do not use them in this way....” (9 years experience male).

Generally the information elicited from quantitative and qualitative data are interesting as they contradict each other to a certain extent. While the information from the questionnaire
demonstrates that assessment is not only the standardised test and teachers also value daily assessment, the information from the interviews show that teachers believe testing to be by far the most important method of assessment practice. Thus their answers in the questionnaire show that ideally assessment is not only the testing but it is also a day to day process. Furthermore, the quantitative data demonstrates that assessment is a daily process but the reason for being one as given through the interviews is for being fair to students and for co-considering students’ participation for the official grade. Teachers do not seem to use daily assessment nor summative assessment for Formative Assessment purposes.

4.5 Assessment approaches based on the NNC

As stated in the literature the assessment approaches promoted by the New National Curriculum (NNC) are centred on the philosophy of Formative Assessment though not explicitly mentioning the term. As discussed several times in the literature, Formative Assessment is geared around four main elements which are questioning, feedback, self and peer assessment and the formative use of summative tests. Thus one section of the questionnaire focused on these elements and their main functions. The section to follow will answer the final research question focusing on teachers’ perceptions:

3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language module?

4.5.1 Oral questioning

The quantitative instrument had 6 related questions focused on oral questioning to obtain more detail on what teachers believe to be the advantages of this tool. From the table that follows (Table 4.9), we can see that generally these questions received strongly agreeing answers. The positive responses of teachers show that teachers value oral communication with students and try to involve them in the everyday teaching and learning process.
The majority of teachers (90 of 95) agree that students should be encouraged to ask questions (q28) while 49 of 95 strongly agree showing rather strong feelings. The interview data also shows that teachers value oral participation because it is a way for children to show their interest while contributing to knowledge and not being passive learners/listeners. At the same time it is a way of encouraging self-assessment as when children realize that they do not understand something they can ask the teacher for more information. All teachers stated that they feel happier when students participate as it shows that they are paying attention. As stated by one of the teachers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28) Students should be encouraged to ask questions</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>1.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29) Teachers should always give time to their students before answering an oral question</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30) Oral questions should be a form of everyday assessment</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>0.932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31) Oral questions should challenge higher order thinking</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32) Oral questions should challenge lower order thinking</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33) Oral questions should involve both higher and lower order thinking.</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>0.981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-9 Means and response distribution of perceptions on oral questioning
“I really enjoy it when they ask questions in the classroom and of course I encourage them...and I believe that when a student asks questions in the classroom he/she is concerned and wants to learn” (6 years experience female).

Although teachers feel children should be encouraged to participate, they do not outline any real strategies they use in order to encourage them. Furthermore, 69 of 95 teachers either strongly or mostly agree in giving time to students before answering an oral question (q29) showing that they not only believe in encouraging children to participate, but they also believe in giving them time to think before answering. Only one teacher mentions a real strategy she uses to give more time to students and that is waiting for more hands to be raised:

“as you know you end up with always the same students willing to answer but in order to avoid that I wait for a long time.....and I tell them , I am not satisfied with only 4 hands up....all right now we are five...now we became 6 etc” (6 years experience female).

Teachers in the interview show a general dissatisfaction with students’ contribution in the classroom as they feel that students rarely participate in the learning process. One teacher complains:

“oral questions are a struggle....because not many students contribute to the lesson.....I ended up using them to see that they are not falling asleep and they are kind of following what I am saying....” (8 years experience male).

Teachers strongly agree that questions should be a part of everyday oral practice (q30) m=5.33. This relates to the earlier discussion (section 4.3) where teachers themselves mentioned daily assessment as one of the four main methods of assessment and for deciding the level of knowledge and performance of a child. However, there is a conflict between what teachers value as important and what is actually happening in practice. During the interview discussions they stated that the questions students raise in the classroom are mostly lower order questions and teachers seem to be disappointed by their
contribution to the development of knowledge. When asked about what kind of questions do children usually raise teachers say:

‘they just ask irrelevant things.....nothing to do with the lesson....they are not interested....’” (8 years experience male).

Another teacher reflected:

(imitating children’s’ voices) “What time does the bell ring?”, “Sir what time do we finish?” “When will we have the test sir?!!?” “not only they ask irrelevant things but also stuff you told them a million times before....” (9 years experience male).

Teachers seem to be more in favour of oral questioning involving mostly higher order questions than lower order questions though the ideal would be to include both. Thus in question (33) ‘Oral questions should involve both higher and lower order thinking’ 69 of 95 teachers either strongly or mostly agree.

To conclude, the triangulation of data shows once more that there is a difference between what teachers believe ideal oral questioning to be and what they say is happening in practice. Generally, teachers value oral communication with children and they feel that it is one of the most important methods for developing knowledge, for assessing children, for making them active learners and for students’ self-assessment. Whilst teachers argue that they would like students to participate in the classroom and show interest, they perceive that students rarely do so in practice. Nonetheless, teachers do not mention any real strategies they have attempted to develop for helping students in being active learners and encourage them to participate in classroom interaction beyond one teacher who mentioned waiting for some time for more students to raise hands.
4.5.2 Self and peer assessment

Self and peer assessment is as we have discussed in the literature another main element of Formative Assessment. Throughout the NNC self-assessment and peer-assessment methods are mentioned mostly through the preparation of assignments and projects, which in the case of upper secondary, are used in a portfolio of work (Xatzisavvis, 2010 and Eurydice, 2008). Teachers seem to be generally positive about peer and self-assessment methods, though perceptions are almost equally spread from (3) slightly agreeing to (6) strongly agreeing suggesting a varying level of agreement (Table 4.10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34) Students should be able to assess each other</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39) The procedure where students find the elements that constitute a certain kind of subject document, write it and assess it should be applied</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>1.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40) The procedure where students reflect on their past work by evaluating it and identifying what still needs to be pursued should be applied</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1.219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 Means and response distribution of perceptions on peer and self-assessment

In all three questions answers are almost equally spread amongst different levels of agreement. This spread of perceptions can be explained from the qualitative data. In teachers’ own words self and peer assessment are not regularly used beyond occasionally
through projects and essays. In the interviews they mention peer and self-assessment as an approach used when essays are undertaken or small written paragraphs. In the Greek language lesson students are obliged by the Ministry of Education and Culture to write one essay per semester. Teachers find peer and self-assessment as a useful tool by instructing children to rewrite some paragraphs of their essays or even teachers retyping some of the children’s fragments of essays and students peer assess anonymous fragments. Some examples are given through teachers’ own words:

“what I like to do with essays but there is not always the time for such actions is that I type some of their paragraphs, like a fragment from an introduction, from the main body and the conclusion and I give it to them and we discuss it all together. And I choose some extremely good ones and some with many mistakes in order for us to comment and it helps that they are anonymous. But it is extremely surprising and exciting that although they do those mistakes themselves only when they see it written by someone else they can indicate them” (1 year experience female).

As we have already discussed in the literature it is suggested that children should have specific criteria in mind in order to be able to assess themselves and their peers. When teachers were explicitly asked if they give children criteria for assessing, they say they do not because they consider children as capable to have sufficient knowledge of what is incorporated in a good essay or a paragraph. Another enlightening fragment of what is happening in practice is the one that follows:

“one of the methods we have learned through the NNC and were instructed to use was to restate a document... for example we were doing a context about racism...we wrote a paragraph in groups in the classroom so I had like....four paragraphs from the four groups (....) so the students themselves assessed their paragraph and their peers...in many parameters and everything that consists of a good paragraph ...that includes grammar, syntax, spelling, vocabulary, context etc” (6 years experience female).

Another indication of the use of peer and self-assessment is through projects. Projects are considered to be written assessment and they are related to higher order thinking where children show their creativity and discover knowledge by themselves through internet and
book search. Projects can be individual or group and they can have the form of a presentation or written assignment. Projects are promoted by the NNC and students have to do at least one per semester per subject. An example of using peer and self-assessment with projects is given by one of the teachers stating that:

“and I also used the interactive board for assessment when they were learning the currency of other countries and why do they have the signs on them that they do...it was extremely helpful and interesting.....and the questions I included in the test after their presentation of their project from the interactive board were based on the questions themselves asked their peers when they were presenting the currency...and if they had some questions in the test that their peers did not present well or did not include in their project they were blaming their peers for loosing marks.....so this made them think that they should do a better project next time...in order to help themselves and their peers.....” (6 years experience female).

Teachers feel that though the NNC is promoting self and peer assessment they did not receive sufficient training or examples of how to implement them. As it is clearly stated through one teacher’s own words:

“they have mentioned these elements but....not how to use them....they didn’t say exactly what to do because they are methods that we were supposed to know and we were supposed to use even prior the NNC” (8 years experience male).

The conclusions that can be made for this section is that although teachers seem to strongly agree with the use of peer and self-assessment, their own words show lack of a coherent knowledge of what these approaches actually involve and lack of confidence in using them. These approaches are not used frequently or as a daily process but teachers try to use them sometimes on essays and projects. Teachers seem excited about these approaches and they feel that children become more active to their learning in this way. Some of the reasons they mention for not using these approaches to a greater extent are the lack of time and training.
4.5.3 Feedback

While feedback is one of the main elements of Formative Assessment as discussed in the literature it is also a major element of the revised assessment framework within the NNC. With respect to the role of feedback q15 and q23 of the questionnaire give an overview of teachers’ perceptions. The responses to these two questions are slightly positively skewed showing no strong feelings but rather a moderate agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15) Assessment provides feedback to students about their performance</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.238</td>
<td>3 4 29 26 20 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23) Assessment feedback to students on their learning needs</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.100</td>
<td>0 7 32 23 25 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-11 Means and response distribution of perception on feedback

Results show that teachers believe assessment should provide feedback to students about their performance while giving them information on their learning needs (q15 and q23) with mean scores of 4.00 and 3.93 respectively. What we cannot know is in practice how often teachers give feedback to students and if students actually take advantage of it. Feedback is named explicitly several times in the Greek Language syllabus, and the process of ‘altering the learning gap’ (Sadler, 1989, p.120) is explicitly mentioned, although no methods of helping the children in taking advantage of it are stressed. Thus, no coherent framework for developing learning through feedback is given. According to several researchers (Black and Wiliam, 1998, Sadler, 1989, Scriven, 1967, cited by Taras, 2005) when the appropriate strategies for closing the gap are not implemented assessment remains summative even when feedback is given. Some information on feedback’s use can be obtained from the interviews where teachers seem to agree that while feedback should have an important role in guiding learning, students rarely take advantage of the comments teachers give them and they are not really concerned in closing any gaps they have in
knowledge. On the other hand teachers admit that they try to take advantage of feedback in guiding their teaching but there is always the issue of lack of time and interest from the children. Furthermore they state that they haven’t been formally and extensively trained for using feedback. One of the teachers who seems willing to give oral and written feedback to children said she gave up because children do not appreciate it:

“not really (use it)....and I am trying to persuade myself to minimise them (comments)....write less because anyway they do not really appreciate or use them...and anyhow students who really care and want to recover the lost knowledge they are going to come find me personally and receive their oral feedback in non-class hours...” (6 years experience female).

While teachers seem to be disappointed with the use children make of comments they do not mention any real strategies they use to encourage them. There was only one strategy mentioned by one of the teachers who just used it once but proved not to be practical.

“I did this once when I was working at upper secondary education....when at a test 21/23 children got a mark below the average (10/20) I gave the test back to them....we discussed it....I told them the correct answers and gave them lots of oral feedback and I told them that we are going to do the same test next week and the results were even worse!!!How is that even possible?!?!?” (9 years experience male).

Another interviewee adds:

“yes but assessment does give feedback....we do give them feedback and comments....it is a whole different story though if they do appreciate it or if they do use it...which ....they actually don’t” (8 years experience male).

As feedback is a major element of FA and the revised assessment framework within the NNC some more questions were included in the questionnaire in order to capture details relating to its content and use by the teachers (Table 4.11).
Teachers consider feedback as involving personally each student and his/her performance in relation to past performances or performance in other forms of assessment (q35) with 85 of 95 agreeing and not the task per se (q36, 55 of 90 disagreeing). Answers to q38 shows that teachers strongly believe feedback should be a daily process and not something given only on written assessments (mean score 2.33) in q37.

Interview data, reveals that, in practice, teachers mostly give written feedback and not oral and it is given mostly on essays and tests. Oral feedback is only given when students receive assessed tests and they discuss their mistakes with the teacher. However, no teacher mentions giving feedback as a daily process in the classroom:

“Always…..little feedback on the test….written and orally when I give them back the test….in the classroom for common mistakes…” (8 years experience male).

A way feedback is given to children on tests is with symbols:

“I personally….teach them some symbols at the beginning of the school year which are used as a coding... and when I put that symbol at the test they will know what it means....for example.....the plus sign means....there is something missing....on the other
hand though…when there are long answers undone I just write as feedback…go to page X and you will find the answer….or chapter X etc” (8 years experience male).

The oldest and most experienced teacher believes that only through extra lessons can feedback be fully used by students:

“But we don’t have time…..this could have been applied to supportive lessons…like they are thinking to implement extra supportive lessons…. in the midday...” (25 years experience female).

The results show a complex set of perceptions with no coherent framework on the use of feedback. An explanation could be that teachers value oral and written feedback, as the information from the quantitative instrument reveals, and they believe that feedback should be an everyday procedure which involves mostly each child’s personal mistakes but they say that what is happening in practice is something different. The reasons they give why feedback is not regularly given by teachers and taken advantage of by students in practice is because of lack of time and sufficient training while also blaming students for not showing an appropriate interest.

4.5.4 Written assessment

Some questions were included on perceptions regarding the content of written questions as this is an issue discussed in international literature and mentioned in the NNC as discussed in the literature review chapter. Teachers mostly agree that written assessment should involve both higher and lower order questions (mean score 4.99).
According to the instructions within the NNC written questions in tests should start with the more easy questions and then the more difficult, higher order ones. In addition, every question should be independent avoiding ambiguous words. Written questions should be clear and cover all levels of students (MoEc: http://www.schools.ac.cy/eyliko/mesi/themata/nea_ellinika/gym_deigmatika_kritiria_axiologisis.html).

According to the interviews teachers are trained for conducting appropriate tests which will cover all the ideas mentioned above. Higher order questions are accomplished by giving unknown tasks to children to compare based on their prior knowledge. As one of the teachers states clearly:

“but the NNC and what they suggest is for students to be assessed on what they have learned, documents we have done with them and also be assessed on some unknown tasks in order to assess their critical thinking and if they are able to find similarities and differences....” (7 years experience female).

Teachers are well trained and they seem to know how to construct a well defined written test. It is the first time that teachers show confidence and interview data mirrors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25) Written assessment should involve higher order questions</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.495</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26) Written assessment should involve lower order questions</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.456</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27) Written assessment should involve both higher and lower order questions</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-13 Means and response distribution of perceptions on written assessment
quantitative data. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) and the framework of the NNC is very comprehensive about testing while they also give example tests to teachers and advice on how to construct testing.

4.6 Differences in teacher perceptions about the NNC by years of experience

The hypothesis to be tested was whether there is a difference between the perceptions teachers hold about the assessment reform on the NNC (22 questions in the questionnaire) based on their years of experience. Teachers were grouped based on years of experience as presented in table 4.7. Because the responses to the questions were ordinal, I used a Kruskal-Wallis test and Bonferroni correction (based on the simultaneous examination of 22 questions) giving us a stricter alpha level of 0.05/22 = 0.002 which revealed no statistically significant differences between perceptions on the NNC and the years of experience of teachers in any of the 22 questions (Appendix N).

4.7 Discussion

With regards to the term ‘assessment’, quantitative data reveals that teachers believe it should be an everyday procedure. They do not feel that assessment is only the test though it is the one given the most importance. Testing material is provided by the MoEC for a number of subjects, and teachers may use it along with their own assessment activities. In the lower secondary (grades 7 to 9) (age 12-14), testing becomes more formal, students and parents are provided with score reports, but assessments are teacher-designed, and only the end-of-year exams on core subjects are school-wide. The same is true for upper secondary and technical schools (grades 10 to 12). There is no compulsory, large-scale assessment system mandated by the government.

What can also be noticed through the triangulation of data is teachers trying to use several methods of assessment; mainly oral and written assessment while they observe students’ attitude in the classroom daily, they undertake projects and assignments and 15 minutes assessed exercises on the previous lesson. Possibly this constant anxiety of teachers using several methods of assessment in order to be fair lies behind the fact that teachers are solely
responsible for showing a child’s progress in every level as well as assigning a representative grade and judging if a child is capable of continuing to the next level.

With regards to everyday oral communication and participation in the classroom teachers seem generally disappointed with the contribution of children in building knowledge. Though teachers value oral communication and they argue to challenge children, and ask them questions while trying to involve them in their learning students only rarely show the appropriate interest or willingness to participate. They say that students usually ask lower order questions and teachers usually end up with only a few people in the classroom participating. This may be an important issue to be further developed and discussed and for stakeholders and practitioners to keep in mind. This reform within the NNC might be a great opportunity to train teachers how to make their lesson more interesting and implement specific strategies for keeping their students’ level of interest high and make them contribute to the lesson effectively.

Information from both data instruments but mostly from interviews reveals that teachers do not have a consensus in their minds about self and peer assessment methods though these are promoted within the NNC. When they were asked about these activities their answers show ignorance on what they really involve but nevertheless have some excuses why they do not implement them. They feel that both they as teachers and their students need more training in order to implement these approaches fully. Furthermore, teachers feel that the number of students in the classroom is restricting for such actions. Some peer assessment methods mentioned to rarely be used by teachers are reading to students aloud or giving them written fragments of parts of essays or answers to written tests and projects in order to discuss and find what they could have done better. Criteria are rarely given explicitly because teachers feel that children are supposed to already know for example what constitutes an excellent essay, or an appropriate answer to a question.

With respect to feedback, teachers seem to appreciate both oral and written feedback and acknowledge that it should concern both students’ performance and their learning needs. However, the questionnaire data shows that feedback should be an everyday process in practice teachers use it orally only to discuss written summative assessment when given back to students and not as a daily process. Teachers also give more written feedback on
essays rather than tests. The interview data reveals that students rarely take advantage of it in altering the ‘gap’ in learning, thus feedback remains summative in this sense. Nonetheless, though they blame students for lack of interest and not using feedback to advance their learning, teachers do not mention any real strategies to encourage students to do so in practice nor have they shown that they know any specific and effective methods of using feedback both for themselves for advancing their teaching nor for stimulating students’ interest in using it effectively.

With regards to the content of written assessment teachers appreciate that it should include both higher and lower order questions. This was given much attention by MoEC and the NNC as teachers were given specific examples on how to construct a test and how to involve both higher and lower order questions. Much emphasis was given by the stakeholders in including unknown tasks in written assessment in order for children to apply what they have learned and be able to present similarities and differences between tasks. This is a specific action mirroring the attempt to promote children in developing critical thinking and use knowledge reflectively.

In the philosophy of the Greek Language syllabus, which is reformed as part of the NNC, the relationship between learning and teaching is being viewed as a dynamic process rather than a one way transmission of knowledge. Children are expected to interact in the classroom, raise questions and actively participate avoiding the notion of being passive learners. Some specific actions for the children to undertake in order to be active learners are suggested in the Greek Language Syllabus. This shows an attempt to involve children not only in the learning process but in the teaching process too (Askew and Carnell 1998; Biggs and Moore 1993; Watkins et al. 1996 cited in Askew 2000).

This study shows that while teachers are trying to implement Formative Assessment what is happening in real practice (according to the interviews) is related to what Torrance and Pryor (1998) named ‘convergent’ assessment. ‘Convergent’ assessment can be characterised by three major features 1) assessing IF the learner knows 2) Accomplished by closed or pseudo open questions 3) at least implicitly can be characterised as behaviourist attempting to achieve mastery learning basically by continuous assessment and not Formative Assessment. On the other hand ‘divergent’ assessment can be described by the
opposites 1) assessing WHAT the learner knows, 2) Open questions are used 3) Constructivist view of learning is adopted (Torrance and Pryor, 1998).

4.8 Additional information from qualitative data

As I carried out my research, even though it is mixed methods there were some occasions when interview discussions went further than the focus of the questionnaire. As a consequence there is additional interesting information extending the narrative of the research which I would like to discuss.

As revealed in the literature, Cyprus is trying to shift assessment to be used for learning, as part of on-going instruction and describes elements of Formative Assessment within the NNC framework which should be implemented. Thus, the methods suggested for assessment by the NNC can easily be compared with what other countries refer to as ‘Assessment for learning’ or ‘Formative Assessment’, however neither term is used directly in the Cypriot context and that is why it was avoided to be used directly in the questionnaire. Although no generalisations can be made as this information was elicited only from the qualitative data, when teachers were asked to give their opinion on ‘Formative Assessment’ in the interviews their answers show ignorance. More specifically their answers were:

“Yes....I think I’ve heard it before.....isn’t it like the continuous one....in the classroom? Tell me the term in English and it might ring a bell....” (6 years experience female).

Another teacher adds:

“I guess it means the assessment that it is continuous...I don’t really know...” (25 years experience female).

“I might have heard it but it doesn’t ring a bell” (1 year experience female).

Their comments after I introduced them to what FA involves, suggest that if teachers had a tangible term in mind they might have been more certain on what to do and how to do it.

As a teacher states enthusiastically:
“Yes....a general term for what we are trying to do...oh that’s nice...” (7 years experience female).

Five of the seven teachers argued that this term was introduced to them at their initial, compulsory training attended before becoming active teachers. This term was not mentioned though at the training they have currently undertaken for the NNC.

Teachers do not seem to be satisfied with the content of the training in enhancing their assessment skills. As this was not one of the main focuses of the study, no questions were included in the questionnaire but teachers wanted to talk about it in the interviews. It seems that according to interview data, not much emphasis was given in the training for teachers to use constructive assessment or Formative Assessment or enhancing their assessment skills in general. Importance was only given on how to construct a test with higher and lower order questions and the specific structure it should have. In their own words, teachers complain that:

“It was more theoretical and not much practical (...) but for Modern Greek it was a bit....light... I guess the lecturers themselves were not pretty sure about the methods of assessment we should use (...) they explained but...not something very specific.....just generalities and blurring.....” (1 year experience female).

Another teacher says:

“They just suggested things for the test...like....some specific exercises and the classification and like (....) they suggested that children should compare tasks.....they just suggested specific exercises for the test...but nothing beyond that.....but not other methods of assessment.....just the projects...which is something that was implemented before....now about everyday assessment...is something that we had in mind even before the NNC....they suggested this as well but without much emphasis or showing us exactly how....” (8 years experience male).

We have seen earlier in this study how much teachers value assessment and consider it as an important element both in teaching and learning and of their everyday classroom lives while realizing that it could have had a much more important role to play. The training
though and the reform of the NNC does not give them the education or the appropriate training needed to implement what they have in mind about ideal assessment.

One of the most drastic changes within the NNC was to divide the school year from three semesters to two. This was a decision made by the practitioners for the explicit purpose of teachers to have more scope of time to use alternative methods of assessment such as projects which are more time consuming. The interview data show a complex set of opinions on this matter. Two teachers argue that this transformation indeed gave them extra time in using projects more often and it helped them not to rush to do tests for the semester grade to be conducted. As stated specifically:

“it did help...because it gave us time...not to get stressed and have to submit grades....it also helped because now students have time in Christmas holidays to prepare for projects and assignments which are alternative approaches of assessment beyond tests” (7 years experience female)

On the other hand some teachers state that the assessment methods a teacher is more familiar with and wants to use he/she will be using them whether the semesters are two or three. As one teacher emphasises:

“This is a huge failure for students especially (....) and this division did not help at all to use alternative methods of assessment. The teacher who was using alternative methods is going to do it whether the semesters are 2 or 3” (5 years experience female).

There is a certain amount of truth in both views because in reality now teachers are obliged to undertake only two major tests per year for the two semester grades to be conducted, thus summative assessment is indeed minimized. On the other hand as stated in the literature, any changes in teaching or assessment strategies can only be accepted when seen as practical and positive and can only be digested by teachers who are willing to apply them (see Sato et al. 2005; Jones and Moreland, 2005). Consequently some innovations are not implemented by teachers because they are not aligned with the teachers’ tested ways of teaching (see Torrance and Pryor, 2001) and if the training did not practically help them to transform their assessment practices then they will continue to use the methods they were already implementing whether the semesters are two or three.
Some more issues were raised during the interviews. As might be expected there is a general complex set of opinions about the NNC because it is just at the initial stages and teachers explicitly mentioned this several times in the interview. Sometimes they seemed positive about some of the changes and sometimes they had negative feelings and it is apparent that they still feel insecure and uncertain on where these changes may lead.

“I just hope you realise that we are just at the initial stage we cannot have a holistic view before practising it for 4-5 years” (7 years experience female).

Furthermore, there were complaints that almost all of the teachers mentioned and can be summarised in the fragment below:

“I want you to give emphasis that myself and many Greek language teachers want to use alternative methods of assessment but the system is not very supportive...first of all the training was not supportive to assessment methods, the number of students in the classroom is huge and it is not acceptable for us Greek language teachers not to have laboratories in order to be able to use computers and projectors etc as teachers in other lessons do...” (6 years experience female).

Here, once more we can see the dedication of teachers in producing high quality assessment and wanting to involve ICT as well. Practitioners shall have this in mind and help teachers to advance their assessment skills and listen to their complaints.

In addition, it is worth paying attention to the fact that five out of seven teachers interviewed said that they use percentages in order to conduct the official semester grade for students. This means that each teacher constructs an excel document where he/she puts specific percentages on each assessment method used and they compute it in order to make up their minds for the final grade of each student. All of the teachers perceive summative assessment to receive 60-70% for conducting the semester grade. This is an ‘assessment policy’ undertaken by private schools in Cyprus but not in public schools for unknown reasons. So if teachers feel that this will be more coherent and justify each child’s final grade why it is not a formal policy? While now, each teacher puts his/her own perceived percentages which of course are not the same between teachers. As one of the teachers states clearly:
“Basically....I was for 7 years at a private school....and my experience there...was
different because in all the modules they have exact percentages of every form of
assessment.....for example.....we knew that the test counts for 50...60% of the final
grade....the project took 20%......oral speech 20% and 10% something else....and it was
something that both students and their parents knew about so.....we had no
misunderstandings......and it was written on a form given to them at the beginning of the
academic year and it was called “Assessment policy”....it was something straightforward
and....it was itself the system assessed every year...if it worked or not and if something else
should be implemented....” (8 years experience male).

To conclude, the additional information received through the discussion with the teachers
shows once more their devotion and commitment in assessment in the sense that they
would like to use more approaches than merely testing and they also want to be fair with
children as solely responsible for their official grade. Though they show ignorance about
the term ‘Formative Assessment’ when introduced to them they relate it to some of the
approaches they are trying to implement while they also express a satisfaction when they
realize that there is a specific terminology and specific strategies summarized in what they
are trying to implement. This should alert the practitioners as it shows that if teachers had a
more tangible theoretical framework with more specific activities introduced to them,
assessment could have been the ideal assessment as teachers imagine it to be. Generally
they do not seem satisfied with the training they have received for advancing their
assessment skills. With regards to the division of the school year from three semesters to
two, perceptions are divided to whether it helped in using alternative approaches of
assessment such as projects and assignments. Another issue that was raised was for more
ICT to be used for advancing teaching and assessment. Finally, reasonably all the teachers
mentioned several times in the interviews that the NNC is at an initial stage and they cannot
have a holistic and strong-minded view.
This chapter presents perceptions on assessment of a large sample (N=599) of Cypriot lower secondary school students. General perceptions about the purposes of assessment are presented through the SCoA-V inventory developed by Brown, Irving, Peterson and Hirschfeld (2009) triangulated with group interview data. Then students’ perceptions on specific assessment approaches based on the NNC for the Modern Greek Language lesson are analysed as data was collected through additional questions on SCoA-V and group interviews.

Initial results gained from the questionnaire were then supported by a number of group interviews to further interrogate the issues which emerged from the completed questionnaires. Three group interviews were undertaken, from each Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9. Though the initial attempt was for all three groups to include six students Year 7 group was conducted with 5 children, Year 8 with 6 and Year 9 group with 4 because some children did not show up or were not willing to participate.

5.1 Introduction

This section reveals students’ perceptions of the four major purposes of assessment obtained by the SCoA-V (2009) inventory. Literature suggests students are aware that assessment exists in order to improve teaching and learning (Brookhart and Bronowicz, 2003; Brown, 2004; Peterson and Irving, 2008), students are aware that assessment is used to evaluate external factors outside their own control such as the quality of schools and their future (Peterson and Irving, 2008; Brown et al.2009; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2006 cited in McInerney et al. 2009). The literature clearly indicates that students are aware of an affective purpose for assessment, impacting on their emotional well-being and the quality of relationships they have with other students (Atkinson, 2003, Hattie et al. 2006, Harlen, 2007, Brown and Hirschfeld, 2007 cited in McInerney et al, 2009) while finally, students are aware that assessment can be unfair, negative, or even an irrelevant process in their lives (McInerney et al. 2009).
5.2 Students’ Conceptions of Assessment Inventory (SCoA)

The SCoA-V (2009) was used to answer the research question:

2) What are Cypriot students’ perceptions of assessment purposes?

To begin with, a summary of the total mean scores for each subscale are given in the tables to follow. The responses were coded based on the original SCoA-V on a non-balanced scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Mostly disagree, 3=Slightly agree, 4=Moderately agree, 5=Mostly agree, and 6=Strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ignore (Negative)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>2.1263</td>
<td>.91460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad (Negative)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>2.7997</td>
<td>.90136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affecting the class (Positive)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>3.2051</td>
<td>.96784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affecting myself (Positive)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>2.7513</td>
<td>1.34073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve teaching (Improvement)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>4.1113</td>
<td>1.00620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve myself (Improvement)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>4.3573</td>
<td>1.00917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate schools (External)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>2.6572</td>
<td>1.30790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Future (External)</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>3.7330</td>
<td>1.16735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-1 Total mean scores of each subscale

These initial results suggest that children do not generally believe assessment to be bad or something that should be ignored. Students seem to believe that assessment has a more positive effect to their class in motivating them to collaborate than actually it has to them in urging them to enjoy learning. Notions of agreement are shown in assessment for improving teaching and themselves as students. Students do not seem to associate assessment with their school evaluation though they realize that it has an effect on their personal future.

5.2.1 Assessment as conceived of as a negative process

This element of the evidence focuses on the degree to which students’ perceptions concerning assessment are negative.
5.2.1.1 Assessment is bad

Assessment may be considered as negative by students if they think of it as being ‘bad’ i.e. unfair or linked with teacher subjectivity. Five questions were related to perceptions of assessment as bad (Table 5.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Assessment is unfair to students</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.378</td>
<td>131 167 167 70 26 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Assessment is value-less</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.326</td>
<td>275 172 73 32 21 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Teachers are over-assessing</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>38 119 160 120 73 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26) Assessment interferes with my learning</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.325</td>
<td>221 201 85 42 19 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31) Assessment results are not very accurate</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.624</td>
<td>61 126 106 114 74 106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-2 Means and response distribution of assessment as bad

Overall, students appear to disagree with the assertion that assessment is unfair, value-less and that it interferes with their learning, thereby showing clearly that they do not see assessment as a negative process in these regards. For example, 45% of them strongly or mostly disagree that assessment is unfair, while only 10% strongly or mostly agree with this notion. This is supported by Student C Year 8 stating that:

“I believe it is fair...if you studied you are going to get on well if not...well...you are not” (Year 8, Student C)

On the other hand there is an example of a Year 9, student who stating that:

“Sometimes teachers are unfair...” (Year 9, Student D)

This child emphasises that assessment as a process is not unfair but sometimes teachers as people might be unfair, as in the Cypriot context it is entirely up to each teacher to construct assessments, evaluate results and make conclusions and judgments.
Furthermore, stronger feelings are shown with regards to the notion that assessment is value-less with 75% of the students in the sample either strongly or mostly disagreeing showing that they value assessment. The interview data support these results. All three focus groups agreed that they cannot imagine their school lives without assessment seeing it as important in that it is giving them information on their level of understanding and gives them a motive to try harder both for furthering their knowledge and subsequently to perform well. In their own words:

- “It helps...” (Year 9, Student B)
- “Yes, it’s a motive to try harder...” (Year 9, Student D)

Assessment occasionally gives them information on any learning gaps they might have though further actions in order to alter the knowledge gap are not compulsory. It is up to each child whether he/she is willing to improve and take further steps in learning. In the words of one student:

“But it’s up to us to use assessment to see what we haven’t learned and learn it again” (Year 9, Student C)

They do not consider assessment to be interfering badly with their learning with 71% (422 of 594) students, disagreeing with this notion. Through discussion with all three focus groups it was apparent that children separate their feelings about daily assessment from tests and exams. Whilst students value assessment in general, they feel they are more productive in everyday assessment than in tests. Also, they believe assessment to affect them negatively in some contexts and positively in others. They complain that they cannot show their full knowledge on tests and sometimes it interferes badly with their learning, while they cherish oral communication and daily assessment which makes them feel like active participants in their own learning.

“Assessment usually it’s just the test where you need to learn a certain amount of units and write well, memorise it basically but everyday work is more important....” (Year 8, Student D)
However, students seem to moderately agree with the notion that teachers are over-assessing (mean score of 3.56) whilst one third, (26%) of this sample disagrees showing no clear pattern. There is no obvious reason as to why children feel teachers are over assessing and no evidence exists to explain this notion as they undertake tests only once or twice per semester and exams only once at the end of the school year. Generally, assessment is low stakes, mostly classroom based, taking place through observation, oral questioning and the general ability a child shows in everyday interaction. Maybe children feel that this low stakes assessment is indeed intense and frequent. Unfortunately, no qualitative data was obtained to explain these results.

Answers vary concerning the notion that assessment results are not very accurate as 32% either strongly or mostly disagree whilst to the contrary 30% strongly or mostly agree. The interview data helps interpret this broad spread of perceptions. It seems that children have interpreted different things as an assessment result. Some children have interpreted it as the grade they receive on tests and exams and some have perceived it as the final official semester grade. Thus, they do not feel that the grade received on tests and exams is unfair but if they perceived their official semester grade as an assessment result, they believe it is not accurate and maybe to a certain extent unfair. This is due to the fact that if they do not perform very well on the test, then their official semester grade will be mostly represented by that single result. One of the students explains:

“In some lessons though they gave us a final grade exactly what we got in the test although we contribute to the classroom interaction and other assessment approaches.....” (Year 8, Student C)

In addition, children who perceived the official semester grade as an assessment result, argue that it is not fair because it is represented by letters A, B, C, D and E thus if a child receives 15/20 on a test and another child receives 18/20 they will both probably receive a B mark at the official semester grade. In one’s own words:

“And it is really unfair if someone deserves a 15/20 and another one an 18/20 they both get a B, in the semester grade but they are not of the same level are they?!” (Year 8, student D)
Taken as a whole, students do not believe assessment to be a negative process. They strongly disagree with the notions that assessment is value-less or something that interferes badly with their learning. They understand the potential and benefits of assessment while there are mixed and spread perceptions on whether assessment results are accurate and whether teachers are over-assessing. Children feel that assessment results are not very accurate because their teacher is solely responsible for conducting assessment and assigning a grade thus they believe it is subjective to a great extent. As they argue they can never show a teacher exactly what they know and certainly not all the time while, the dominant method of assessment which is the test is just a single activity which is certainly not representative of their knowledge. Furthermore, there is no reasonable explanation as to why children feel teachers are over-assessing while assessment is only classroom based and tests and exams take place only once or twice per semester.

5.2.1.2 Assessment is irrelevant and tend to ignore it

Assessment may be considered as negative by students if they think of it as irrelevant with little impact on their learning. This scale shows a rather clear pattern that assessment is not something that students tend to ignore nor do they believe it to have only a small impact on their learning (Table 5.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21) I ignore assessment information</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.200</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24) I ignore or throw away my assessment results</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.173</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27) Assessment has little impact on my learning</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.418</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 Means and response distribution of assessment as something to ignore

The table above evidently indicates students’ strong feelings on ignoring assessment, with 85% disagreeing that they ignore assessment information and 82% strongly or mostly disagreeing that they throw away their assessment results. Associated group interview data
helps explain why children do not ignore assessment results. The group interviews reveal that assessment is not something they ignore because it will determine their official semester grade and establish whether they can proceed to the subsequent level of their education. Moreover, it impacts on their future in lower secondary schools as their next teachers will know their grades from previous classes and might be affected by them and may also construct a prior idea about their level of learning as a result. As two children from Year 9 group add almost simultaneously:

- “Yes……if we proceed to the next class...” (Year 9, student B)
- “Or even move to another school they will see our previous marks and be affected and they will make assumptions about our level.....” (Year 9, student C).

For assessment in having little impact on their learning, answers are located between strongly disagree and moderately agree showing no clear pattern although 43% of the students either strongly or mostly disagree. Year 8 students argue that summative assessment sometimes interferes badly with their learning because it is stressful and it usually involves a large syllabus and content they have been taught months before and might not remember, while there is not always enough time for revision. So while studying for the test they do not try to actually learn but merely memorise as much information as possible, which will then probably be forgotten after having the test. On the other hand they believe that oral and everyday assessment is not harmful and it is better because it is not so stressful and they can easily recall information from previous lessons and feel more willing to participate as active learners. One student comments:

“Tests are stressful, and it’s just an instance which cannot prove your full knowledge but while contributing to the classroom every day is more important in building your knowledge and showing that to the teacher....” (Year 8, Student A).

Students generally do not tend to ignore assessment information or results as they believe that their near future depends on it and assessment is also seen as a motive to try harder in order to perform better the next time. Whilst students do not seem to ignore assessment information, in the interviews they do not mention using that information to advance their learning. They only mention using assessment information for summative judgments and
for showing results to third parties but not any aspects of using it formatively were mentioned by students if not asked directly. They believe assessment to have some impact on their learning, though they seem to have more positive feelings on everyday assessment rather than the tests which make them anxious and stressed.

5.2.2 Affect conception

The emotional impact of assessment on students has been a matter of great concern (McInerney et al. 2009). This section is focused on whether children believe assessment to have a positive impact to their classrooms and themselves.

5.2.2.1 Assessment affects the class

This subscale investigates whether assessment is encouraging and motivating classmates to cooperate with each other and become more supportive; and if there is a pleasant atmosphere during the assessment process (Table 5.4).
There is slight agreement in the majority of answers, with the exception of question 28, showing no strong feelings but rather a minor agreement. The only question within this scale receiving slightly more positive answers is that assessment makes the class more motivated to learn (q25) with 59% of the students agreeing.

The only question where children seem to disagree is in the good atmosphere in their classroom when assessment is taking place (q28). The group interviews mirror a dichotomy in perceptions. Two contrasting views state:

“It’s a nice experience because we can understand our level through assessment” (Year 7, Student A).
Another student says:

“Sometimes it can be a bit stressful....” (Year 7, Student E).

The conclusions drawn from the triangulation of data is that children find assessment a useful experience because they can realize its benefits, but it can be stressful at some times, usually referring to tests and exams.

As for assessment encouraging peers to be more supportive, cooperative and motivated to help each other, answers are widely spread thus making it difficult to reach any firm conclusions. The spread of perceptions is apparent in the data obtained from both instruments. The group interview with Year 7, (12 year old) students gives the impression that children like to cooperate with each other and there is not an antagonism between them. As stated by two of the children:

“If it’s something easy and we have to collaborate in teams....we do....but if we are asked separately.....then... we do it separately” (Year 7, Student C)

“There isn’t any competition between us....” (Year 7, Student E)

The group interview with Year 8, (13 years old) indicated that students seemed to be more competitive with their classmates though they admit helping each other to revise before a major test or exam. For example:

“It depends......we get competitive...but before the test we ask each other questions we believe they are going to be in the test and see if the other person knows the answers.....” (Year 8, Student F)

The group interview with Year 9 (age 14) students reveals stronger feelings about being competitive with each other. Furthermore, they believe that because of this competition assessment affects the class negatively.

“Negatively... you take it personally....as much as you are friends with each other you get a bit competitive.....” (Year 9, Student A+ Year 9, Student B)
While the interviews suggest that as children get older they become more competitive, in order to be able to make generalizations this was further analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>classroom</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>20.5707</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>6.34400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>18.6839</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>5.71444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>18.3979</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>4.96819</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-5 Total Mean of the scale based on Year

The total mean score for this scale which was based on 6 questions was calculated. As demonstrated in table 5.5 there is not much difference in the total mean score for each Year group suggesting that the assumption as children get older they become more competitive cannot be supported. The data from the questionnaire does not support this assumption and no generalizations can be made beyond the fact that only in Year 7 (age 12) are students slightly less competitive than Year 8 and Year 9 while they seem more agreeable to the notion that assessment has a positive effect to their class.

5.2.2.2 Assessment affects myself

The notion of assessment affecting them personally is geared around two questions exploring whether children find assessment an engaging and enjoyable experience and whether they enjoy learning when assessed (Table 5.6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic 1(S.D.) 2 3 4 5 6(S.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I find myself really enjoying learning when I am assessed</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Assessment is an engaging and enjoyable experience for me</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.502</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-6 Means and response distribution of assessment as affecting students

No clear pattern is shown in table 5.6. Perceptions are almost equally spread from 1=strongly disagree to 3=slightly agree while 4=moderately agree also receives a relatively large number of responses.
The group interviews helped interpret this broad spread of perceptions. It seems that the plurality of the term assessment itself is confusing the children. Firstly they seem to segregate their feelings about high stakes and low stakes assessment. They find low stakes assessment non stressful, helpful and engaging while they do not enjoy tests and exams (high stakes assessment) which makes them feel stressed and anxious. As one student states:

“We enjoy everyday interaction because we are more active….especially in literature they might ask questions about something we haven’t yet learned….to elaborate and discover knowledge” (Year 7, Student E)

The dialogue developed in the group interview with Year 8 students is interesting in throwing light on this aspect of student perceptions. When asked by the researcher if assessment is pleasant for them they seem to laugh at first and then say:

- “Well if you study a lot yes…when you know the answers you feel content” (Year 8, Student A and Year 8, Student B)
- “No…its stressful….so will you ever go to write a test or an exam and be happy?!” (Year 8, Student E)
- “No never!!!” (Year 8, Student B)
- “It’s not an ideal feeling but if you study I guess its ok……” (Year 8, Student D).

In conclusion, students seem to appreciate the advantages of assessment and they generally consider it as a useful process while they only get stressed with high stakes assessment. When they feel well prepared and consider their performance as satisfying they feel content but when they do not perform well or realize that there are questions in the test which they cannot answer they feel unhappy. Because the literature suggests that increased positive emotion toward assessment has negative relations towards scores of mathematics and reading comprehension (McInerney et al. 2009) I was tempted to explore whether this assumption made in New Zealand is applicable here. I calculated the mean score of the effect of self-scale in comparison with students’ grades in Modern Greek language and results do not confirm this notion.
Table 5.7 shows that there is no significant difference between perceptions of students of different grades.

5.2.3 Improvement conception

One of the purposes of assessment should be to lead to improved teaching and learning (McInerney et al, 2009). This section deals with students’ notions about the extent to which they believe assessment to have a role in improving instruction and in improving themselves as students.

5.2.3.1 Assessment helps teachers improve

Generally it seems that children believe assessment to help their teachers track their progress though they seem less sure if it helps plan the next steps of teaching. Answers to all questions composing this scale show a moderate level of agreement (Table 5.8).
Table 5-8 Means and response distribution of assessment as improving teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Assessment helps teachers track my progress</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.357</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Assessment is a way to determine how much I have learned from teaching</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.469</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Teachers use my assessment results to see what they need to teach me next</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.603</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) Assessment is checking off my progress against achievement objectives or standards</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>1.338</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) Assessment shows whether I can analyze and think critically about a topic</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.348</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23) My teachers use assessment to help me improve</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.463</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students show rather strong feelings that assessment is used by their teachers to track their progress (m=4.40), it is also a way to determine how much they have learned from teaching (m=4.53) and check their progress against objectives and standards (m=4.26). For example, considering assessment in helping teachers tracking their progress, 32% of the students mostly or strongly agree. Stronger feelings are shown regarding the notion that assessment is a way to determine how much they have learned from teaching as 57% of the students mostly or strongly agree. This is supported by the group interview discussion:

“Because when they ask questions and we answer they realize what and if we understood” (Year 7, Student A)

“With tests they can see if we understood what they have taught so far” (Year 8, Student B)

These quotes further show students’ belief that teachers use both oral questioning and tests to track their progress.
A large proportion of students, (44%) also believe that assessment is used for checking their progress against achievement objectives or standards. This is what students refer to in the interviews as, ‘level’. As they argue:

“They see our level” (Year 7, Student C)

“They see if they have achieved the goals they put” (Year 9, Student A)

“To a large extent it is useful yes... for teacher to observe our level...” (Year 8, Student B)

There is not a consensus in students’ minds when considering if the assessment results are further used for helping them improve and whether teachers are going to use the results to inform next steps in teaching. Thus 39% of the students only slightly and moderately agree to question 11. Furthermore, in question 23 on whether teachers use assessment to help them improve, answers are once more almost equally extended between slightly agree (3) and strongly agree (6) showing a spread of perceptions to the agreeing notion. Thus, no clear conclusions can be drawn from the data. These perceptions are also reflected in the group interviews:

“But some teachers if they see we did not understood something they might proceed and not pay much attention to our learning needs...” (Year 7, Student E)

“What they do wrong is not giving emphasis to our mistakes and in closing the gap they observe we have in knowledge...” (Year 8, Student F)

Furthermore, it seems that some children believe teachers use assessment just to conduct an official grade and not for helping students in taking any further steps in learning, or use assessment formatively.

“They assess mostly to conduct a grade and nothing beyond that.....” (Year 8, Student C)

Students in Year 9 group interview say that teachers try to use assessment formatively though not in all instances and not all of the teachers and then it depends on each child to take advantage of the comments teachers rarely give or the extra assignments, in order to improve.
“They see if they have achieved the goals they put, they do try but it depends from the student mostly...” (Year 9, Student A)

“They might put an extra assignment to improve your learning and your final grade...” (Year 9, Student D)

“But if they realize that a student does not care then they give up as well.....” (Year 9, Student A)

The mean score is lower in question 19 on the assumption that assessment shows if they can analyze and think critically about a topic, with 56% of children answering that they slightly or moderately agree. Though no interview data exists to explain this statement it might be related to the extent to which higher order questions are used both orally and in written form a matter discussed later in this chapter.

In all, students agree that assessment is useful for their teachers in tracking their progress, determining how much they have learned from teaching and checking their progress against objectives and standards but it is up to each teacher whether he/she will use assessment for the next steps of teaching and learning and if some teachers do use certain strategies it is then up to each child whether he/she is willing to alter any gaps in knowledge. There are not any clear strategies for using assessment formatively from the students’ perspective and the group interview shows that no strong approaches for altering any gaps in learning are taking place.

5.2.3.2 Assessment helps me improve

Generally the answers to the questions conducting this scale show a moderate agreement approximately (m=4), to the notion that assessment helps students improve (Table 5.9).
On closer inspection, children seem to pay attention to their assessment results in order to see what they can improve next time as 66% mostly or strongly agree to this notion. As suggested by the interview with Year 9, age 14 students:

- “Yes it does help…” (Year 9, Student B)
- “It shows our level… (Year 9, Student C)
- “And if we need to improve… (Year 9, Student B)
- “We learn to become better by assessment....by recognizing and see our mistakes and try to do better next time…..” (Year 9, Student D)

Considering if they actually take responsibility through assessment in order to take further steps in learning and whether they look on what they did wrong or poorly to guide their next moves answers fall to the positive but remain spread. The same also applies to the two questions focusing on the role of assessment in identifying what they need to study next and whether they use feedback. More consideration on the use of feedback is given later in this chapter through extended questions beyond the SCoA. The group interviews reflect this moderate level of agreement in the aforementioned notions while Year 8, students say that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>595</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.209</td>
<td>7 17 49 127 114 281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>592</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.532</td>
<td>39 67 118 131 99 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>593</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.410</td>
<td>28 25 99 146 120 175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>591</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1.387</td>
<td>25 40 135 141 124 126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>587</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.416</td>
<td>22 44 108 137 121 155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-9 Means and response distribution of assessment as improving learning
assessment is indeed helpful to a certain extent and for helping them improve though it is entirely up to them if they are going to take further steps in learning and if they want to use summative assessment formatively. As one child argues:

“well assessment just helps a little...because you know....you realize what you know and what you don’t....and you can study by yourself and gain the lost knowledge....if we received more comments, this would help...because then you will not focus only on the grade...and you will give more importance to the comments...and actually learning” (Year 8, Student C)

Generally, the quantitative and qualitative instruments both show that students pay attention to their assessment results because it shows what they need to do better next time. The discussion with the children presents a very positive feeling about assessment though no real strategies of taking further steps in learning or altering any ‘gaps’ are mentioned. Some of them also complain that more emphasis should have been given to comments and feedback by the teachers in order for them to be able to use them constructively and further their learning.

5.2.4 Assessment is used for external factors

This section investigates the extent to which children believe assessment is related to external factors such as school accountability. Additionally it explores whether children believe assessment to affect external components i.e. their future career and jobs and showing parents their progress.

5.2.4.1 Assessment is used to evaluate schools

The results show that children do not associate assessment with the evaluation of the quality of schools. Answers are negatively skewed as shown in Table 5.10.
Table 5-10 Means and response distribution of assessment as evaluating schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.527</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22) Assessment measures the worth or quality of schools</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.410</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54% of the students do not associate assessment in providing information on how well schools are doing, while 17% show only a slight agreement. With regards to assessment in measuring the worth and quality of schools 49% of the students strongly or mostly disagree whilst 23% showing only a slight agreement.

One student says that:

“Sometimes….it is considered as a good school when it has really strong students who score high every time on tests and exams….but you can never know exactly what’s happening inside every school… classroom assessment does not show the quality of the schools…..”(Year 8, Student B).

The group interview with Year 9 students shows that they share the same opinion as the aforementioned quote though they also mention an issue that was raised by teachers in the individual interviews. They seem to realise that there are rumours and talking between children and teachers from different schools about how well schools are doing. These rumours are usually based on how many students receive honours because of excellent grades on the official semester grade and based on how many students fail the exams, but nothing beyond these informal discussions. In one’s own words:

“Maybe to a certain extent…because we are a small country….and these things travel by rumours..And maybe if many students fail the exams…it shows that the school is not good” (Year 9, Student B).

The results are reasonable as assessment in the Cypriot context is mostly classroom based and unofficial whilst there are not any standardized or formal procedures which are
compulsory by the government for ranking schools. Thus students do not see the extent to which what they are doing in their classrooms is comparable with other classrooms or schools.

5.2.4.2 Assessment is used for my personal future

With respect to the views of assessment used for their personal futures many responses are within the slightly and moderately agree categories. Generally no strong feelings are shown (see table 5.11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12) Assessment results predict my future performance</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.555</td>
<td>75 85 123 149 80 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) Assessment is important for my future career or job</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.510</td>
<td>37 61 116 136 105 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) Assessment tells my parents how much I have learned</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.477</td>
<td>30 49 90 136 123 170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32) Assessment results show how intelligent I am</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.624</td>
<td>141 120 93 111 67 53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.11 Means and response distribution of assessment used for their future

The extent to which assessment is seen as useful in predicting future performance, the student mean score (m=3.56) is showing no strong feelings but rather a slight and moderate agreement. On closer inspection answers are widely spread showing no clear pattern as 13% of the students strongly disagree whilst 14% of student strongly agree. This spread of perceptions is also mirrored in the interviews.

Some students believe that assessment impacts their near future in the sense that it shows whether they can proceed to the next level, but nothing beyond that. As one of them argues:

“It affects your semester grade and if you are going to proceed to the next level...” (Year 7, Student A).
Some older students though seem to believe that it will affect their near future and might determine their future performance. In their own words:

“Yes……if you proceed to the next level they will see your previous marks and be affected and they will make assumptions about your level…” (Year 9, Student B)

“Well it affects your psychology because if the teachers believe you deserve a C then it is unlikely you will ever be able to get an A, later on even if you improved dramatically” (Year 8, Student B)

Answers are almost equally spread across to positive categories in relation to assessment as important for their future career or job. They seem to state that in lower secondary assessment is affecting their near future, but not the long term future nor their future in higher education or careers.

“Of course it affects our future grades but…” (Year 8, Student B)

“Upper secondary counts most for our future in higher education and job search but…not lower secondary....” (Year 8, Student C)

“Yes…Basically not the first classes of lower secondary but at the upper secondary yes…” (Year 9, Student D)

Clearer are the views on assessment in informing their parents on how much they have learned (m= 4.31) with 49% of the students mostly or strongly agreeing that it is important. Question 32 receives the lowest mean score (m=3.00) showing that children do not believe that assessment shows how intelligent they are as 28% of children seem to strongly or mostly disagree. Unfortunately there is no information from the interviews to explain this result.

Generally, the results of this scale from the questionnaire show something slightly different from students’ responses in the group interview. Whilst the data from the quantitative instrument shows that assessment is perceived to have an impact on their future career or job, in the interviews they said that assessment in lower secondary schools does not determine their future but assessment in upper secondary schools does. Furthermore,
children realize that it affects their near future and whether or not they will proceed to the next level of education. It is interesting that children believe assessment to predict their future performance. They seem disappointed to the extent that if they fail once, especially in the beginning of the school year then they feel that it is hard to change a teacher’s mind about their level even if making dramatic progress. In addition they believe assessment should be used to inform their parents on how much they have learned. The only question from this scale receiving disagreeing answers is the one stating that assessment shows how intelligent they are. Students do not feel that their level of intelligence can be shown through assessment.

5.2.5 Summary of SCoA-V results

All in all, students do not believe assessment to be a negative process. They strongly disagree with the notions that assessment is value-less or interfering badly with their learning. They realize the potential and benefits of assessment while there are mixed and spread perceptions on whether assessment results are accurate and whether teachers are over-assessing. Students do not tend to ignore assessment information or results as they believe that their near future depends on it. Assessment is also seen as a motive to try harder in order to perform better the next time. Students seem to have more positive feelings on everyday assessment rather than the tests which make them anxious and stressed.

For assessment in encouraging and motivating classmates to cooperate with each other and become more supportive; and if there is a pleasant atmosphere during the assessment process no firm conclusions can be made. Generally, students seem to slightly disagree and moderately agree at the same time with assessment impacting their class positively. Friends try to cooperate by assessing each other before the test occurs but admit to also being competitive at some times. Assessment is also seen as a motivation for children to learn. There is a clearer picture on whether there is a good atmosphere in the classroom when written assessed while children admit that when having written summative assessment the environment is not so good. With regards to assessment in affecting themselves as students they believe daily assessment not to be stressful, but rather a helpful and engaging
experience while they do not enjoy the process of tests and exams which affects their emotional well-being.

Students show rather strong feelings that assessment is used by their teachers to track their progress. They believe that it is also a way to determine how much they have learned from teaching and check their progress against objectives and standards. There is not a consensus in students’ minds when considering if the assessment results are further used by teachers for helping them improve and whether teachers are going to use the results to inform next steps in teaching. It seems that it depends from each teacher whether he/she will use assessment for planning next steps in teaching and if some teachers do try to help students enhance their learning it is then up to each child’s willingness to take action.

The triangulation of data shows that some students are paying attention to their assessment results in order to focus on what they need to do better next time and take further steps in learning. The discussion with the children presents a very positive feeling about assessment though no real strategies of taking further steps in learning or altering any ‘gaps’ are mentioned. It seems that children are not encouraged to use feedback constructively.

Students do not seem to associate assessment with ranking schools. This may be a cultural perception as assessment is mostly classroom based and unofficial whilst there are not any standardized or formal procedures compulsory by the government for showing a school’s status and school league tables do not exist.

The children show that assessment in lower secondary schools does not determine their future but assessment in upper secondary schools does. Furthermore, children realize that it affects their near future and if they will proceed to the next level. Interestingly children believe assessment to predict their future performance. In addition they believe assessment to inform their parents on how much they have learned. Students do not feel that their level of intelligence can be shown through assessment in the various modules.
5.3 Differences in assessment conceptions of students and years of age

For the assessment conception subscales derived from the SCoA, parametric statistics were used and more specifically one-way ANOVA tests to explore if there are differences between conceptions of students between different age groups.

Four one way between groups analysis of variance tests were conducted to explore the impact of students’ age groups (Year 7, n=203, Year 8, n=200, Year 9, n=196) and their conceptions on the four competing purposes of assessment as found in Brown’s previous studies and SCoA V (assessment used to improve teaching and learning, assessment, used to evaluate external factors outside their own control such as the quality of schools and their future affective purpose for assessment and finally assessment can be unfair, negative, or even an irrelevant process in their lives). Using again the Bonferroni correction (because we have 4 competing purposes) we have a p value of 0.05/4=0.013. Interestingly, there was a significance difference in all four conceptions of assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is bad</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>16.079</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.040</td>
<td>11.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>416.751</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>432.830</td>
<td>598</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>47.990</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.995</td>
<td>28.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment for improvement</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>19.549</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.775</td>
<td>10.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>535.872</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>.899</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>598</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>10.155</td>
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<tr>
<td>AssEffect</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>617.481</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>1.038</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>637.790</td>
<td>597</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-12 ANOVA Tests for differences in SCoA and years of age
Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the following:

1) Assessment is bad

Dependent Variable: Assessmentisbad

Tukey HSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) classroom</th>
<th>(J) classroom</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.17791</td>
<td>.08331</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>-.3737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-.40095*</td>
<td>.08374</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.5977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>.17791</td>
<td>.08331</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>-.0178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>-.22304*</td>
<td>.08405</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>-.4205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>.40095*</td>
<td>.08374</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.2042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.22304*</td>
<td>.08405</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.0256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-13 Kruskal Wallis test for assessment is bad conception and years of age

Results show that older students in grade C are more in agreement (the mean score is higher thus agreeing more) that assessment is bad for their school lives (mean difference = -0.40095 and -0.22304) compared to younger students. There is a significant difference between students in A class (Year 7) and C class (Year 9) and between students in B (Year 8) and C class (Year 9).

2) Assessment is used for improvement

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Assforimprovement

Tukey HSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) classroom</th>
<th>(J) classroom</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>.34251*</td>
<td>.09090</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.1289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.69372*</td>
<td>.09136</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.4791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.34251*</td>
<td>.09090</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.5561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.35121*</td>
<td>.09170</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.1358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.69372*</td>
<td>.09136</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.9084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.35121*</td>
<td>.09170</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.5667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5-14 Kruskal Wallis test for assessment is used for improvement and years of age
Again we have interesting results in relation to students’ conceptions on assessment being used for improvement and differences in age groups. It seems that as students get older they show less agreement that assessment is used for improving teaching or learning. Thus there is a significant difference between the A (Year 7) and B (Year 8) students’ conceptions with a mean difference= 0.34251 (p=0.001) and even greater difference in perceptions of A (Year 7) and C (Year 9) students with a mean difference= 0.69372 (p=0.001). There is also a significant difference between students in B (Year 8) versus C (Year 9) with a mean difference=0.35121 (p=0.001).

3) Assessment has a positive effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) classroom</th>
<th>(J) classroom</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>.29879</td>
<td>.09447</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.0768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.43120</td>
<td>.09496</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.2081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.29879</td>
<td>.09447</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.5208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.13241</td>
<td>.09530</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>-.0915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.43120</td>
<td>.09496</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.6543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.13241</td>
<td>.09530</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>-.3563</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5-15 Kruskal Wallis test for assessment having a positive effect and years of age

From the table 5.15 above it is obvious that students in the first year of lower secondary school endorse more strongly the belief that assessment has a positive effect on themselves and the classroom compared to older students. Thus results show that there is significant difference between the A’ class (Year 7) and B’ Class (Year8), mean difference=0.29879 (p=0.005) while the difference is even higher between A and C class (Year 7 and 9), mean difference= 0.43120 (p=0.001). There is not a significant difference though between the conceptions of B’ (Year 8) and C’ (Year 9) classes.
4) Assessment is used for external reasons

**Multiple Comparisons**

**Dependent Variable: AssExternal**

**Tukey HSD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) classroom</th>
<th>(J) classroom</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>.27783*</td>
<td>.10149</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.0394 - .5163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.44670*</td>
<td>.10215</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.2067 - .6867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.27783*</td>
<td>.10149</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.5163 - -.0394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.16888</td>
<td>.10252</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>-.4098 - .0720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.44670*</td>
<td>.10215</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.6867 - -.2067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.16888</td>
<td>.10252</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>-.4098 - .0720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table 5-16 Kruskal Wallis test for assessment used for external purposes and years of age**

From the table 5.16 it is obvious that students in the first year of lower secondary school endorse more strongly the belief that assessment is used for external reasons such as making schools and themselves accountable. Results show that there is significant difference between A and C class (Year 7 and 9), mean difference = 0, 44670 (p=0.001) and A and B class (Years 7 and 8), mean difference = 0.27783 (p=0.018). There is not a significant difference though between the conceptions of B (Year 8) and C (Year 9) students.

5.4 *Differences in assessment conceptions of students and schools in different cities*

Four one way between groups analyses of variance were conducted to explore students’ conceptions in different cities (Nicosia, n=250, Limassol, n=132, Larnaca, n=104, Pafos, n=49 and Ammochostos, n=64) and their conceptions on the four competing purposes of assessment as exploited earlier. Using again the Bonferroni correction (because we have 4 competing purposes) we have a p value of p=0.05/4=0.013. There was a significance difference only in the conception of assessment used for external purposes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>7.876</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.969</td>
<td>2.752</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>424.954</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>.715</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isbad</td>
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<td>432.830</td>
<td>598</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>598</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1.915</td>
<td>2.076</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>621.693</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>637.790</td>
<td>597</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-17 ANOVA Tests for differences in SCoA and various cities
Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the following:

**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: AssExternal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) city</th>
<th>(J) city</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lefkosia</td>
<td>Limassol</td>
<td>-.33617</td>
<td>.11024</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-.6378</td>
<td>-.33617</td>
<td>.0345</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larnaca</td>
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<td>.11955</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-.6510</td>
<td>-.32390</td>
<td>.0032</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pafo</td>
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<td>.16002</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>-.7623</td>
<td>-.32442</td>
<td>.1134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ammochostos</td>
<td>-.34550</td>
<td>.14350</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>-.7381</td>
<td>-.34550</td>
<td>.0471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limassol</td>
<td>Lefkosia</td>
<td>.33617</td>
<td>.11024</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.0345</td>
<td>.33617</td>
<td>.6378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larnaca</td>
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<td>.01175</td>
<td>.4804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.4361</td>
<td>-.00933</td>
<td>.4174</td>
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<td>-.0032</td>
<td>.32390</td>
<td>.6510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.3796</td>
<td>-.01227</td>
<td>.3551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Pafo</td>
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<td>-.4860</td>
<td>-.00052</td>
<td>.4849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ammochostos</td>
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<td>.16267</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.4667</td>
<td>-.02159</td>
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</tr>
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<td>.16002</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>-.1134</td>
<td>.32442</td>
<td>.7623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limassol</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Pafo</td>
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<td>.19436</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.5107</td>
<td>.02108</td>
<td>.5529</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5-18 Tukey HSD Tests for SCoA differences and various cities

The only significant difference is between Nicosia and Limassol with mean difference= 0.33 617 and p=0.020 showing that students in Limassol endorse more strongly the belief that assessment is used for external reasons. It is beyond the scope of this research and the research questions to investigate the reasons why, although useful for further studies.
5.5 *Students’ perceptions of the term ‘assessment’*

Additional questions were added beyond the SCoA-V inventory in order to obtain information on what students associate with the term assessment and also to understand perceptions concerning the reformed assessment framework based on the New National Curriculum (NNC). The next section will answer the research question

2) b. What assessment methods do students associate with the term assessment?

In considering what students associate with the term assessment, three questions were included in the questionnaire on whether they believe assessment to be an unofficial procedure or only the graded work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>1(S.D.)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6(S.A.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34) Assessment is a daily, unofficial procedure</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.479</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35) Assessment is ONLY the graded work</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.529</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36) My teacher raises questions in the classroom and he/she observes me in order to evaluate me</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.404</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-19 Means and response distribution of the term assessment

Students generally appear to disagree that assessment is only the graded work with teachers asking questions in the classroom seen as important. Students agree with the focus of q36, that the teacher raises questions in the classroom in order to evaluate them while they seem less sure about assessment as unofficial practice with 40% disagreeing with this notion.

Four main themes emerged from students’ group interviews. Firstly, all 15 students included in the interviews seem to agree that the first thing that comes to their minds when listening to the word assessment are grades and tests. As they say:

- “Grades” (Year 9, Student A)
- “Numbers” (Year 9, Student C)
- “Level of students” (Year 9, Student B)
- “Tests and exams” (Year 9, Student D)

The second theme emerging is that when they are actually assessed they say that they are assessed everyday by their teachers in the classroom as some students phrase it:

“Every day.....almost every day....without us really realizing it” (Year 7, Student E)

“Well....oral assessment which is happening more often....” (Year 8, Student F)

“Participation in the classroom....is a form of assessment” (Year 8, Student B)

Thus we can see that although students instantly think of high stakes assessment when listening to the word assessment they also realize that assessment is also taking place everyday in their classrooms mostly through interaction and questioning from teachers.

Thirdly, students were asked if they know any other methods of assessment beyond high stakes and oral participation and they all seem to mention the same approaches. These are the extra assignments or projects which can be done individually or in groups. Projects and assignments usually involve some research on a given specific topic with presentation in the classroom or submission to the teacher. In their own words:

“We have projects done individually or in groups and we present it in the classroom and our peers comment on it and teachers give us comments but no grades” (Year 9, Student D)

They seem excited about the projects which they believe to be interesting. They like this method of assessment as they feel that their learning is more proactive and they like presenting what they have researched to the classroom.

“We like doing projects, its more exciting and we prefer it instead of testing which is so stressful” (Year 8, Student B)

The fourth theme emerged while trying to elicit more information from students concerning what their teachers’ consider in order to conduct the official semester grade. They all seem to agree that what counts the most are the written tests, then the participation in the
classroom and also if they are doing their homework and generally if they show effort. This is in accordance with teachers’ answers as discussed in the previous chapter. They also feel that though teachers are trying to encourage them in participating in the classroom and daily assessment, what will count most for their official semester grade is the grade they receive on the summative assessment; in their own words:

“*And teachers claim that the tests are not what count the most...when you see your grade on the official semester results it is...exactly what you get at the test....So...*” (Year 8, Student B)

During the interview the researcher observed great disappointment from the children who feel that testing is not fair to the extent that it is just a single instance which does not represent their full knowledge. They also state that tests make them feel stressed and that they feel the pressure to gain a good mark, thus when the test is approaching they do not study for learning but for the ultimate goal which is to gain a good grade acting to a performance ethos where they feel that they need to show their peers, and their teachers and parents that they are good students. Some of their comments highlight these views:

“*You are getting stressed for the grade and not for yourself...for your learning....and to be certain that you will have a good future in schools....*” (Year 8, Student A)

“*We feel a constant pressure and that they teach us to the test...they rush to cover the syllabus...in order to have the test or the exam...*” (Year 8, Student F)

“*Everything is based on what we will need to know to do well on the test....*” (Year 8, Student B)

Thus the conclusions drawn from this section are that children do not feel that assessment is only the graded work or the test but that nevertheless it is the most dominant method of assessment. It seems that it is the most stressful one and the one given more attention by them, their teachers and their parents as it is the one that will count the most for their final official semester grade. Students seem to realize that assessment is also happening every day in the classroom while teachers observe their progress and value their participation and interest and they believe that teachers often check to see if they have done their homework.
As we have seen earlier in the teachers’ results chapter children share the same opinion that assessment in any form is not an unofficial process. Furthermore, it is interesting that children value projects and assignments and they strongly believe that this method of assessment is more proactive, engaging and it helps them to learn more effectively.

5.6 Assessment approaches based on the NNC in the Modern Greek language module

Part of the student questionnaire (questions 37-48, see Appendix I) focuses on specific assessment experience within the Modern Greek language module and the NNC. As analysed in the literature the assessment approaches promoted by the NNC are built around the philosophy of Formative Assessment whilst not explicitly mentioning the term. Questioning, feedback, self and peer assessment and the formative use of summative tests are supported by the NNC as discussed in detail in the literature review chapter and the philosophy of FA focusing on involving students in the teaching-learning-assessment procedure and for assessment to be used as a vehicle for learning. Thus a number of the student survey questions and interview questions were focused on these elements and their main functions.

5.6.1 Oral questioning

The questionnaire included 4 questions focusing on what students believe oral communication should involve. The terms ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ order which characterise questioning in the literature were not used because in Greek translation they are very vague and might not have been familiar to most of the children thus the questions included instead attempted to describe the terms (Table 5.20).
Table 5-20 Means and response distribution of perceptions on oral questioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37) Oral questions should be about what we understood and to recall information</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>1.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38) Oral questions should demand critical thinking and reasoning</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39) Oral questions should involve both the above (see q.37 and 38)</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43) Teachers should encourage us to raise questions</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.361</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally the above questions received agreeing answers though showing no strong feelings or clear preference to solely lower or higher order questions. Only q43, “Teachers should encourage us to raise questions” receives strong answers with 62% of the children mostly or strongly agreeing showing that they need support from their teachers to participate in the classroom and be actively involved in everyday learning and assessment. This is very important because as we have seen in teachers’ results chapter they state that children are not really interested whilst on the contrary now students seem willing to participate in the classroom but expect from their teachers to help them.

The answers may be expected as it is not reasonable for only lower or only higher order questions to dominate daily school life. Thus students seem to moderately agree to both higher and lower order questions to be used orally.

The information elicited from the group interview, reveals that in practice students are not strongly encouraged to raise questions in the classroom and most of the time feel that they are being passive learners. It is rather surprising complaining that they are even embarrassed to ask questions in the classroom even for something they did not understand. If they really want to cover lost knowledge then they might ask the teacher personally in non-class hours; for example:
“I do not ask questions even if I don’t understand something....” (Year 7, Student A)

And other students add:

“We prefer to ask them personally at the break when we do not understand something because....we will be offended in the classroom and they might make fun of us...” (Year 7, Student B)

“We prefer to ask them personally and they also come to us personally sometimes in non-class hours” (Year 7, Student D)

Another important issue raised from the groups is that they feel that they are not given sufficient time to think of an answer when asked orally, thus the teacher ends up with the same children participating in discussions. They believe that when given sufficient time to elaborate and when the answer to higher order questions comes from their own thinking and prior knowledge and not from their teachers then it becomes tangible knowledge.

“No, they do not give you enough time to consider...and think....and when you don’t really know the answer they....skip you...and go to the next person who is ready.....so the answer....does not stay in your mind and become knowledge because they didn’t give you enough time to think hard and elaborate...” (Year 8, Student B)

Year 9 group brings up an interesting perspective on oral questioning for the Modern Greek language subject. This group suggested that literature which is a part of the Modern Greek language module is ideal for using higher order questions both orally and written, as they can be asked to compare texts or use their previous knowledge on poems of the same era or poets from the same or different era as comparisons, one student states:

“They ask mostly questions to see if we understood something but also higher order questions...mostly for critical thinking... while it’s not applicable to all modules....it is more apparent and appropriate at literature...” (Year 9, Student C).

The group interview with the Year 8 students supports the view that teachers ask mostly lower order questions in the classroom and only very rarely higher order questions. In addition, students seem to relate oral participation not so much with learning but to achieve
their ultimate goal which is to receive a good official semester grade. Thus they try to show effort and participate in the classroom sometimes in order for this to be co-considered with the test grade and make up a higher official semester grade. This suggests that the test is centred to their minds as one of the children states:

“Oral participation counts for the final grade.... To be conducted....like if your test grade is between A or B they will count your participation to set the mark...” (Year 8, Student C)

In conclusion, students do not show a clear preference for solely lower or higher order questions dominating their classroom lives though they feel that when elaborating to higher order questions, knowledge becomes more tangible. They feel that they should be strongly encouraged by their teachers to participate in the classroom though this is not happening in practice to a great extent. It is interesting that some of the students feel embarrassed to ask questions in the classroom thus when they have a query they might go personally and ask the teacher in non-class hours. Interesting is also the perspective of some children that oral participation is useful for summative purposes and ultimately for showing some interest in order to gain a higher official semester grade.

5.6.2 Self and peer assessment

The questionnaire shows generally that students feel positive about self and peer assessment approaches although they are more positive about self-assessment than peer assessment (Table 5.21).
In a closer inspection (table 5.21) we can observe that 22% of students disagree with the peer assessment approach while only 8% with the self-assessment. 32% of the students believe they should be able to assess each other’s work whilst almost twice as many (63%) believe they should be able to assess their own work. Furthermore, 64% of the students believe that they should be able to understand what they have learned and assess their level in order to take next steps in closing any gap in learning.

The group interviews show that children are not familiar with any real strategies of peer or self-assessment and they show ignorance about these terms. When asked explicitly if they know what the terms mean they showed unawareness and were trying to guess from the wording. They could not recall any actions of peer or self-assessment they undertook. Some of their answers precisely are:

“What? Can you repeat?” (Year 8, Student D)

“What is peer assessment” (Year 8, Student B)

“What do you mean?” (Year 8, Student F)

“What is peer and self-assessment exactly?” (Year 7, Student A)

When introduced to what self-assessment might involve they seem to like the approach and find it even more interesting and valuable than teachers assessing them. As one child argues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>1(S.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44) We should be able to assess each other’s work</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45) We should be able to assess our own work (ex. on assignments, tests, essays)</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>1.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48) I should be able to realize what I’ve learned and assess my level in order to take next steps in closing the gap in learning</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-21 Means and response distribution of perceptions on self and peer assessment
“I believe that self-assessment is more important than teachers assessing us and we should be able to assess ourselves and encouraged more for such actions...” (Year 7, Student E)

Through discussion when introduced to these approaches they realize that they need some prior knowledge to be able to assess their own work and that of others.

“But they don’t teach us the criteria...so how can you assess yourself or anyone else?” (Year 8, Student D)

This shows that children are unfamiliar with any real peer and self-assessment strategies though if they were in use they feel that clear assessment criteria is a very important element which should be given to them.

Year 9 students from the group interview seem to relate self-assessment to assigning a grade. When asked if they use any self-assessment methods they seem to believe that it is all about calculating the test grade they achieved and how much willingness they show in the classroom and participation as well as some other approaches of assessment such as the grade achieved on projects and assignments in order to be able to estimate and predict their official semester grade. They do not mention self-assessment as an approach for enhancing their knowledge or taking further actions of self-regulation. One Year 9 student comments:

“We can also consider by ourselves the grades on test and participation and behaviour...in order to know what to expect at the final official semester grade...” (Year 9, Student C).

When asked about peer assessment methods a fruitful discussion developed between them showing some familiarity and excitement on this approach though they do not use it very often and they state that sometimes it might be slightly offending as they may not want their peers to be aware of the quality of their work. More specifically:
“Yes we did it.....mostly in projects and assignments...” (Year 9, Student C)

“Sometimes we exchange assignments with the person sitting next to us.....and assess each other’s work....basically to read it and give comments” (Year 9, Student B)

“We also did it once with the essays...to correct each other’s syntax and spelling mistakes...” (Year 9, Student A)

“What are you talking about? We just did it once....we do not do it very often” (Year 9, Student D)

“But sometimes it can be embarrassing....if you did many mistakes you wouldn’t like other’s to see them and judge you” (Year 9, Student D)

“Yes....you will not want to give it to your peer if it’s really bad” (Year 9, Student B)

To sum up, though the quantitative instrument shows that children are positive and agree that they should be able to use peer and self-assessment approaches, the discussion with a total of 15 children shows that in practice these approaches are not often used nor they are familiar with the terminologies and what they really involve. So there is a difference between potential and experience. The interviews reveal that Year 7 and Year 8 children show total ignorance on these approaches and they do not seem to recall using any of these strategies while Year 9 group is slightly more familiar with peer assessment. They seem to relate self-assessment with estimating their final grade (thus with summative assessment, a judgment) and not with any use suggested in the literature as part of formative assessment such as using criteria to assess their work and that of peers or altering any knowledge gaps by taking advantage of feedback.

5.6.3 Feedback

Two questions in the questionnaire elicit information on whether children believe they should receive oral and/or written feedback (Table 5.22).
Table 5-22 Means and response distribution of feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback should be given in written assessment (in essays, assignments and tests)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>590</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.397</td>
<td>19 41 23 127 136 168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback should be given daily from the teachers in answers we give orally</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.407</td>
<td>22 49 125 131 130 136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children seem to believe that both oral (m=4.40) and written (m=4.19) feedback should be used. There is a wide spread of perceptions geared around the agreeing responses almost equally distributed from slightly to strongly agree especially in question (47) on daily feedback.

Generally the interviews with all three groups mirror this pattern of positivity and agreement regarding feedback but they do not know how to deal with comments and they are certainly not trained on how to take advantage of them. In addition they sometimes feel comments to be unfair. As one girl says:

“Well....if you like the comment and it is something good you like to see it but if it’s bad......when you believe that your essay is good but the comments are bad then you feel that the teacher is unfair” (Year 7, Student B)

Students say that they receive feedback most often on essays rather than through tests or orally and it usually involves their spelling, syntax and grammar mistakes. This generally shows a lack of formative feedback.

“Mostly in essays... and not so often in tests....they just put a grade.....and... Sometimes you make a mistake but you don’t really know what went wrong and you can’t understand only by the grade...” (Year 8, Student B)

They mention a coding method that teachers have also mentioned in the interviews in order to give feedback on tests without teachers spending much time or rewriting the full answer. This coding involves signs such as ‘?’ when the teacher does not understand or ‘+’ when
the child should have elaborated more or when something is missing. As one student explains:

“Most often they use some kind of coding like….underline or put (+) sign if the answer needed more elaboration or (?) sign if they do not understand our answer…..if it doesn’t make sense....” (Year 9, Student B)

Furthermore, children seem to realize that feedback is helpful but even if they sometimes receive formative feedback they do not use it to a great extent because they do not know how. Some though admit that they are not really bothered with comments and they just have a quick look at them.

“I do not really use the comments…I just have a quick look at them and then ignore them” (Year 8, Student A).

Though they do not use comments to a great extent they argue that they would like to receive more comments both orally and written and they seem to feel that they would have taken advantage of the comments in order to improve if they were encouraged to do so or if comments were stimulating.

- “So would you like to receive comments on your work?” (researcher)
- “Certainly.....to realize what we did wrong....and to get better for the final exams...” (Year 8, Student B)
- “So how would you take advantage of the comments if you received some?” (researcher)
- “I would rewrite my answer correctly...” (Year 8, Student B)
- “I would correct my mistakes when I went home...” (Year 8, Student C)
- “Like in grammar mistakes you need to know what went wrong to cover the gap you have. It’s good to improve” (Year 8, Student F)

A student from another group also adds that:

“It would be good for learning....so if you did something wrong you get the chance to learn it and cover the gap...” (Year 9, Student D)
Thus, we are drawn to the conclusion that children are not trained on how to integrate comments into their learning. As we have seen in the literature, researchers have tried through action research to investigate the benefits of children receiving only comments and no grades on their work and the effect it might have (Black et al. 2003; Smith and Gorard, 2005; Taras, 2009). Children in the interviews were asked how they would perceive receiving only feedback and no grades. At first they all seem shocked and laughed but then mixed perceptions were revealed for this action as some students find it useful while others feel that grades are necessary.

“This would help...because then you will not focus only on the grade...and you will give more importance to the comments...and actually learning” (Year 8, Student B)

“But grade is also a way of showing you your level...maybe if they don’t grade the first test and they do so in the rest....I believe grades are necessary....”( Year 8, Student C)

When they were further asked how they would react if encouraged to develop and correct their responses at home while taking advantage of the comments, which may ultimately lead to better grades they were very honest, saying that it would have been a very boring procedure but useful. They say that it would be unfair for their peers who study in the first place and gain a good grade first time but, some also realize that by using the comments they would learn more. However, others believe that copy pasting from the comments or their books would not have been useful at all, in their own discussion as it developed, they argue:

- “Boring but useful” (Year 7, Student A)
- “I think that nothing will change through this process!!! If I did not understand something or didn’t learn it then...I just didn’t.......rewriting it or copying from the book will not help...” (Year 7, Student B)
- “But on the other hand you will have the full answer...you might learn something more....but.....not to put another grade...” (Year 7, Student E)
- “It might be a bit unfair to students who studied at the first place....” (Year 7, Student C)
We can see a misalignment in what students believe to be ideal and what they say is happening in practice. While the information from the questionnaire shows children believe they should receive oral and written feedback, in practice it seems that they do not receive many comments beyond some on essays and they do not use them in altering any learning gaps. Furthermore, there is a contradiction in their views as on the one hand they seem to want more feedback but they do not take advantage of the minimum feedback they receive now even if it is only on essays. Children are not solely to blame though as they seem not to be encouraged to taking advantage of the comments they receive and are not familiar with any real strategies in doing so; but if they were more encouraged to do so, they can acknowledge its benefits.

5.6.4 Written assessment

Three questions were included to explore the perceptions of students on what kind of questions should be included in tests and other summative assessments. The questions are similar as used for oral questioning asking children about higher and lower order questions without using this terminology (Table 5.23).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Response distribution (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40) Written questions should be about what we understood and to recall information</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.237</td>
<td>1(S.D.) 2 3 4 5 6(S.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41) Written questions should be about critical thinking and reasoning</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.341</td>
<td>14 44 110 147 133 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42) Written questions should involve both the above (q 40 and 41)</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.329</td>
<td>18 45 113 158 137 116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.23 Means and response distribution of perceptions on written questioning

As with oral questioning children show no clear preference for lower or higher order written questions. We can observe that answers are generally skewed to the agreeing notion and they are almost equally spread from 3=slightly agree to 6= strongly agree thus showing no clear pattern but rather a moderate agreement in the usage of higher and lower order
questions. This is in agreement with teachers’ perceptions as analysed in the previous chapter. As also analysed in the use of oral higher and lower order questions, students can see benefits in both whilst they can see that teachers assessing what they already know is necessary while trying to help them develop knowledge and elaborate more through higher order questions is also useful. Unfortunately, no further information was elicited from the interviews.

5.7 Differences in students’ perceptions about the NNC by cities and age groups

The hypothesis to be tested was whether there are differences in the perceptions students hold about the term assessment and the reform of the NNC (16 questions) based on their cities (Nicosia n=255, Limassol n=132, Larnaca n=104, Pafos n=49, Ammochostos n=64). Kruskal-Wallis test and Bonferroni correction were used giving as a level of significance 0.05/16=0.003. The tests revealed no statistically significant differences between perceptions of students according to the cities in which they go to school (Appendix O).

Another hypothesis to be tested was whether students have different perceptions about the term assessment and the various approaches of the NNC based on their year group (Year 7 n=203, Year 8 n=200, Year 9 n=196). Kruskal-Wallis test and Bonferroni correction was used giving as a level of significance 0.05/16=0.003. The tests revealed no statistically significant differences between perceptions of students according to the different cities (Appendix P).

5.8 Discussion

This section focuses on the main issues raised for students’ perceptions on the term assessment as well as their perceptions on the elements of Formative Assessment as exposed in part of the NNC reform.

In relation to the term ‘assessment’, students perceive that it is not only the test but also the everyday interaction with their teachers, their homework and projects they undertake. When listening to the term ‘assessment’ the first thing that comes to their minds are tests
and final exams but they understand that their daily effort is something valued by teachers. They also feel that their homework and their everyday classroom participation are co-considered to make up their official semester grade. Assignments and projects are also assessed though they are not regularly used. Furthermore, they do not feel that assessment is an unofficial procedure whilst as we discussed in the previous chapter, there is not any, compulsory assessment system by the government, nor the results are published. The aforementioned students’ perceptions are in alignment with teachers’ perceptions. So for what counts more as an assessment event and what will count the most for the official semester grade to be formed in ranking order, are tests as the most important, classroom participation and general effort shown (i.e by undertaking homework) and finally projects and assignments. It is interesting that through the discussion children mention projects and assignments as the only challenging method of assessment, the one that makes them feel happier and more proactive in their learning. The opposite is true for tests and exams while they complain to feel stressed and study for accomplishing their ultimate goal which is to gain a good grade in order to please their teachers, their parents and be considered as good students and not for actually learning. None of these approaches of assessment are mentioned to be used formatively. Instead they are said to be used for a judgment (summative) for forming their official semester grade.

With regards to everyday oral communication and participation in the classroom children do not show preference to solely higher or lower order questions dominating most likely because they understand the benefits of both. Year 9, age 14 students seem to realise that the Greek language module is very welcoming to higher order questions because they can use information and knowledge from previous lessons about poetry or texts or writers and apply that knowledge in order to compare the new tasks taught. Children seem to feel more active learners when given time to elaborate and think of an answer to a higher order question. While we have seen in the previous chapter that teachers do not feel satisfied with children’s’ contribution to knowledge and participation here it is clear that students would like to be encouraged by teachers to participate but in practice it seems that they are not encouraged to a great extent. It is surprising that even when they have a query and they want to learn they sometimes feel reluctant to ask in the classroom thus they ask teachers personally in non-class hours.
For self and peer assessment strategies the questionnaire shows that children believe they should be able to assess themselves and each other, though they are slightly more positive toward the self-assessment strategy than peer assessment. Disappointedly the in depth discussion shows that children are not familiar with specific self or peer assessment approaches. When talking about self-assessment they relate it with estimating their semester grade and not with acknowledging any gaps they have in learning in order to take control of their next steps. Only the Year 9, age 14 students, show some familiarity with peer assessment while they say they have used it once or twice but find it abusive to some extent and feel exposed to their peers. When I tried to explain what self and peer assessment may really involve they admit being unable to assess themselves or each other without proper guidance or knowing the exact criteria a priori.

With respect to oral and written feedback, the quantitative data shows that children are very welcoming to these actions but once more the qualitative data shows that in practice they do not use them much. They argue that they receive mostly written feedback on essays and some signs used as referencing systems to their tests. Although we have discussed in the teachers’ results chapter that teachers are disappointed with students as they do not seem to take advantage of the feedback, students’ interview show that they are not encouraged to do so in practice. Students value feedback and argue that if it was compulsory they would have used it in altering any gaps they have in learning but such strategies are not promoted by their teachers.
6 Synthesis of students’ and teachers’ perceptions

While results were presented as obtained from the qualitative and quantitative data with only a small discussion at the end of each section, the focus of the chapter to follow is a more analytical discussion synthesising the findings of students’ and teachers’ perceptions and relating them to the wider international literature. The discussion starts by examining the results of the two research questions focusing around what teachers and students associate with the term assessment in general.

1) b. What assessment methods do Cypriot teachers associate with the term assessment?

2) b. What assessment methods do students associate with the term assessment?

6.1 Introduction

This question was considered as important for clarifying whether teachers and students only see assessment as graded work or if they believe assessment to have a more fundamental role in teaching, learning and on-going instruction as indicated by the literature (Black and Wiliam; 1998 a,b; Black et al. 2003; Broadfoot, 2007; Jane, 2012; Kennedy et al. 2008; Newton, 2007; Stiggins, 2007; Taras, 2008; Wiliam 2011a,b).

As discussed in section 2.1.2, many countries still emphasize the importance of Summative Assessment in relation to standards and international comparisons but are also trying to enshrine Formative Assessment within their school practices so as to reflect changes in the adoption of new learning theories and curriculum theories, leading to an emphasis on assessment as linked with instruction and learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, b; Black et al. 2003; Broadfoot, 2007; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Harlen and James, 1997; Harlen, 2007; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008; Shepard, 2000; Singh, 1999; Rowe, 2006; Torrance and Pryor, 2001). Increasingly children are expected to have a central role in the construction of their learning and sense making, to be active learners and become increasingly autonomous for the purpose of lifelong learning. Thus assessment should change accordingly to meet these expectations. Likewise, the restructuring of assessment in its content and form
suggests the need for a broader range of assessment tools so as to reflect changed learning goals (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Pat El et al. 2013; Shepard, 2000; Wiliam, 2011b; Williams, 2010; Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, and Gardner, 1991).

If the changes above are to be successful, then teachers and students need to have particular perspectives concerning assessment. Insights into their perspectives were developed through separate questionnaires for the two parties and separate interviews.

6.1.1 1) b. What assessment methods do Cypriot Greek language teachers associate with the term assessment?

The questionnaire included 6 questions to elicit information on what teachers associate with the term assessment. As analysed in the results chapter Cypriot teachers do not associate assessment with standardised external testing as such tests are not frequently used within the Cypriot context. They seem to agree that assessment includes teacher developed tests though they also believe that other methods such as projects, feedback and everyday participation should also be used to evaluate children.

Investigating teachers’ perceptions in any attempt to understand educational change is important to the extent that ‘Curriculum change is unlikely to be successful unless it actively engages the practitioners who are the foot-soldiers of every reform aimed at improving student outcome’ (Cuban, 1998, p.459 cited in Priestley and Sime, 2005 p.475). This study has shown that Greek language teachers in secondary schools in Cyprus realise that assessment is not only the teacher made test, but in the interviews emphasise that it is still the dominant method of assessment used, even with the introduction of the New National Curriculum. Some of the reasons might be the importance given to tests by the Ministry of Education and Culture and because teachers are well trained for developing tests thus feeling comfortable in using this approach. Testing is also the approach they feel confident with using and the only written proof they have for showing to third parties children’s’ progress. It might also be the most dominant method due to its historical position within the system. This latter reason can also be found in Hargreaves (2005) who suggests, , assessment as a measurement tool it is the most dominant conception neither
because it is best for children nor because it makes most sense but is due to historical reasons (Hargreaves, 2005). The other approaches of assessment mentioned by teachers such as daily evaluation, projects and assignments are also valued but apparently do not have concrete examples and guidance on how to use them effectively thus hesitating in doing so in practice. Through their own words it is also evident that they realise assessment could have been useful in advancing teaching and learning but this is not done in real practice.

It appears that the issue may not be how to change teachers’ perceptions which already appear to see the utility of Assessment, but to shift the emphasis in helping them put into practice what they already believe to be ideal. International literature suggesting that less emphasis should be given to written tests (McMillan, 2000; Shepard, 2000). While this study has shown that teachers seem willing to shift assessment practices in order to be used for learning, policy makers would need to acknowledge teachers’ needs and give more emphasis in enhancing assessment practices. This can be accomplished by giving them guidance, training and the opportunity to develop their Formative Assessment skills. The lack of emphasis by the MoEC and the committee for the configuration of the curriculum to Formative Assessment approaches is reflected in the views of teachers. It is evident that by mentioning the elements of Formative Assessment in the NNC in the form of suggestions through official documentation it is not practically helping the teachers. This is not a new issue as in the study of Kyriakides (1996), primary Cypriot school teachers also seem to ask for more training in order to enhance their assessment skills. Emphasis was given to training teachers in new learning approaches, new books and content knowledge as the NNC was developed. While the aforementioned are important I suggest that equal emphasis should have been given to research evidence suggesting that improving teachers’ Formative Assessment approaches is much more beneficial to students’ learning and outcome than teaching and training teachers on content knowledge (Wiliam, 2011).


2) What assessment methods do Cypriot lower secondary school students associate with the term assessment?

The findings from the questionnaire suggest that students do not believe assessment to be only the graded work. They generally agree that assessment is a daily unofficial process and that assessment is also happening by teacher observation and questioning.

The group interviews show something slightly different from the questionnaires because it is apparent that students instantly think of tests and exams when listening to the word ‘assessment’. Students do realise that the teacher is observing them in the classroom and ask them questions orally in an attempt to assess their level of performance, their level of interest, and their level of effort and understanding. This is a similar pattern to Peterson and Irving’s (2008) research undertaken in New Zealand where students referred to assessment as predominantly tests. However, they sometimes feel that tests are given much more attention by their teachers mainly for conducting the official semester grade to the extent that their daily effort and other methods of assessment undertaken such as projects, assignments and written essays are not considered to the same degree. Students also feel that teaching and learning are mostly guided and driven by tests and end of year exams. These may be some of the reasons students devalue the other assessment approaches and give emphasis on performing well only to the test.

Students in the interviews state that tests and exams are important but they feel more productive and active as learners with other methods of assessment such as projects and assignments. They also feel disappointed with their teachers giving such a big emphasis to tests and they would like more opportunities to show their knowledge and indeed develop knowledge themselves through other approaches (more detail on projects and assignments are given later).

From these findings we are led to the conclusion that children are happy when feeling as active learners. They feel disappointed in their teachers and they would like them to stimulate and help them to use alternative methods of assessment beyond written tests. They would also like more opportunities to show knowledge through other methods of
assessment beyond testing but as they admit this is not happening in practice to a great extent. Thus while on-going classroom assessment practices will need the active involvement of students (Van de Watering et al. 2008), the issue raised from this study is that children are indeed willing to get involved but do perceive that they are not provided with adequate support and stimulation.

1) a. What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?

2) a. What are Cypriot students’ perceptions of assessment purposes?

These two research questions were used for information as to the extent to which teachers and students agree or disagree with the competing purposes of assessment. For these research questions to be answered the Students’ Conceptions of Assessment (SCoA-V) inventory developed by Brown and colleagues (2009) and Teachers’ Conceptions of Assessment (TCoA) inventory as developed by Brown and Michaelides (2010) were used. Brown (2002) defines assessment as ‘‘any act of interpreting information about student performance, collected through any of a multitude of means or practices.’’ (p. 26). It provides information ‘‘that allows valid and appropriate educational decisions to be made about such things as what to teach students, how to classify students, to identify if students are making progress, to ask how much learning is present etc.’’ (p. 27). This implies that Brown defines the purpose of assessment in terms of the decisions that are taken based on the information that is collected. The results of my study can contribute to the cross-cultural discussion and can also form the basis for more research in this area within Cyprus. As discussed in chapter three one of the restrictions of the two inventories is that they elicit information on the agreement or disagreement with major competing purposes as previously identified in the literature (Brown, 2003, 2004; Brown and Harris, 2009; Brown, Harris and Harnett, 2012; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008; Brown, Lake and Matters, 2011; McInerney et al. 2009). For an in-depth investigation as to why students and teachers hold the perceptions they do, individual and group interviews proved useful in explaining these perceptions further, building on the quantitative results of the inventories. The results from the SCoA and TCoA in triangulation with the qualitative results will be discussed in the following sections. The discussion will start with the perceptions of assessment conceived of as a negative process by both parties.
6.1.3 Assessment as a negative process

A small reminder here that, assessment may be considered as a negative process by teachers and students if associated with unfairness, if considered as value-less, identified as an imprecise process or interfering badly with teaching and learning. Also if teachers and students tend to ignore assessment information and results or perceive it as an irrelevant process in their school lives it is considered as ultimately a negative process.

6.1.3.1 Assessment is irrelevant

Generally teachers and students in this study do not believe assessment to be an irrelevant process. The questions around this notion for teachers considered the extent to which assessment results are used for purposes other than reporting attainment. Teachers in the questionnaire seem to disagree that assessment results are filed and ignored or that there is little use of them. The information from their own words helps us understand as to why they hold the perceptions they do. It seems that as an assessment result teachers perceive the judgment they make about each child’s level from the different assessment approaches they use for example tests, projects, essays and oral participation. Then these judgments are calculated for the official semester grade to be formed thus for a summative judgment. This shows that teachers do not use the assessment results, from the approaches mentioned earlier, formatively to support and enhance teaching and learning, but just to make up their minds about an official semester grade as totally and solely responsible for it.

According to the literature some teachers admit that they sacrifice learning with understanding for the goal of drilling students in the things for which they will be held as accountable, a conclusion made by the study of Sato et al. (2005).

A similar pattern can also be found in students’ perceptions. The questionnaire leads us to the conclusion that assessment information is not ignored but as admitted by students in the
interviews, these results are not used formatively but for a summative judgment, namely for their official grade. Beyond this no real strategies for using assessment results to further their learning are mentioned by students.

6.1.3.2 Assessment is bad

Students’ answers in the questionnaire are widely spread but generally showing to disagree with the perception that assessment is unfair, valueless and that it interferes with their learning, thereby showing that they do not commonly see assessment as a bad process. The group interviews were valuable as students had the chance to elaborate and show that they differentiate their feelings about daily assessment and tests/exams. They conceive tests and exams as bad processes because they lead to memorisation techniques and acting to a performance ethos. They do not suggest though that tests and exams should be banned because they realise that they are important for other reasons such as informing third parties and show if they can proceed to the next level. They believe other assessment approaches, i.e. oral participation and projects, to be more stimulating for their learning and they enjoy them more.

According to interviews, students believe assessment to be an imprecise process because of the way official grades are presented. According to students, because their official semester grade is represented by letters A-E it cannot show the full scope of variation amongst them; for example, a student who is believed to deserve 15/20 and another who deserves 18/20 will both receive a B grade in official semester documentation.

The questionnaire data shows that teachers do not believe assessment to be unfair or that it interferes badly with either their teaching, or do they believe that it forces them to teach against their beliefs. In the chance they had to elaborate through the interviews, teachers reveal that to a certain extent their teaching is assessment driven. It is mostly driven by what will count as accountable and those are tests and exams. Also, they do not feel that assessment itself is an imprecise process but in the interviews they admit that the representation of the official mark is imprecise because it cannot show a student’s level precisely as explained earlier and agreeing with students’ perceptions.
Literature suggests that teachers can hold positive and negative conceptions of assessment simultaneously due to the plurality of beliefs and the complexity of the nature of assessment and its many uses (Michaelides and Brown, 2010). Both parties also seem to differentiate their feelings about daily assessment and high stakes assessment (tests and exams) whilst they both seem dissatisfied with the presentation of the students’ grade as imprecise.

6.1.4 Positive/Improvement oriented conceptions

Positive conceptions from the inventories consist of three main ideas; assessment improves teaching, assessment improves student learning, and assessment holds schools accountable. In the case of children, assessment may also be conceived as a positive process when affecting their future, their class and themselves towards improvement.

6.1.4.1 Assessment improves teaching

According to literature, students and teachers seem to realize that assessment can be useful for improving teaching, which leads to the improvement of learning which in turn leads to improved assessment scores (Brown, Irving, Peterson and Hirschfeld, 2009 cited in McInerney et al. 2009).

In this study, students generally believe assessment to be useful for their teachers in tracking their progress, determining how much they have learned from teaching and checking their progress against objectives and standards. They seem less sure that teachers use these results in order to modify their teaching according to students’ needs. In the interviews, students seem to argue that it is up to each teacher whether he/she will use assessment data to plan the next steps of teaching and if some teachers do use certain strategies it is then up to each child whether he/she is willing to recover any gaps in knowledge.

There are not any compulsory strategies for using assessment formatively and the group interview shows that no coherent approaches for altering any gaps in learning are taking
place. Thus we are led to the conclusion that students answers to the questionnaire show that ideally assessment is positive and they realise that it can be used in improving teaching and learning but their own words in the interviews suggest that in practice this is not happening.

Although students understand that assessment can be used to help improve their learning, little was found to indicate that they autonomously acted on that information. Instead of accepting responsibility for learning, students shifted the responsibility to the teacher. This is not uncommon and can also be found in the study of Peterson and Irving, 2008 who investigated secondary school students’ conceptions of assessment and feedback from 4 diverse New Zealand schools.

The perceptions of teachers are very similar. While the quantitative instrument shows that teachers indeed believe that assessment should be about improving students’ learning and teaching, in the interviews they admit that in practice it depends on each teacher as to whether he/she will use assessment or if they will only focus on the results of assessment (summative). Teachers feel that assessment measures students’ higher order thinking skills only to a very small extent while oral and written questions are usually dominated by lower order questions which promote memory recall and only a minor use of reasoning. In addition, they do not feel that they can adapt their teaching to meet each child’s needs. The reasons they give for this are curriculum pressures, the lack of appropriate training and the large number of students in the classrooms considering that they are composed of mixed ability students.

The results of this study are in accordance with other research stating that classroom assessment is conceptualized in terms of teacher-controlled data gathering about students, rather than as an interactive process which affects students (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). In Butler and McMunn (2006) it is stated that their research and experience shows that the evidence collected for students by teachers are often used to formulate grades and not for supporting students’ learning or altering their teaching practices based on students’ needs. In my study, although undertaken almost two decades later it seems that though the perceptions have changed, assessment is not used in practice beyond making summative
judgments. Ultimately, this leads to the conclusion that there is incoherence between theory and practice.

6.1.4.2 Assessment improves learning

The data obtained from the questionnaire shows that children strongly agree that they pay attention to their assessment results and it is useful for them to look at what they did wrong or did poorly on to guide what they should learn next. No strong feelings are shown on actually using assessment to take responsibility for their next steps, thus assessment remains summative. The triangulation of data shows a contradiction in what students believe to be ideal and what is happening in practice. Discussion with the students presents a very optimistic feeling about assessment in the role of improving learning though no real strategies for taking further steps in altering any ‘gaps’ are mentioned. Some of them also emphasise the fact that more importance should have been given to feedback by their teachers in order for them to be able to use it constructively and use summative assessment formatively (something that has been discussed earlier). Thus we are led to the conclusion that students do realise that assessment could have been used for improving their learning and be in a more advanced stage after the assessment occurs but it is up to each child’s willingness and no real strategies are promoted for this function of assessment neither by the official policy nor by teachers on a regular basis.

Teachers generally moderately agree that assessment determines how much children have learned from teaching and if they meet qualification standards. They also state a simplistic notion within the interviews as to why they believe assessment to be integrated with teaching practice, and that it is not with the Formative Assessment sense, not even with the continuous assessment sense but as they state; what and how to teach is based on what they intend to include in the test and in the final exams. Furthermore, they seem to agree that assessment can give feedback to students about their learning needs but no real strategies for actually using it are implemented thus it remains summative in this sense. In addition, they seem less sure as to how to modify their ongoing teaching based on assessment results as they do not think it is feasible due to lack of time and it is hard to take into consideration
each child’s needs in mixed ability classes of 25 students as applied in the Cypriot educational context.

The conclusions drawn from this section are that both teachers and students tend to agree with the legitimate purposes of assessment and they realise that it could have been useful in improving teaching and learning. As revealed through their own words, this is not happening in practice. This may be reasonable considering that policy makers and indeed the NNC does not give much emphasis on how to put the suggestions and theory into practice. I suggest that results are encouraging to the extent that Cypriot lower secondary school teachers and students generally seem to appreciate assessment and their perceptions are in alignment with literature suggesting assessment is not to be used only as a measurement instrument (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Heritage, 2013; Shepard, 2000; Stiggins, 2007; Wiliam, 2011b) but it is not surprising that this is not happening in practice, whilst there is lack of support in implementation.

6.1.5 Assessment used for external purposes

Assessment may be associated with external factors such as school accountability by both parties. In the students’ case, assessment is sometimes considered to affect external outcomes such as their future performance, their future career and jobs as well as showing parents their progress according to Brown, 2004; Brown and Harris, 2009; Brown et al. 2009; Brown and Hirschfeld, 2008; McInerney et al. 2009.

6.1.5.1 School accountability

Though it is not uncommon for countries such as the UK to have formal policies for ranking schools based on standardized testing, this is not the case in the Cypriot context. The lack of specific policies in ranking schools and in making schools accountable can explain why the answers of teachers and students vary. Thus their perceptions do not show a clear pattern.
Teachers do not really seem to associate assessment with school accountability as they realize that while assessment is mostly classroom based and individually constructed by teachers; results are not comparable. They believe that assessments can show the level of each school only to a small extent through unofficial discussions with other colleagues on how well schools are doing. Usually this is translated to assessment results, for example how many students fail exams or receive awards. However, at the same time, they show a belief that the assessment results are trustworthy and consistent.

Students’ perceptions are clearer as they seem sure that assessment is not associated with making schools accountable. They cannot see how what they are doing in the classroom can be comparable with other classes or schools. The study of Peterson and Irving (2008) undertaken in New Zealand also found no evidence that students believe that assessment is making their school accountable. This is not uncommon in countries based mainly on low stakes assessment with no league tables for ranking schools.

6.1.5.2 Assessment is used for my personal future

Students in this study do not believe that assessment shows how intelligent they are which was one of the notions constructing this scale. They do not feel that their level of intelligence can really be shown through assessment within the range of modules they follow. Furthermore, whilst the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that assessment has an impact on their future career or job, in the interviews they said that assessment in lower secondary schools does not determine their future but this is more likely to happen in upper secondary schools. Children recognize that it affects their near future and at the same time they believe that it predicts their future performance. Students seem to argue that the image a teacher will construct for them initially is hard to change dramatically during the school year. They seem disappointed to the extent that if they fail once, especially in the first written test then it is hard to change a teacher’s mind about their level even if they make good progress subsequently. This should be a matter of cautious for teachers whilst they need to reassure children that they can progress and assessment should not affect their emotional well-being or de-motivate them.
6.1.5.3 Assessment is affecting the class and myself

Assessment may affect the class in a positive way if there is a pleasant social climate in the class (Brown and Hirschfeld, 2007 cited in McInerney et al. 2009). Furthermore, assessment may be conceived as encouraging and motivating classmates to cooperate with each other and become more supportive in order to advance their learning and eventually to perform better (Brown et al. 2009).

There were six relevant questions constructing this scale. All of them receive a spread of answers from strongly disagree to strongly agree suggesting a puzzlement in students’ minds. The triangulation of data helps explain that assessment is encouraging the class to work together and help each other and they tend to cooperate more by revising together before the test. Furthermore, children seem to become more supportive when assessed though in the interviews they admit that sometimes there is a slight antagonism between them. More than half of the students in the questionnaire do not believe that there is a good atmosphere in the classroom when assessed and the interview reveals that when referring to a negative environment they associate it with tests and exams, while they feel less pressure and much more positive feelings about daily assessment, projects and assignments. There is a strong agreement that when assessed by any type of assessment they become more motivated to learn.

The notion of assessment affecting students personally is focused around whether children find assessment as an engaging and enjoyable experience and whether they enjoy learning when assessed (Brown et al. 2009). No clear pattern is shown from the information elicited from the questionnaire. The group interviews helped interpret this broad spread of perceptions. It seems that the plurality of the term assessment itself as discussed in the literature review is confusing the children. Thus by the term ‘assessment’ students admit in the interviews that are not sure if the researcher means the tests, or the exams, or daily evaluation, or projects, assignments or essays or indeed all of these together. As we have seen in an earlier section students feel differently about these different forms of assessment and they realise to a certain extent that they are used for different purposes. The feelings they have about assessment do not seem to be related with their grades, though other
studies have shown that increased positive emotion toward assessment has negative relations towards scores of mathematics and reading comprehension (Weekers et al. 2009 in McInerney et al. 2009).

6.2 Conclusion

Though the literature suggests that there needs to be a change in perceptions about assessment in order for a reformed assessment framework to be implemented, it is not possible to talk about Cypriot students’ or teachers’ changed assessment perceptions as there are not any previous studies relating to this area to compare. The results of this study show that teachers and students appreciate assessment in all its forms and see the different uses and purposes of the variety of assessments. Both seem to realise that assessment could have been useful for improving teaching and learning. Children and their teachers do not tend to see assessment as an irrelevant or a bad process and they do not commonly associate it with school accountability. Whilst this study did not involve any methods for checking what is actually happening in practice, in the interviews where both teachers and students could elaborate and talk to the researcher about their experiences, they seem to argue that they do not use any firm strategies to alter gaps in learning and teaching. Some of the reasons they give for this are inadequate emphasis by MoEC and NNC as well as inadequate training. In practice, they say that it is totally up to each teacher to guide teaching after assessment occurs and ultimately to give guidance to students to further their learning. Then it is up to each child’s willingness for taking action as not any firm strategies seem to exist. It is evident mostly from the qualitative data that teachers and students are willing to change their practices in order for assessment to be used formatively. Students especially seem to believe in challenges and that they cherish several methods of assessment such as projects and assignments while the only ones making them feel like active participants. The same applies with teachers, while admitting to have positive feelings about assessment and that they demonstrate a willingness to shift their assessment practices to a more cognitive constructivist approach.

There is a constant contrast as to what teachers answer to the questionnaire and what they say in the interviews. As we do not have a definite answer to why this is apparent there are
two possible explanations. It might be the case that in the quantitative instrument teachers answer to how ideal assessment should be but in the interviews they feel more comfortable to elaborate and say what truly happens in the schools. Furthermore, ‘Under ecological rationality, it is predictable that teachers would tend to agree with all of the legitimate purposes of assessment in a jurisdiction. However, we would expect them to have more-or-less agreement depending on the fit of the purpose to their role within the system. The tendency to acquiesce or be agreeable exists partly because objects (e.g., assessment purposes and practices) are complex and difficult to rate’ (Krosnick et al. 2005 cited in Michaelides, 2010, p.8).

Policy makers seem not to give great importance to the implementation of formative assessment strategies. Teachers in other countries seem also to complain that sometimes they are not well prepared to meet the demand of classroom assessment due to inadequate training.

Beyond training, some other strategies may include teachers’ opportunity to monitor and reflect on their own practices before being ready to think about intervention strategies as suggested by Torrance and Pryor (2001). Furthermore, some more strategies might be for teachers to conduct their own research, by making notes or using reflective diaries together with examples of students’ work; while video and audio recording themselves, as they are teaching for the ultimate purpose of enhancing their assessment skills. No one suggests that any reform is easy. Teachers will need a substantial knowledge not only of their domain but also of the nature of Formative Assessment while they will need time and support to be able to successfully cope with these reforms (Bennett, 2011; Shepard, 2000).

6.3 Assessment approaches within the NNC

Two of the research questions focused on students’ and teachers’ perceptions considering assessment approaches suggested through the NNC for the Greek language subject. The research questions were specifically:

3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?
4) What are students’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

No research papers could be found in the Cypriot context around assessment approaches within the NNC but information was elicited from specific strategies suggested by policy makers and the committee for the configuration of the curriculum available for the public through national reports, published guidelines and training documents. As analysed in section 2.1.7 of the literature the suggestions are mainly for assessment to be divided in three stages; 1) Initial, for diagnostic reasons, 2) Continuous, for feedback during lessons and 3) Final, for evaluating broader parts of learning after long periods. Some specific approaches suggested by official government documents concern the continuous stage and are in alignment with the elements of Formative Assessment.

6.3.1 Questioning

One way of categorising questions is by identifying them as ‘lower order’ and ‘higher order’ questions. ‘Lower order’ questions usually do not demand great thinking or reasoning, mostly seeking answers which demand recall of information while ‘higher order’ questions are considered as ‘rich’ questions which demand thinking and reasoning and which are more challenging (Baroudi, 2007; Brooks, 2002; Marshall and Drummond, 2006; Wragg, 2003). According to Black and Wiliam (1998b), students’ own questions produced better learning results than questions asked by the teacher especially in the classroom context because discussions, in which pupils are led to talk about their understanding in their own ways, are important aids to improved knowledge and understanding. Cypriot government reports state precisely that children should develop the “ability to raise questions for information they didn’t understand” (National Curriculum for Greek, p.18).

Questions included in the questionnaire were focused on higher and lower order questions while emphasis was also given in relation to students asking questions in the classroom.

Research suggests that oral questions should encourage critical thinking and reflective use of knowledge (Cowie, 2005; Marshall and Drummond, 2006; Wiliam, 1999 cited in Baroudi, 2007; Wragg, 2003) as students are expected to contribute to the learning process.
through participating in the classroom by answering and asking questions. One of the suggestions of the reformed curriculum is for oral questioning to play a dominant role in students’ learning and also act as an assessment process. Some very specific strategies suggested within the Greek language through the NNC, are that children should participate and contribute in a classroom discussion in finding the parameters of the instance of communication in written or oral documents taught including: the purpose, social characteristics of the receiver etc

(http://www.schools.ac.cy/eyliko/mesi/themata/nea_elliniki_glossa/yfistameno_yliko_axiologiseis.html). They continue by suggesting that students as participants in a communication event must have the ability to contribute in a discussion, the ability to raise questions for information they didn’t understand and use certain strategies to disagree with the others without being offensive. It is also suggested through the NNC that teachers on their behalf should acknowledge students’ efforts in an attempt for Formative Assessment assessing each child’s progress through time and shown effort, a suggestion also found in Harlen and James (1997).

6.3.1.1 Teachers’ perceptions on oral questioning

This study has shown that Greek language teachers seem to believe that both lower and higher order questions should be used in the classroom. Teachers value the use of both and they can address different issues through their use according to purpose and context. Teachers also seem to give emphasis to the role of oral questioning in building children’s skills to communicate with each other, have a civilised dialogue or even a debate in an attempt for developing students’ critical thinking and reasoning. They believe in children raising their own questions for contributing to knowledge and self-assessment. Teachers though seem dissatisfied with children’s oral participation and general level of interest.

However, they do not mention in the interviews any real strategies they use to encourage children in raising questions. Only one teacher mentions a real strategy for making more students contribute to the lesson and that is with the use of ‘wait time’ which can also be found in the literature as discussed by Black and Wiliam (2001).
The willingness of teachers to help children contribute towards the generation of knowledge and participate in the classroom mostly by questioning is apparent but there is lacks of pedagogic training, specific examples or any kind of guidance in helping teachers achieve this. Thus there is a conflict between what teachers value as important and what they say is actually happening in practice. It is suggested in the international literature that teachers should be trained on how to make use of high quality questions both orally and written, as a basis for training their students on how to ask questions for supporting their learning and understanding but also for assessment (Black et al. 2003; Taras, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). Several methods are mentioned in the literature for supporting such actions for example the ‘hands down’ method and the ‘wait time’ method (Black et al. 2003; Cowie, 2005; Marshal and Drummond, 2006). According to Cypriot teachers’ own words, they were not trained to any great extent for such actions and for enhancing their skills in using oral questioning effectively. This suggests that the lack of good practice in developing questioning is the result of a lack of pedagogic training for teachers.

6.3.1.2 Students’ perceptions on oral questioning

Children in this study seem to appreciate the potential of oral questioning in building knowledge and for teachers to understand their level of learning and performance. They also seem to realize that oral questions should involve both higher and lower order questions. However, students feel disappointed that teachers do not help them to contribute more in building knowledge. Students blame their teachers for not encouraging them to participate in classroom questioning activities.

Children say that when they have a query they feel embarrassed to ask in front of other peers so they go during non-class hours to ask the teacher if they do not understand something. They also state that they go during non-class hours to ask teachers about their progress. This is a drawback and according to Cowie (2005) children should not be embarrassed to ask questions. Something similar can also be found in Lord and Jones (2006) which is a meta-analysis of 48 inquires relevant to students’ perceptions of assessment in the UK taking literature from 1999 to 2005, where there is also the sense that
learners would like more opportunity to talk to their teachers about their progress and learning.

There is an indication that children in Cyprus act to a ‘performance’ ethos (Harlen and Deakin-Crick, 2003 cited in Broadfoot, 2007) as they admit that sometimes they only show effort and participation in oral questions and answers, not because they enjoy it but just to accomplish a better official semester grade.

The findings of this study suggest that oral questioning is not implemented as suggested in the NNC with teachers blaming students for this lack of critical questioning and students blaming the teachers. However, the important factors appear to be that though there are suggestions through the NNC that oral questioning should be used formatively and students should contribute in teaching and learning in the classroom this is not happening to a great extent. Whilst both parties can see the usefulness and potential of oral questioning they do not have adequate support neither from literature or practical training and examples to put what they believe to be ideal into practice.

6.3.1.3 Teachers’ perceptions on written questions

Teachers are well trained in developing written tests and they are confident in constructing well defined written test questions. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the framework of the NNC are very comprehensive about testing. Through the initial training for the NNC much emphasis was given to how teachers should construct a test while specific test samples are given to teachers through websites. Teachers may choose to use the sample tests as given or alter them slightly or even construct a new test.

The results from the interviews suggest that higher order questions are not regularly used orally but a number of higher order questions are used in written assessments. For including higher order questions in the Greek language module, it is accomplished mainly by giving unknown tasks to children to compare based on their prior knowledge.

Generally there is a balance in written assessments using both higher and lower order questions as suggested through the curriculum documents for the NNC. Higher order
questions in written assessment are mainly used to observe which of the children can go
beyond memorisation and can think critically.

6.3.1.4 Students’ perceptions on written questions

Students believe that there should be a balance of lower and higher order questions asked in
written assessments. They do not show a clear preference for either of the two types. They
realise that these two types are used for different purposes, for example they understand
that lower order questions are important for teachers to check if they have understood the
curriculum taught. Higher order questions are also important especially in the Modern
Greek language module, as they say they can be useful in elaborating, using critical
thinking and reflective use of knowledge.

My study is an opportunity for teachers and policy makers to listen to students’ voices and
the positive feelings they have on being challenged through oral and written questioning to
enable them to be active participants in class. Thus maybe more emphasis should be given
by policy makers to helping teachers enhance their skills in using higher and lower order
questions as well as how to practically engage students in asking questions themselves.

6.3.2 Peer and self-assessment

Both self and peer assessment methods are suggested through the NNC. As discussed in the
literature review chapter benefits can be obtained through using peer and self-assessment
approaches. According to Klenowski (1996) self-assessment is a process leading to self-
development and according to Broadfoot (2007) self-assessment is all about students
reflecting on their past work and being responsible for their next steps in learning. In the
study of Black et al. (2003) students were found to learn more by taking the roles of
teachers and examiners of each other. For self and peer assessment to develop they must
take place in an environment where teaching and learning recognizes the central role of
students in the learning process (Broadfoot, 2007, Weeden et al. 1999). Furthermore,
students need to have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets they need to attain (Black
and Wiliam, 1998a). For self and peer assessment to occur, students need training and
understanding of targets and need time to build the necessary skills to judge specific problems (Beave, 1977; Pianko and Radzik, 1980; Thompson, 1981; Chater, 1984 cited in Sadler, 1989).

The results obtained from this study broadly show that students and teachers have positive perceptions of self and peer assessment and they believe they have a place in the Cypriot curriculum. The information obtained, however, suggest that they are not implemented in practice. Also the results of this study show that both students and teachers do not have a consensus in their minds of what self and peer assessment actually involve. It is not surprising though when considering that training, for the NNC did not give sufficient information as to how teachers can develop these practices and any firm literature is absent.

6.3.2.1 Teachers’ perceptions on self and peer assessment

Teachers seem to strongly agree with the notion that children should be able to reflect on their past work by evaluating it and identifying what still needs to be pursued, also being able to find the elements that constitute a certain kind of subject document, write it and assess it. For example what makes a written document a poem or not, when a document is narrative or descriptive and the like. When asked in the interviews they say that they do not encourage children to use peer or self-assessment very often mostly because they are not confident that they know exactly how to apply it. They have tried to use these methods only once or twice per semester mostly through assignments and projects. A specific strategy that was mentioned was to instruct children to exchange an assignment with the person sitting next to them in order to peer assess. However, according to interview data, criteria are not given and targets are not made explicit. It is also important to have in mind that according to the literature self-assessment should contribute directly to an explicit judgment of performance or else children will not probably take the process seriously (Broadfoot, 2007).

There was only one teacher from this study who seemed confident in using peer assessment through projects. This example of peer assessment may be attributed to the background of this teacher who was undertaking a master’s degree at that time in ‘IT in education’ and
was affected by its content. She used an interactive whiteboard for this project and for developing peer assessment. It is not unlikely according to the literature for teachers to use certain strategies because of their background and who they are as teachers (Sato et al. 2005). So as discussed in a previous chapter this teacher asked students to develop a project in groups for information about the currencies of specific countries. This approach was an initiative of this single teacher, but nowhere in the official documents and the available literature in Cyprus can firm instructions be found on how to use peer and self-assessment.

Teachers’ interviews show confusion in their minds about what these methods actually involve. Teachers also feel that though the NNC is promoting such approaches they did not receive sufficient training or examples of how to implement them.

6.3.2.2 Students’ perceptions on self and peer assessment

Students seem more positive about the self-assessment approach rather than the peer assessment approach. When asked to give information on these through the group interviews unfortunately students seem to be totally unaware about what these approaches really involve leading to the conclusion that their positivity in the questionnaire is misleading. Some of them believe that self-assessment is about trying to estimate their semester grade by considering both the grade achieved on the test and the participation shown in the classroom as well as the grade achieved in other assessment approaches such as projects and assignments. Thus they relate self-assessment to a judgment (summative).

When the researcher tried to introduce them to some self and peer assessment strategies in an attempt to see if they could recall doing any of them, they realize that they would need to have some criteria and standards in mind when working on particular tasks and be trained for such actions in order to implement them.

For children in Year 9 seemed to recall and mention one instance when they used peer assessment in the classroom and that was by exchanging assignments with peers in order to give feedback. They were instructed by their teachers to give comments to their peers about general mistakes that they could find in each other’s assignments concerning grammar and
spelling mistakes, syntax and contents. No specific criteria or standards were given and results did not lead to an explicit judgment or grade.

It is not unreasonable that children show in the interviews some hesitation towards the use of peer assessment, while they are not knowledgeable about what it really involves and how it can help them. The students’ perspectives are in accordance with the literature which suggested that children need to have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets they need to attain and they need to have certain criteria in mind if self and peer assessment if to be effective (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Sadler, 1989).

They do not seem very comfortable with this method while embarrassed to show their work to their fellow students if they do not consider it of a good quality. They feel that with this approach their peers can judge them badly and make fun of them if they have some serious mistakes. So there were instances where children mentioned this strategy to be insulting or embarrassing.

It can be argued that for self-assessment to occur students need training and understanding of targets and also need time to build the necessary skills to judge specific problems. According to the international literature, when pupils are trained, they have been found to be able to assess their own work and that of others with a reasonable level of accuracy (Brooks, 2002). Students build up their ‘pool of strategies’ by learning to revise and filter their own work in collaboration with the teacher, and by editing and helping other students to enhance theirs (Sadler, 1989). In the case of the NNC, training is not present and may therefore be responsible for the lack of use in schools.

6.3.3 Feedback

Feedback is considered to be one of the most important elements of FA when used in appropriate ways (Baroudi, 2007; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Black et al. 2003; Kennedy et al. 2008; Ramaprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1989; Scriven, 1967; Taras, 2005). It is also a major element of the revised assessment framework within the NNC. In the NNC it is explicitly mentioned that teachers should use feedback to inform students on ‘lost’ knowledge and how to take the appropriate next steps to rectify it before proceeding to something different.
This can also be found in the international literature as feed-forward (Askew, 2000; Brooks, 2002; Weeden et al. 1999).

Though feedback is named explicitly in the NNC no actual methods of helping the children in taking advantage of it and actually using it to alter any gap in learning are mentioned anywhere. Thus, no coherent framework for developing learning through feedback is given. According to several researchers (Black and Wiliam, 1998, Sadler, 1989, Scriven, 1967, cited by Taras, 2005) when the appropriate strategies for closing the gap are not implemented assessment remains summative even when feedback is given.

6.3.3.1 Teachers’ perceptions on feedback

Generally, the answers to the questionnaire demonstrate that teachers believe assessment should provide feedback to students about their performance while giving them information on their learning needs. Statistical results from this study demonstrate that teachers consider feedback to be a daily process and not something given only on written assessment. The interview data though reveals something different. According to their own words, in practice feedback is not used as a daily process orally or written but rather feedback is given mostly on essays which children carry out once or twice per semester. The reasons they give as to why feedback is not regularly used in practice is the lack of time and sufficient training and to some extent students not showing the appropriate interest in feedback.

Teachers do not seem to know any effective strategies for giving feedback though they are trying to find their own ways of developing their practice but the evidence from this study suggests that they have not proven to be very successful, as they themselves admit.

As suggested in the literature there are certain ways of giving feedback which are more effective than others. Effective forms of feedback are those which stimulate the thinking of children about the work itself and how to improve it incorporating strategies such as involving children to suggest ways they can improve as well as specifying a better way of doing something. It is possible that when feedback is provided inappropriately, it can lead to negative effects such as impacting students’ emotional well-being, making them feel
uncomfortable and can actually lead to a decrease of students’ performance (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; cited by Brown et al. 2012).

The results of this study are similar to Berry (2004) who states that teachers seem to know that they must involve students in their learning but even if they know positive ways of giving feedback they rarely implement it in actual practice. Teachers in Berry’s study also feel that they need more support and professional development to help them improve their roles in FA, and particularly in using feedback to further learning (Berry, 2004). This is in agreement with what has been discussed earlier as one of the critiques of FA by Bennett (2011), one of the issues he raised is the teachers’ need for professional development and it seems from this study that teachers themselves acknowledge the fact that they need more training and support to incorporate issues that they value in practice.

6.3.3.2 Students’ perceptions on feedback

Students also seem to appreciate feedback based on data from the questionnaire, but as they argue in the interviews they do not take advantage of it to take further steps in learning, thus it remains summative in this sense. These results are perhaps not surprising as whilst feedback is named explicitly in the NNC no methods of helping the children to take advantage of it, to alter the learning gap are mentioned anywhere. As a researcher, I was curious to understand if children are satisfied with this feedback system or if they want something more and thus asked them some questions in the interviews as to any strategies used around written comments and if they would appreciate it or not if these were developed. Their answers show that they would have taken appropriate actions if they were properly instructed to in order to take advantage of the comments to further their learning and they can realize by themselves feedback’s benefits to their learning and in performing better in tests and exams.

In the literature it is stated that very young students, even at primary school level can distinguish feedback as ‘evaluative’ or ‘descriptive’ (Tunstall and Gipps, 1967). Usually when feedback is evaluative and the judgment is not positive it seems to de-motivate children (Black and Wiliam, 1998b, Black et al. 2003; Crooks, 2001). When feedback is
informational it is considered as a guide to future learning informing students about both their strengths and weaknesses as well as the appropriate next steps for improvement often referred to as feed-forward (Askew, 2000; Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Black et al. 2003; Broadfoot, 2007; Cowie, 2005; Crook, 2001 cited by Broadfoot, 2007, Wiliam, 2011b). There were some indications of similar perceptions in my study where children are demotivated by comments.

Thus, the quality of comments given and the guidance that should be given to children in order to understand how to take advantage of comments are crucial (Smith and Gorard, 2005). Students want teachers to give them “constructive criticism, not just plain old criticism” (Rawlins, 2006, p.7). In addition, they give great emphasis to quality feedback which will help them understand things better, which is timely leading to the belief that more constructive feedback will help them learn more (Rawlins, 2006). In my study students also responded that they do not just look at the grade but some of them said they make little use of feedback for revision purposes and only to some extent while they believe that this is helping them with future work. This study shows the maturity of the children on how to make good use of feedback and shows they are not only concerned with short term goals for example just to pass the test. They show a desire to have learning with understanding, though they like to receive a grade as well.

The results of this study show that both teachers and students acknowledge feedback’s benefits, but there is only a small indication that it is put into practice. This is not unreasonable taking into account the confusion in official documents and the inadequate training within the NNC which on the one hand makes some suggestions but has no specific strategies for helping teachers implement the suggested approaches. Thus this incoherence of perceptions is a reflection of the incoherence in suggestions from government papers and NNC training.

6.3.4 Projects and assignments

Beyond testing, teachers and students mention projects and assignments as other methods used for the evaluation of student learning. This was one of the suggestions created within
the NNC and is also discussed in the literature (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Pat El et al. 2013; Shepard, 2000; Wiliam, 2011b; Williams, 2010; Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, and Gardner, 1991). It was suggested that new alternative methods of assessment should be used which correspond to the evaluation of different skills, abilities and knowledge. This is suggested to be achieved through the use of presentations, interdisciplinary work, projects, and production of hard copies or electronic material (3 September 2010-09-29).

6.3.4.1 Teachers’ perceptions on projects and assignments

Teachers value projects and assignments and they acknowledge their benefits. As they admit in the interviews, they do not use them regularly because of the time needed to train students how to do a proper project and then the effort needed to give feedback and evaluation. Not much data was obtained for projects and assignments as no questions were included in the questionnaire thus information come only from interviews. In the interviews teachers seem willing to use projects and assignments but again show no confidence for knowing exactly how.

6.3.4.2 Students’ perceptions of projects and assignments

Students seem to enjoy the use of ‘alternative’ methods of assessment beyond testing including the use of projects and assignments. Students seem very excited when undertaking projects and they believe this to be a very useful and productive method of learning. They enjoy presenting what they have found and knowledge that they have discovered by themselves to their peers, accepting comments from both fellow students and the teacher. Information again comes solely from the group interviews thus no generalisations can be made.

This preference for a variety of assessment methods to be used can be found in many studies discussed previously in the international literature, including studies by Jones and Moreland (2006), Dochy and McDowell (1997), Seale, Chapman and Davey (2000), Fowell, Southgate and Bligh (1999), Cowie (2005). According to Dochy and McDowell,
students find newer forms of assessment ‘intrinsically interesting and motivating’ (Dochy and McDowell, 1997, p.291). Lord and Jones (2006) study which was based on a meta-analysis of 48 inquiries relevant to assessment argues that students like a variety of assessment methods to be used because they are linked with a sense of ease, fun, newness, progressive accomplishment and appropriate challenge. Students enjoy subjects and activities where teaching and learning are active, participatory and have practical application. A balance and variety of assessment methods is also seen as desirable by students (e.g. formal and informal; teacher- self- and peer-led evaluation; formative and summative) (Lord and Jones, 2006).

Through students’ responses in the interviews we can identify some of the reasons as to why they like these alternative methods of assessment beyond tests. These reasons concern their emotional well-being for example, they find these methods less stressful. They feel that they are more engaging and interesting and that it helps them to have deeper learning. In addition, they feel that it is not possible to show their real level of knowledge through an instants occasion such as the test thus they would like more opportunities to show their level.

The results of this study are encouraging and students’ perceptions would be useful for the government and the people involved in the reform of the curriculum as well as their teachers in helping them to realise that children really value alternative methods of assessment and maybe they are not as immature or uninterested as they usually blame them to be.

Data suggest that both teachers and students value projects and assignments and can acknowledge the benefits which come from them. Some of those benefits are that children take responsibility for their learning, they feel like active learners and it is more like a real life activity. Once more we can see that both teachers and students feel that they would like to have more support and training to put these approaches into practice. Thus, on the one hand we observe both parties having positive perceptions about these alternative methods of assessment which have so much to offer to both but on the other hand it is disappointing to hear that they struggle, seeking for help and support to put them in use, but unfortunately do not seem to find it anywhere.
6.3.5 The division of school year into two semesters

The division of the school year from three semesters to two was the most drastic change explicitly mentioned to be directly linked with the attempt to improve assessment as it is expected that this division will lead to fewer written tests being completed thus ultimately less summative assessment as suggested through the NNC. The main purpose of this division according to the NNC is to minimise the number of tests in an attempt for children and teachers to put more emphasis on the use of alternative methods of assessment. It is expected that children will care less about the semester grade and will work harder due to the new alternative methods of assessment promoted giving more space for children and teachers to work and evaluate different skills, potential and knowledge through presentations, interdisciplinary work, projects and production of electronic or hard copy material. There is not a consensus though as to how teachers are expected to undertake these alternative forms of assessment when specific guidance and sufficient training is absent with no direction on how to monitor and reflect on their own practices. This incoherence in the NNC literature is also mirrored in the minds and perceptions of teachers about this reform. A limitation of this study might be that it did not include any questions in the questionnaire about this reform; data was obtained only from the interviews and thus cannot be generalised. While two of the teachers who were interviewed state that the division can be helpful to a certain extent because indeed formal written assessment is minimised, they are not sure how they are going to use alternative methods of assessment if they do not know how they are to be integrated into their work.

As Bennett states “process, cannot somehow rescue unsuitable instrumentation, nor can instrumentation save an unsuitable process” (2011, p.7).

While an ultimate purpose of having fewer tests was for teachers and students to care less about the test grade and the official semester grade, this study reveals that this purpose has not been accomplished so far. Teachers and students still give emphasis to the official semester grade. Both parties agree that the written test will play a dominant role to this. Although the government’s expectation is to minimize the emphasis given to tests no new
emphasis is given to other methods of assessment such as essays, projects, assignments, everyday communication and feedback by training or concrete examples.

6.3.6 Concluding Comments

Secondary school students and Greek language teachers in this study seem to separate out their feelings about test/exams and other forms of assessment as well as formative strategies. Both students and teachers feel negatively about tests and exams but both accept and realise that high stakes assessment is needed even if students feel that they learn less from it. Students feel that tests make them stressed and put them under pressure to gain a good mark, thus when the test is approaching they do not study to extend their learning but toward the ultimate goal which is to gain a good grade and by association show to others that they are good students. This was identified in the literature as one of the drawbacks of assessment as discussed by Broadfoot (2007) who highlight that summative assessment promotes a ‘performance’ ethos and that students become increasingly extrinsically motivated and grade obsessed (Harlen and Deakin-Crick, 2003 cited by Broadfoot, 2007).

In this study, students do not suggest that high stakes assessment should be abandoned and they appreciate its ‘clear-cut’ indication, a conclusion also made by Lord and Jones (2006) from a meta-analysis of inquiries undertaken in the UK from 1999-2005.

However, teachers feel restricted by high stakes assessment on what and how to teach leading them to teach to the test. That is also identified in the international literature where other researchers argue that summative assessment encourages teachers to adopt transmission teaching for students to be able to perform better to the test (Harlen and Deakin-Crick, 2003 cited by Broadfoot, 2007). Also the influential study of Popham (1987), although undertaken more than two decades ago, it can find some extent of truth here while he outlined the traditional notion of measurement-driven instruction to illustrate the relationship between instruction and assessment he stated that assessment directs teachers’ attention to the content of test items, acting as powerful ‘curricular magnets’ (Popham, 1987). While one of the attempts of the NNC is for summative assessment to play
a minor role, it does not seem that it has actually done so during the early period of its adoption.

Teachers say that some assessment approaches mentioned within the NNC are in accordance with assessment methods suggested prior to the NNC as can be found in Eurydice (2008) thus not many radical changes are taking place, nonetheless formative practices are made more explicit. Teachers feel helpless because they are not trained to any great extent on how to shift their assessment strategies in order to be more linked with instruction and nowhere in the Cypriot literature and policy documents can coherence be found as to how teachers can implement the strategies mentioned.

Striking is also the fact that when teachers were asked in the interviews about their perceptions of Formative Assessment they were not familiar with what it involves. When I tried to explain to them in broad terms what FA is about together by its main elements they said that it is in alignment with some of the strategies they were already trying to implement but without knowing they were called ‘Formative Assessment’.

Findings have some similarities with the international literature that in teachers’ and students’ minds improvement of teaching, learning and performance is usually associated with Formative Assessment in contrast to an accountability conception which is usually associated with ‘Summative’ assessment (Dixon, 1999; Fill, 2000 cited by Brown, 2003). Furthermore, teachers feel that it is difficult to balance the students’ needs with the school needs. The greatest tension occurred with accountability practices which are seen as necessary but as having negative effects on students leading them to a ‘performance’ ethos (Harris and Brown, 2009).

Another issue raised through this study is that students do not really seem to realise that the curriculum is reformed and the policy makers did not involve students in the procedure. It seems that not engaging students in the NNC reform was a mistake while the idea of involving students in the international educational research and ultimately reform has emerged and found to be beneficial (Smardon and Bewley, 2007; Van de Watering et al. 2008; Williams, 2010). It is stated that intentional and directed attention to what students say has the power to impact on and improve their learning (Smardon and Bewley, 2007).
Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) stated that students’ conceptions have an impact on their educational experiences and learning. Likewise, as stated by leading theorists of the field, “Discussions in which pupils are led to talk about their understanding in their own ways are important aids to improved knowledge and understanding” (Black and Wiliam, 1998b, p.7).

Another issue raised is the suggestion through the NNC for assessment to take place at the beginning of the school year named ‘initial’ assessment; for diagnostic reasons, for teachers to be informed and plan the next steps (Shepard, 2000, Curriculum) but nowhere in the discussion with teachers or students was this strategy mentioned leading to the conclusion that it is not in use.
7 Conclusion

7.1 Overview

The primary aims of this study were to determine what Greek Language teachers of public lower secondary schools and lower secondary school students in Cyprus endorsed as their perceptions about assessment purposes in general and their perceptions regarding the development of assessment approaches in the New National Curriculum within the Modern Greek Language subject. An Explanatory Sequential design of mixed methods where qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results (Creswell and Plano, 2007) was used to address these objectives. The study sample was recruited using a stratified approach based on the number of public lower secondary schools in the whole Greek Cypriot republic resulting in 95 Greek language teachers and 599 lower secondary school students participating in total, a large number considering the Cypriot context. Each party’s results were examined separately, though an attempt to compare main ideas was developed in the discussion chapter. Four overarching research questions with sub questions guided this study:

1) a. What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?
   b. What assessment methods do Cypriot teachers associate with the term assessment?
2) a. What are Cypriot students’ perceptions of assessment purposes?
   b. What assessment methods do students associate with the term assessment?
3) What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?
4) What are students’ perceptions regarding the development in assessment approaches in the NNC within the Modern Greek Language subject?

To answer these questions, previously validated survey instruments underwent minor adaptations mainly because of the translation to Greek. More questions were added to answer the research questions specific to the NNC. Individual interviews with 7 teachers
were undertaken and 3 group interviews with the students resulting in a total sample of 15 students.

As study of the literature supports, perceptions are important to the extent that teachers will not shift their assessment practices, according to the national trend of assessment to be used to support learning, if their perceptions are not in alignment with these suggestions. Such a shift is one of the explicit purposes of the New National Curriculum in Cyprus. This study’s importance lies in the fact that it has shown that teachers’ and students’ perceptions are in alignment with the current trend, but their aspirations and expectations would need support in implementation. Thus, this last chapter will mainly focus on some of the restrictions that may hold teachers and students back from using assessment as suggested according to national literature, Cypriot government papers and indeed what this study has shown that they value while suggesting some solutions to overcome these barriers.

7.2 Discussion and Implications

The NNC in Cyprus suggests that assessment should not only be conceived as the high stakes assessment such as tests and exams but it should be an ongoing procedure linked with instruction. Thus, it was decided to investigate if teachers believe assessment to be interactive-informal or test-like, based on questions from a previous work of Brown et al. (2009). The data reveals that teachers believe assessment should be happening every day in the classroom by observation and oral questioning; they do not feel that it is associated with external testing as such tests are absent in the Cypriot educational framework but it involves a test made by them and administered to students once or twice per semester. From the interviews it was apparent that teachers use daily interaction with children by observation and oral questioning for the ultimate goal of assigning them a fairer end of term grade but not formatively in a systematic way to enhance teaching or learning. As we have seen the reasons behind this is not the lack of willingness or the lack of association of assessment to guide teaching and learning but the absence of firm theory in the Cypriot context and training leading to a lack of skills in accomplishing this in practice. One of the important findings of this study lies in the fact that it has shown that though teachers can see the utility of assessment to enhance teaching and learning, more research based on the
Cypriot background to enhance literature is needed so that teachers can have a firm theory of how can assessments be used as such.

Similarly with the teachers’ questionnaire, some questions were included in the students’ questionnaire on whether they believe assessment to be only the graded work or if they believed they were assessed by other approaches. The data obtained from the questionnaire illustrates that students do not feel that assessment is only the graded work but they believe that they are assessed on a daily basis mainly by questioning and by observation in an attempt of their teachers to evaluate their whole presence in the school, their effort, participation, and development of initiatives and cooperation, a perspective which reflects the guidance given by NNC (Document.No 7.12.02/12. 7.12.15/2, Curriculum, 2010, Eurydice, 2008/9). This makes assessment not only criterion referenced but also norm-referenced which takes into account a pupil’s work or progress and also things such as effort put into work and progress that the pupil has made over time (Harlen and James, 1997). The triangulation of data reveals that my study is parallel with Peterson and Irving (2008) and Cowie (2005) where children seem to instantly think of high stakes assessment when they are asked about assessment approaches; they realize that assessment can be more than high stakes but they only hardly mention other approaches such as feedback to be used. In the group interview it was apparent that students generally do not feel happy with tests being the dominant method but they also appreciate alternative forms of assessment and mainly the ones that make them feel like active learners, such as projects and assignments, a conclusion also made by (Lord and Jones, 2006) on a meta-analysis of 48 inquiries from 1999 to 2005 in the UK. My study supports the view that while children feel excited with alternative forms of assessment such as projects and assignments these are not often used because of teacher inadequacy. The data obtained from this study shows that students’ perceptions of assessment are in alignment with the current educational theories (Shepard, 2000; Smardon and Bewley, 2007) and with the NNC which wants them to be active learners and use assessment formatively. This is encouraging but it seems that no adequate emphasis was given by policymakers in Cyprus to elevate assessment to be used in this way. It is rather disappointing that though children seem excited about approaches such as peer and self-assessment they do not know how to put them into practice because of lack of guidance.
The Teachers’ Conceptions of Assessment inventory (TCoA) as modified by Brown in collaboration with Dr. Michaelides in 2010 to fit the Cypriot context was used and answer the question “What are Cypriot teachers’ perceptions of assessment purposes?” After conducting this 24 item inventory, the researcher used these authors’ previously identified belief groups to analyse the data using descriptive statistics. In all, teachers seem to endorse more the positive conceptions of assessment rather than the negative ones. As can be seen by the individual tables given in the teachers’ results chapter, answers in the questionnaire are widely spread, reflecting a multiplicity in perceptions. This study supports that teachers can hold multiple and even contradictory perceptions about the purposes of assessment at the same time as identified also by the study of Harris and Brown (2009) and Michaelides and Brown (2010). This is not unreasonable considering that teachers’ perceptions of assessment are influenced by several parameters such as the social and educational context surrounding them as well as their personal experiences and what they conceive as important (Jane, 2012). Another major factor in this plurality of perceptions is that assessment itself serves multiple purposes, which may be complementary or contradictory (Cizek et al. 1995, Kahn, 2000 cited by Brown et al. 2011). In this research, teachers do not seem to have a consensus in their minds about the purposes of assessment considering the many occasions where quantitative results contradict qualitative results. Furthermore, perceptions are even more complex because of the newly established reform within the NNC and the emphasis given in shifting assessment to be used for learning.

The Students’ Conceptions of Assessment-V inventory was used as modified by Brown and colleagues in 2009 to answer the research question “What are Cypriot students’ perceptions of assessment purposes?” After conducting this 33 item inventory, I used these authors’ previously identified belief groups to analyse the data using descriptive statistics. Some more modifications were also used to fit with the Cypriot background as this inventory was mostly used in Anglo-Saxon countries, thus for validity a process for accurately translating the inventory was performed. For assuring reliability some statistical procedures were undertaken using the Cronbach Alpha technique. All four scales were found to have acceptable fit within this sample.
Generally, as can be seen by the mean scores in each scale (Section 5.2) students seem to be more in agreement with the improvement conception and less in agreement with assessment as having a negative effect, being a negative process or used for external factors. Information from the interviews reveals that though children cherish assessment information it is then up to their teachers or themselves to use results formatively to enhance learning. This is in alignment with the study of Peterson and Irving (2008) where students stated that they may autonomously use assessment information for their benefit but there are not any firm strategies for doing so in practice. As for assessment in improving teaching, students agree that it helps teacher track their progress, determine how much they have learned from teaching and check their progress against achievements objectives and standards but they seem less sure if teachers use these results to plan next steps in teaching or for helping them improve. As explained in their own words it is up to each teacher’s willingness to return to what has already been taught or to what they have not learned well and then if some teachers do so, it is up to students to take action. From these answers it seems that students acknowledge assessment’s summative assessment purposes but are less sure if it is actually used formatively to support teaching. To a certain extent students seem disappointed with teachers’ feedback and encouragement for closing the gaps they might have in knowledge as observed by assessment results. Students seem to agree that assessment should improve their learning. The triangulation of data reveals that children will need more support by teachers, mainly accomplished through feedback in order for them to take action.

For the specific approaches of assessment emphasized through the NNC, this study has achieved to reveal some important findings. In the NNC, some suggestions are made for assessment in an attempt to give it a more fundamental role linked with ongoing instruction. A framework that is given for assessment is that it should be initial for diagnostic reasons, continuous for feedback during the lessons and final, to assess broader parts of learning. Initial form was nowhere mentioned by teachers suggesting that it is not in use. Teachers show confidence about the final form as they show assurance in themselves and their capability of constructing well defined tests and accurately evaluating them, which is parallel with the study of Michaelides and Brown undertaken in Cyprus in 2010. The continuous form which involves several approaches such as feedback during
lessons, the effective use of oral and written questions, self and peer assessment formed the major part of this data.

As analysed in the literature review chapter, the NNC suggests assessment to be used formatively but this terminology is not widespread in the Cypriot context for unknown reasons. That is why this term was not used in the questionnaires though when asked in the interviews teachers seem to slightly recall the terminology ‘Formative Assessment’ as it was introduced to them in preliminary pre-service training but are not overly familiar with it. I suggest that it might have been useful for teachers to have a terminology in mind and what it involves. When this terminology was introduced by me in the interviews, teachers said that it involves some of the strategies they were already implementing but without knowing they were called Formative Assessment; this is parallel with the research of Priestley and Sime (2005) where teachers perceived Formative Assessment as enhancing some of the strategies they were already implementing.

The triangulation of data in this study reveals that teachers are positive about the main elements of FA as identified by Black et al. (2003) as well as the more fundamental role given to assessment related to ongoing instruction similar with studies such as Torrance and Pryor (2001), Priestley and Sime (2005) as well as Berry (2004). This study can be a message to policy makers and professional developers that the shift of emphasis should be given on how to help teachers improve their assessment practices in order to be able to implement what they believe to be ideal. For example, the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that teachers are very welcome for feedback to be used for learning, for oral questioning to be used as an assessment process but also to develop learning and guide teaching while they also have positive feelings about self and peer assessment. The information obtained from the interviews show that teachers do not have a consensus in their minds about how to put these strategies into practice in effective ways. This may be attributed to insufficient training and theory in the Cypriot context. Although there have been major efforts in the last twenty years to develop a unified theory of assessment for the educational context that takes into account the culture of learning (Black and Wiliam, 2006; Pryor and Crossouard, 2008; Shepard, 2000), such initiatives still fall somewhat short of the exhaustiveness and comprehensive theory needed to cover the complex and
multidimensional nature of assessment (Simon et al, 2010). Beyond the lack of a firm theory there is limited access to good assessment design and use. In the Cypriot context we can see both a lack of systematic research and literature as well as a lack of emphasis given to teachers’ professional development in assessment approaches. Whilst the NNC has some suggestions to make, teachers will not adopt attractive sounding ideas, even if based on extensive research, if these are presented as general principles which leave entirely to them the task of translating them into everyday practice. What they need is a variety of living and concrete examples of implementation, from which they can both derive conviction and confidence that they can do better, and see concrete examples of what doing better means in practice (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). This is obvious from teachers’ own words in this study’s interviews where teachers seem to be willing to modify their assessment practices but gauge for concrete examples and guidance. This study also supports the view that more research should be developed about assessment within the Cypriot educational context in order to develop theory as well as practice. Though emphasis was given by the NNC in teachers advancing their content knowledge, theory suggests that improving teachers’ assessment approaches is much more beneficial to students’ learning and outcome than teaching and training teachers on content knowledge (Wiliam, 2011).

The NNC supports that a broader range of assessment tools should be used and assessment should be linked with instruction, in accordance with the international literature (Black and Wiliam, 1998 a,b; Lord and Jones, 2006; McMillan, 2000; Shepard, 2000). This study shows that students in lower secondary schools in Cyprus like a variety of assessment approaches to be used, including a balance of high stakes and low stakes assessment, parallel with Lord and Jones (2006) in the UK relevant to assessment. Also both studies support the idea that children like to be challenged by assessment. Students also want to feel like active learners and participate in the learning process, similar with studies such as Dochy and McDowell (1997), Lord and Jones (2006) and Peterson and Irving (2008).

Some of the actions the government could have taken in order for alternative methods to be used are to give them importance by official assessment policy documentation. For example if the official semester grade is still important maybe it would have been wise to assign specific percentages to different assessment approaches to count toward the official
semester mark. This approach is something that unofficially each teacher individually uses as they argue in the interviews but it is inconsistent because each teacher gives a different emphasis (and thus percentages) to each method. As stated in chapter 4.8 teachers construct their own record documents where they put specific percentages for each assessment method they use, in order to help them to be fairer in creating official summative marks for students. So if teachers believe that is more coherent and justifies each child’s final grade why is it not a formal policy to ensure parity between teachers?

A point worth considering by stakeholders and revealed through this study is the dissatisfaction of teachers and students with the assessment representation system. They feel that the way grades are represented in the official semester report by numbers from A-E is itself inaccurate and cannot show a students’ level precisely. This is not the case in upper secondary schools in Cyprus where level is represented by numbers (06-20) thus giving teachers more scope to be accurate and fairer to some extent. The relevant authorities and policymakers may need to consider altering the representation of the results in order to be more accurate.

In all, it seems that both teachers and students have positive feelings about assessment as to be used for learning. Both parties seem to like challenges and they cherish assessment as a process, both summative and formative realising that they have different purposes. Both parties feel positive about the use of oral and written questioning, higher and lower order questions, and the use of feedback and self and peer assessment approaches in the scope of assessment for learning. It seems that they seek help and they ask for more guidance and concrete examples for putting into practice what they believe to be ideal. The results of this study should be made known to the public and especially to policy makers in order to alert them in shifting emphasis to approaches of assessment and take advantage of the pre-service training of teachers as well as the training within the NNC curriculum in helping teachers advance their assessment skills. Thus, teachers will in turn help their students and assessment will ideally help teaching and learning and ultimately advance students’ level of achievement, help students become more active learners, have responsibility for their learning and be lifelong learners as these are some of the expectations not only of Cypriot education but of the educational systems worldwide (Black and Wiliam 1998; Heritage,
Though it goes beyond of the scope of this study, it is legitimate to give some implications of how these can be achieved. As mentioned in the literature review chapter assessment is not undertaken in a vacuum. Some fundamental components need to pre-exist for assessment to be used formatively. As this study has shown throughout, the problem is not merely to shift or to persuade teachers and students to see that assessment can be used for learning but how to help them to do so in practice. The qualitative and quantitative data were in a constant conflict. Some suggestions as to why this was the case are that information retrieved from the questionnaires was showing their perceptions as to how ideally assessment should be. On the other hand, interviews show that they need help, for assessment to be used for learning and to be able to implement what they believe to be ideal into practice.

It is suggested that policymakers should be cautioned to invest more in developing teacher knowledge and skills needed to engage in the process of formative assessment, than in the tools available for formative assessment. When instituting large-scale assessment systems, policymakers must consider the time, cost, and personnel resources needed to conduct, score, report, and interpret the data. Enacting a policy around assessment without the necessary contextual supports is sure to miss the mark. However, a systematic approach that takes key stakeholders—students, teachers, and education leaders into consideration has a stronger chance of success (CELEO, 2014; Pinchok and Brandt, 2009). As we have seen earlier, the training teachers received was not focused on assessment and it was not systematic nor did it take seriously the role of students as learners in reforming the NNC. According to research students should also be formally engaged in the defining and developing of scoring rubrics for projects and performances (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, and Chappuis, 2004). So that they can better reflect on their own thinking, it can be helpful to explain to them, in language that they understand, how best to connect their current thinking to the learning target and demonstrate mastery of concepts and performance. In addition, it is critical to take the time to help students see what quality work and performance look like so that these standards are not a mystery to them.
The marriage of learning progressions and high-quality formative assessment strategies will answer the following key questions to guide instructor feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007):

- Where am I going (what are the goals)?
- How am I going (what progress is being made toward the goal)?
- Where to next (what activities need to be undertaken to make better progress)?

The better teachers become at managing these three key questions, the better formative assessment practices, and their instructional benefits, will take hold. For example, improving the quality and pacing of questioning is a skill that teachers need to practice regularly.

Applying formative assessment approaches systemically across schools can be a challenge in that they are not based on a product, technology, or system that can easily be installed or implemented (Pinchok and Brandt, 2009). As suggested, schools will need to invest in high-quality, sustained formative assessment professional development programs for teachers to make this comprehensive approach work in the classroom. The need to reallocate resources to ensure that teachers have concentrated time and support to build their knowledge of formative assessment within professional learning communities is critical and they cannot do it without a supportive culture and network to reinforce best practices (Pinchok and Brandt, 2009). This network is nowhere to be found in the Cypriot context and it may be something that policy makers need to think about implementing. Supporting “work groups” or cadres of teachers who meet regularly to discuss the data collection and data use in their classrooms has been shown to be helpful (CEELO, 2014).

Though we have seen that Cyprus is trying to overcome the centre periphery model characterizing it for several years and engage teachers in the NNC, this has happened only to a very small extent in the beginning of the implementation. Some recommendations for policymakers would be to engage stakeholders in making decisions, developing policy, and providing important supports such as professional development and ongoing technical
assistance (Bennett, 2011; CEELO report, 2014; Pinchok and Brandt, 2009). Ongoing assessment development from experts or internal assistance in schools is nowhere to be found in the Cypriot context. Policy makers would need to realize that formative assessment cannot be implemented rapidly but progressively whilst teachers must be willing to confront a number of obstacles when changing to a system of true formative assessment (Reeves, 2011).

In addition, a drawback of the NNC training as I mentioned earlier is that none of it was solely focused on assessment. This training could have focused on training teachers for having a strong understanding of what typical development for the age group looks like and support to become adept at collecting classroom-based data, judging a child’s progress, and using that understanding to improve their teaching practices (Bennett, 2011; CEELO, 2014; Pinchok and Brandt, 2009). Whilst we have seen in the literature review that the educational system in Cyprus has realized that assessment in each subject module and year group should be treated differently, differentiated seminars and specific ongoing training for each age group is not apparent, nor are they encouraged to collect data and act upon it. Heritage (2007) argues that to use formative assessment correctly, teachers will need in-person training with a qualified trainer who understands the importance of using data to inform instruction. Another good idea might be to implement supplemental training or refresher information self-paced by online modules.

### 7.3 Limitations

Every study has some limitations and during the process of this thesis I have realised that there are limits to the number of things I can achieve within a single study. The limitations can be seen as a challenge for future research in this area.

Firstly, there are some limitations due to the sample selected. The results can only be generalizable for the population of lower secondary Greek Language teachers and lower secondary school students as this formed the sample of this study. Thus results might have been different for teachers teaching other subjects or in other levels of education. Also the
results and experience of children in other levels of education might be different. There are also some restrictions because of the small sample included in the qualitative phase. I was intending to have a larger sample for the qualitative phase but unfortunately only seven teachers agreed to be interviewed. Moreover, I was aiming to have interviews with two groups from each level of students but this was not feasible due to reasons explained in the research methods chapter. Another limitation of this study might be the absence in the questionnaire of questions focusing on the ‘initial’ form of assessment as suggested through the NNC and perceptions about the division of the school year in two semesters.

Something that can be considered as a drawback but also a benefit at the same time is that this study was undertaken at the initial stages of a big curriculum reform. Thus though it can capture initial perceptions of the NNC at the same time teachers themselves admit that they are not sure as what this change really involves and where it may lead. Thus, if undertaken again after a long period of exposure to the new curriculum, teachers and students may have a different perspective about the reform of assessment.

7.4 Future research

The value of this study lies in the fact that it sets the foundations for future studies in investigating the perceptions of teachers and students about assessment within the Cypriot educational context. Its originality lies in the fact that it is the first study in Cyprus investigating students’ and teachers’ about assessment purposes in general; it is the first study investigating their perceptions on the NNC whilst it combines both quantitative and qualitative instruments within a mixed methods approach. Thus it could form an outline for future research. As this study involved a sample only from lower secondary schools it may be interesting and useful to investigate the assessment experience of students and teachers from other levels of education. Furthermore, it can form the basis for a longitudinal study which will research if and how perceptions of teachers and students are changing especially as they master and experience the NNC.

This study can also form the basis for actually changing the assessment practices of teachers by listening to their queries and helping them to gradually develop their
assessment skills. This hopefully will result in reforming the way teachers are trained to ensure they have a full and critical understanding of issues to be developed, and also to make sure they understand the practical ways in which these approaches can be used. The findings of this research should serve to emphasise the differences between what teachers believe to be ideal and what they actually do in classrooms. Inevitably, more research is needed to make clear the links between teachers’ conceptions of assessment and their assessment practices. Teachers may well work more effectively if there is coherence between assessment conceptions and teaching and assessment practices.
Appendices

Appendix A

Regulations of formal assessment at the secondary general level

Pupil assessment at the secondary general level is prescribed by Regulations ΚΔΠ 310/1990 paragraph 11, 1-24.

Gymnasium

At the gymnasium (lower secondary) level, assessment is based on the subsequent methods, used for all grades and subjects:

● “Daily evaluation of oral participation, and a pupil’s involvement in the teaching/learning process

● Short written tests. The number and frequency of these are at the discretion of the teacher

● Period-long compulsory written tests which are given with notice in each of the terms

● Assignments done by a pupil either at home or at school as part of the daily learning process, set at the discretion of the teacher

● Creative projects undertaken by pupils, either individually or in groups, on a subject of his/her choice and under the guidance of the teacher, and at his/her discretion

● Written examinations held every year in June in the following subjects: Modern Greek, History, Mathematics and Physics

Marks are awarded both at the end of each term and at the end of an academic year. The grading scale used is as follows:

● A = Excellent

● B = Very Good

● C = Good
• D = Almost Good
• E = Fail

The grading scale for written examinations is as follows (out of a possible 20):

• 19-20 = A
• 16-18 = B
• 13-15 = C
• 10-12 = D
• 1-9 = Fail” (Eurydice, 2008/9, p.142)
Appendix B

Main assessment methods for upper secondary (Year 10-12) as set by MOeC

The main assessment methods used at the lyceum level at all grades and in all subjects are as follows:

● Oral participation.

● Short quizzes. These are given without notice and as often as the teacher chooses.

● Written term tests. These last a full period and are held at least once a term. Teachers are required to inform the deputy head teacher responsible for the class if they intend to give a written term test. Pupils should not be given more than one term test in any subject in one day, and no more than three in any one week.

● Portfolio. This is a file prepared by each pupil, giving a general picture of his/her performance in a particular subject.

● Final written examinations. These are held in June every year. Pupils in the different grades are examined in different subjects.

Marks are awarded both at the end of each term and at the end of an academic year (Eurydice, 2008/9, p.142-144, my translation).
Appendix C

Official document by MoEC setting some guidelines for assessment because of the transition of two semesters instead of three

Official public document published on the 24th of September 2010 clarifies these principles:

“a) According to the regulation 24(2) for the operation of public secondary schools 1990-2010 “Teachers are obliged to assess students by written assessment at least once in the four month semester.

b) As suggested in the previous circular considering students’ assessment, the implementation of the four months gives teachers an opportunity for implementing new feedback forms of continuous and creative assessment beyond test, which will correspond to the evaluation of differing skills, abilities and knowledge through ex. presentations, interdisciplinary work, projects, production of hard or electronic material etc.

c) According to the aforementioned and according to the regulation 24 (2) it is expected that emphasis should be given in alternative methods of assessment and restriction of the written test method in order for teachers and students to get rid of assessment’s useless stress” (my translation)
Appendix D

Objectives of the ‘Main Training’ as described by the MoEC

“Inform teachers about the elements of NNC, the way they are handled (philosophy, objectives, content, methodology, assessment) and the way its implementation is going to affect the school units.

Introduction to the new elements of every course separately

Inform teachers on the connection between the syllabus of every subject and the general instructions of NNC which seek for:

- sufficient and coherent body of knowledge
- develop positions and behaviour which indicate a democrat citizen
- developing key competencies and skills for the society of the 21st century

Improvement of the knowledge of teachers in matters relevant with the NNC

Inform teachers on the way in which the curriculum will be adjusted according to NNC

Familiarization with the educational proposals and approaches which shall be implemented during the lessons” (Document.Number.: ΠI 7.7.09.16, my translation).
Προς Διευθυντή/τρια

Αξιότιμε Κύριε,

Είμαι πτυχιούχος του τμήματος Ελληνικής Φιλολογίας του Αριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης με μεταπτυχιακό στις "Μεθόδους δευτικής Έρευνας" (MSc Educational Research Methods) από το Πανεπιστήμιο Λέστερ του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου (School of Education, University of Leicester).

Στο παρόν στάδιο εκπονώ έρευνα η οποία θα οδηγήσει σε διδακτορικό από το Πανεπιστήμιο του Λέστερ. Το θέμα της Διπλωματικής μου εργασίας αφορά τις αντιλήψεις των καθηγητών και των μαθητών για το ρόλο της αξιολόγησης γενικότερα αλλά και ειδικότερα με βάση τα Νέα Αναλυτικά Προγράμματα. Η έρευνα έχει ήδη εγκριθεί από το Πανεπιστήμιο του Λέστερ και το Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού της Κύπρου και φέρει τον τίτλο 'Students' and Teachers' perceptions of changing assessment practices in lower secondary schools in the Cypriot New National Curriculum'. Η έρευνα αισιοδοξεί να συμπεριλάβει έντεκα σχολεία από όλη την Κύπρο με συνολικό δείγμα περίπου 850 μαθητές και 150 καθηγητές. Στο ερωτηματολόγιό υπάρχουν δανεισμένες ερωτήσεις από μια έρευνα που έχει γίνει σε διάφορες χώρες όπως Νέα Ζηλανδία, Γερμανία και Χονγκ Κόνγκ και αφορά στις γενικότερες αντιλήψεις των καθηγητών για την αξιολόγηση από τον καθηγητή Brown, G. T. ο οποίος ήδη ενέκρινε αυτή την έρευνα.

Θα ήθελα να εξασφαλίσω τη σχετική άδεια και από εσάς για να μπορέσω να έχω πρόσβαση στο .............................................................................................. ούτως ώστε να πραγματοποιήσω την έρευνα μου. Η έρευνα θα διεξαχθεί κατά την περίοδο.......................... 2012.

Μέθοδοι συλλογής δεδομένων:

1. Ερωτηματολόγια σε όλα τα παιδιά τριών τμημάτων, ένα από κάθε Α', Β' και Γ' Γυμνασίου.
2. Ερωτηματολόγια σε όλους τους φιλόλογους τους σχολείου που διδάσκουν Νέα Ελληνικά.
3. Πιθανή συνέντευξη καθηγητών οι οποίοι θα επιλεγούν μετά την ανάλυση των ποσοτικών δεδομένων και θα είναι πρόθυμοι να συμμετέχουν.
4. Ομαδική συνέντευξη με παιδιά τα οποία θα επιλεγούν μετά την ανάλυση των ποσοτικών δεδομένων και θα είναι πρόθυμα να συμμετέχουν με την έγκιση βεβαίως του εν λόγω καθηγητή/τριας.

Σας διαβεβαιώνω ότι θα χειριστώ με τέτοιο τρόπο την έρευνα μου ώστε να διέπεται από εντιμότητα αλλά και να διασφαλίζεται πλήρως η ανοιχτόμορφη ανωνυμία των σχολείων, των διευθυντών καθώς και των εκπαιδευτικών που θα συμμετέχουν σ’ αυτή σε τυχόν δημοσιεύσεις. Για οποιεσδήποτε διευκρινίσεις είμαι στη διάθεσή σας (ηλ.ταχ: gs159@le.ac.uk).

Σας ευχαριστώ εκ των προτέρων.

Με εκτίμηση,

Γεωργία Σολομωνίδου.

Καταλαβαίνω σε τι αφορά η σχετική έρευνα και είμαι βέβαιος/α ότι θέλω να συμμετέχω

Υπογραφή: ..............................................................
Appendix F

Teachers’ Questionnaire (in translation)

Education, School of
Georgia Solomonidou
PhD Thesis

Teachers’ and Students’ perceptions of changing assessment practices in lower secondary schools in the Cypriot New National Curriculum

This questionnaire has loaned some of the questions from a large scale study which was undertaken in several countries such as New Zealand, Germany and Hong Kong and it is concerned with the general perceptions of teachers on assessment firstly constructed by Brown G.T.L. In order to adapt it to the needs of this country and research some more questions have been imposed in order to study teachers’ perceptions on the changing assessment practices within the New National Curriculum. Moreover, another aim of this questionnaire is to understand what teachers have in mind when hearing the word assessment.

The research concerns only Greek Language teachers. Please allow yourself about ten minutes to complete the questionnaire. Your answers will be strictly confidential. Although your names and some more personal details will be needed for a possible interview at the quantitative phase the results of this study will be published in a statistical form so that neither the schools nor the teachers will be identifiable. Thank you in advance for your time and thoughtful answers. Your cooperation in this study will help your views come to light and might as well bring changes to the assessment system thus supporting your work.

For further information or queries please contact:
Georgia Solomonidou: gs159@le.ac.uk
Please tick the answer that represents you better:

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<td>9) Assessment allows different students to get different instruction</td>
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<td>10) Assessment information modifies ongoing teaching of students</td>
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<td>11) Assessment is integrated with teaching practice</td>
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<td>13) Teachers conduct assessment but make little use of the result</td>
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<td>15) Assessment provides feedback to students about their performance</td>
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<td>16) Assessment determines if students meet qualifications standards</td>
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<td>18) Assessment has little impact on teaching</td>
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<td>23) Assessment feedbacks to students their learning needs</td>
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<td>24) Assessment is a way to determine how much students have learned from teaching</td>
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<td>25) Written assessment should involve only higher order questions</td>
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<td>26) Written assessment should involve only lower order questions</td>
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<td>27) Written questions should involve both higher and lower order question</td>
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<td>28) Students should be encouraged to ask questions</td>
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<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree slightly</td>
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<td>29) Teachers should give time to students in the classroom to answer a question</td>
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<td>30) Oral questions are a way of everyday assessment</td>
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<td>31) Oral questions should involve only higher order questions</td>
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<td>32) Oral questions should involve only lower order questions</td>
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<td>33) Oral questions should involve both higher and lower order questions</td>
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<td>34) Students should assess each other’s work (peer assessment)</td>
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<td>35) Feedback should only be about ego involving evaluation</td>
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<td>36) Feedback should only be concerned with the task</td>
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<td>37) Feedback should only be given in written assessment</td>
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<td>38) Feedback should be an everyday procedure</td>
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<td>39) The procedure where students find the elements that constitute a certain kind of subject document, write it and assess it should be applied</td>
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<td>40) The procedure where students reflect on their past work by evaluating it and identifying still needs to be pursued should be applied</td>
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<td>41) Assessment means a standardised test</td>
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<td>42)</td>
<td>Assessment means a teacher made written test</td>
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<td>43)</td>
<td>Assessment is a formal process</td>
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<td>44)</td>
<td>Assessment happens every day with oral questions and answers</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
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<td>45)</td>
<td>Assessment is happening everyday by observation</td>
<td>O</td>
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<tr>
<td>46)</td>
<td>Assessment is an informal procedure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please give some personal information which I remind you that they will be not be exposed in any way:

School: .................................................................

I teach for ....... years

Gender (circle): male / female

How long have you been trained for the NNC please answer in days..............

Have you been using the NNC in the school year 2010-2011; (circle) yes / no

Did you participate with any other way in the NNC? Please explain:
..........................................................................................................................
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If you are chosen for a twenty minute interview are you willing to participate? (circle) yes / no

If yes, please give me your contact details:
..........................................................................................................................
Appendix G

Teachers’ Interviews (outline, in translation)

According to the findings of the questionnaires and each teacher’s answers questions will change accordingly.

1. What does the term assessment mean to you?
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   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

2. The main skills and competencies that children need to develop for the 21st century according to the Cypriot stakeholders are for children to be creative, have critical thinking, use the knowledge reflectively and have interpersonal skills as well as to co-operate with others. How are each of these skills developed?
   Let’s talk first about creativity:
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   Critical thinking:
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   Use Knowledge reflectively:
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   Have interpersonal skills and cooperate with others
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   And what is the role of assessment for developing these skills (if any)? (this question might be asked consequently after the teachers elaborates on each of the skills above)

3. What assessment methods do you usually undertake in the Greek language lesson?
   (this is an indirect question trying to elicit information on formal-government
obliged assessment and any informal-teacher assessment. If the teachers do not seem to elaborate on this they are going to be asked more specifically on the formal assessment they are asked from the government to undertake once every semester and if any other forms of informal assessment are taking place).

4. For what purposes is each of the assessment methods referred above used?

5. (If the teachers answers on the questionnaire show a belief that assessment improves teaching and learning they are going to be asked to elaborate on this and explain how.) According to your answers to the questionnaire, you seem to believe that assessment improves teaching and learning? So can you elaborate on this?

6. (If the teacher’s answers on the questionnaire show a belief that assessment should be rejected either because it is invalid, irrelevant or negative.) If they have shown positivity to this belief they are going to be asked to elaborate on this.

7. Do you believe that assessment is separated from teaching and instruction or is it a part of it? Please explain.
8. One of the reforms of the NNC was to divide the semesters to two instead of three. To what extent do you think the division of the semesters in two have helped you in using alternative methods of assessment?

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9. Considering the training for the NNC that you have undertaken, can you tell me what assessment methods were suggested by the trainee for the Greek Language specifically and if you are for or against them and why?

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10. Did the training help you develop your assessment skills, and if yes, how?

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11. a) What do you think is the purpose of oral questioning?

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b) What is the purpose of written questions?

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What do you think about students asking questions? (Do you encourage them?)

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12. What do you think about peer and self assessment methods?

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To what extent do you use it and how?
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Is the NNC supportive to these elements of assessment? Have you been trained for such actions?
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13. What do you think is the purpose of feedback and how often do you use it?
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Is the NNC supportive to this element of assessment? Have you been trained for how and when to use it?
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14. Are you familiar with the term formative assessment and what it includes?
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Appendix H

Students’ Focus group (outline in translation)

Children are going to be asked to have the Greek Language Lesson in mind when answering the questions.

1. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word assessment?
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2. Do you believe that teachers assess your work on a daily basis and if yes, how? (this is an indirect question showing how informal students believe assessment to be)
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3. What counts for your semester mark to be conducted?
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   (if the children believe that it is the end of term test that counts mostly they are going to be further asked) Does your everyday work and homework count too? And to what extent?
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4. (According to students answers on the quantitative data/the questionnaires, when the focus group is composed by students who are categorized in one of the four major perceptions –assessment improves achievement and learning or – assessment makes student accountable, or – assessment is irrelevant and tend to ignore it or – assessment is enjoyable, they are going to be asked to elaborate and discuss further about that perception)
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5. When do you usually receive written feedback on your work? What is it about?
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6. Do you like receiving feedback on your work? And how do you use it (are you
encouraged to do so)?
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7. Besides written feedback do you receive oral feedback too?
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8. What are the questions asked in the classroom usually about?
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   Why do you think teachers ask questions in the classroom? (according to how the
discussion proceeds the researcher might need to make some more questions for
kids to elaborate and for me to come to conclusions on ‘lower’ order or ‘higher’
order questions in the classroom).
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9. To what extent are you given space to think before answering?
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   Are you encouraged to make your own questions?
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10. What do you think about peer and self assessment methods? If the children do not
understand the terms I might need to make it more clear by saying, have you ever
been asked to assess one of your previous assignments or tests?
........................................................................................................................................
Why do you ask questions in the classroom? (If the children do not elaborate very well on the previous question I might need to ask about the questions they ask in the classroom which sometimes might be the smallest indication of self-assessment). Trying to see if they ask questions to understand something they didn’t understand.

Have you ever been asked to assess one of your peers written assignment or test or at least elaborate on his/her oral answer to a question?

11. (The final question to be asked seeks to elaborate on the main philosophy of FA which is for children to have responsibility on their own learning, so they might be asked something like: Do you feel you are a passive learner (the teachers teach and you need to learn) or do you take responsibility for you learning like by making projects, research assignments individually or in groups?)
Appendix I

Students’ Questionnaire (in translation)

Name: ________________________________
School: ______________________________
Classroom: __________________________

Tick the answer that represents you best!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Mostly disagree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Moderately agree</th>
<th>Mostly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assessment is unfair to students</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2. Assessment helps teachers track my progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I pay attention to my assessment results in order to focus on what I could do better next time</td>
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<td>4. Assessment encourages my class to work together and help each other</td>
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<td>5. I find myself really enjoying learning when I am assessed</td>
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<td>6. Assessment is value-less</td>
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<td>7. Our class becomes more supportive when we are assessed</td>
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<td>8. Teachers are over-assessing</td>
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<td>9. Assessment motivates me and my classmates to help each other</td>
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<td>10. Assessment is a way to determine how much I have learned from teaching</td>
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<td>11. Teachers use my assessment results to see what they need to teach me next</td>
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<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Assessment results predict my future performance</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Assessment is important for my future career or job</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Assessment tells my parents how much I have learned</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Assessment is checking off my progress against achievement objectives or standards</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>I use assessment to take responsibility for my next learning steps</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Assessment is an engaging and enjoyable experience for me</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Assessment shows whether I can analyze and think critically about a topic</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Assessment makes our class cooperate more with each other</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>I ignore assessment information</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Assessment measures the worth or quality of schools</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>My teachers use assessment to help me improve</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>I ignore or throw away my assessment results</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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<td>25. When we are assessed, our class becomes more motivated to learn</td>
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<td>26. Assessment interferes with my learning</td>
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<td>27. Assessment has little impact on my learning</td>
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<td>28. When we do assessments, there is good atmosphere in our class</td>
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<td>29. I look what I got wrong or did poorly on to guide what I should learn next</td>
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<td>30. I use assessment to identify what I need to study next</td>
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<td>31. Assessment results are not very accurate</td>
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<td>32. Assessment results show how intelligent I am</td>
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<td>33. I make use of the feedback I get to improve my learning</td>
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<td>34. Assessment is an everyday, informal procedure</td>
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<td>35. Assessment is ONLY the graded work</td>
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<td>36. The teacher asks me questions in the classroom to evaluate me</td>
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Answer the following questions having in mind ONLY what happens in the Greek language lesson

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<tr>
<td>37. Oral questions should involve only lower order questions</td>
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<td>40. Written questions should involve only memory recall answers</td>
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<td>42. Written questions should involve a sufficient amount of higher and lower order questions</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Teachers should encourage us to raise questions</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. We should assess each other’s work</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>45. Feedback should be given in written assessment(including essays)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Feedback should be given daily</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. I should be able to realize what I’ve learned and assess my level in order to take next steps in closing the gap</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*My past semesters’ grade in Greek language Lesson: A / B / C / D / E*
Appendix J

Reliability measures of TCoA using Cronbach’s Alpha technique

Scale:

1) Accountability

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Excluded(^a)</td>
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<tr>
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\(^a\) Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>N of Items</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach's Alpha</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>.829</td>
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The accountability scale has a very good internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at .830 thus no items need to be excluded or rejected.

2) Improvement of teaching

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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Cases</td>
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<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

\(^a\)
The accountability scale has a good internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at .768 thus no items on this scale need to be excluded or rejected.

3) Improvement of learning
The accountability scale has a very good internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at .908.

4) Assessment is bad

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Cases Valid</td>
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<tr>
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a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach's Alpha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Items</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The assessment is bad scale has a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .687. While examining the degree to which each item correlates with the total score (see table below) one item is probably measuring something different from the scale as a whole. While the overall Cronbach Alpha is low (less than 7) I removed the item with low item-total correlation which was question (18) “assessment has little impact on teaching”.
The new scale with the deleted item shows much more internal consistency with Alpha now at .790.

5) Irrelevance

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.
This is the only scale that based on the Cronbach Alpha shows inconsistency between instruments and there aren’t any actions that we can apply because it is only based on two questions. The Cronbach Alpha though might be low because this scale is based only on two questions and it is very difficult to get a decent Cronbach Alpha value with a small number of items especially below n=10 questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>0.310</td>
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Appendix K

Reliability measures of SCoA using Cronbach’s Alpha technique

Scales:

1) Assessment is Bad

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This scale has an acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at 0.711.

2) Assessment is used for improvement

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The assessment is used for improvement scale has a very good internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at .872.

3) Assessment has a good affect

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The affect scale has a very good internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at .816.

4) Assessment is used for external factors

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<tr>
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a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

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<tbody>
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This scale has a good internal consistency with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient at .769.
Appendix L

Example of one teacher’s parts of transcription and main ideas from her interview

Teacher: D K (VN 350028)

Background

Interview lasted 44 minutes at her house. It was the first interview I have done. She is a young teacher with one year experience. Although trained does not yet use the NNC fully. She is sceptical about the NNC and cautious.

Assessment in general

1) Tests
2) Projects
3) Everyday assessment

She used the words, “to achieve standards”

- She gives emphasis in lack of time which is a barrier in using alternative methods of assessment besides tests
- Believes in the NNC but admits that not even the trainees knew or say much about assessment
- She is against the 2 semesters and much freedom
- Believes that through the new books and new syllabus knowledge will come from the students
- Argues that children like challenges
- Colleagues of her who used the NNC fully observed that children like them but failed the test
- Uses group work and peer assessment
- Argues that giving grades in inevitable gives lots of feedback in essays but not so much in tests
- Likes to use debates and let children talk freely about their experiences but sometimes she feels like she is losing track and the control of the classroom and what they were supposed to learn through discussion.

_Bigger picture_

Feels that the most common method is the test. She is the only one strongly opposite to the division of the school year in two semesters because she feels that too much freedom in deadlines and the curriculum and for assigning marks is making teachers less productive and more lazy “I was feeling more responsible when we had three semesters and we were pushed to achieve some goals and standards in more strict lines. Now there is too much freedom and for me it’s bad...because you always want some deadlines but now it’s more relaxed...” she feels that not much emphasis was given to assessment by the trainees or the NNC and that they could have done more to align assessment with the new philosophy of learning “-well there is always the issue of lack of time, and the way you are told to assess does not give you the scope to assess the students within different parameters. Like I would like to have more time for projects, to make students able to work in groups and actually search to discover knowledge because.....there are some students who find serious difficulties and need some help....so maybe with something more interesting and within a well structured group they might be more effected to learn in a good way. There is no doubt that we need assessment but we have to become pioneers and find some other ways to assess students who have learning difficulties and help them through assessment” “- it was more theoretical and not much practical especially the first seminars for ancient Greek I was more certain for what I was doing.. but for modern Greek it was a bit....light I guess the lecturers themselves were not pretty sure about the methods of assessment we should use....but again...it’s just the initial phase.....we as teachers were expecting to see a prototype... something as an example ..the explained but...not something very specific.....gust generalities (14:00) and blurring..... Especially before you implement it....”

She used an interesting method in assessing -well what I do...and try to implement is instead of giving a paper for homework and risking some children not to bother...I give
them papers to work in groups or in couples and instead of me taking it home to assess it we assess it all together in the class by indicating some points and see to what extent they have elaborated and developed the idea without having any prior knowledge. Of course before doing this I give them some hints and some standards (22:25) and then I might assess it officially at home. They like it very much and they keep asking “when we are doing an exercise with open books?!” So with this way you are also assessing if they can use the book properly and the knowledge they should get from it...i hate to see copy pasting in my tests but unfortunately it happens very often.

-can I ask you to give me some more information about the projects you said you are doing and the group work...

-there are some questions basically I give them or to compare documents or just some ‘food for thought’ for them to elaborate basically and challenge their critical thinking

-and do you give them grades for this or ..

-actually they ask for it...they want to get graded, even the most weak student looks forward for this but also wants to get graded, they believe it’s easier and they enjoy it more than typical assessment with close books.

And

-what I like to do with essays but there is not always the time for such actions is that I type some of their paragraphs, like a fragment from an introduction, from the main body and the conclusion and I give it to them and we discuss it all together. And i choose some extremely good ones and some with many mistakes in order for us to comment.

(kind of like a peer assessment action basically)

-yes and it helps that they are anonymous. But it is extremely surprising and exciting that although they do those mistakes themselves when they see it written by someone else they can indicate them.

-did anyone advise you to do this or.....
- not really, it’s just something I have discovered myself and thought of doing (30:33)"

Although secondary data is extremely interesting what she say as about some of her colleagues who implemented fully the NNC in ancient Greek “don’t you think it’s hard for a twelve year old to discover the knowledge etc?

- well actually no...because the way they are challenged and children like challenges....and I talked with teachers who are more into the NNC and its methods and they said that children actually like this methods and the new books in ancient Greek which have the form of comics. (19:00)

-the fact that children started to like ancient greek is very good but do they learn anything or they just think it’s fun?

- well to be honest some of my colleagues I talked to said that lots of their students failed the test, so that is bad news.....I feel like.....it will show...we can’t now yet...it’s too soon....we don’t know if the whole philosophy of the NNC will work....”
Appendix M

Initial attempt for coding all interview data (example of one theme and coding attempt)

1st theme that emerges is how teachers view assessment in general.

What follows are segments of teachers talking about assessment in general as well as the second theme that emerges which is the methods they use for assessment.

-What does the word assessment mean for you in general?

-Assessment is a procedure where teachers try to judge if something is bad or good and achieved certain standards or not while having certain criteria in mind I’ve tried to give you a very general term but I guess that’s what it is...really.

-so if we wanted to be a bit more specific..what would you say about assessment?

-a certain type of judgment and opinion of the teacher as far as the student is concerned. While you have certain criteria in mind and the final goal is to set a final grade that represents the student. And...assessment has many parameters there are many ways for assessing a child....like....in the modern Greek 1)orally in the class, whither he/she participates or not in the classroom, and this can be divided in two parameters like it is another thing when students try and participate and ask questions and another whither their answers are correct or not and the level of their answers high.... 2) written, like...the test (the most common type of assessment) warned for it or not expected and 3) homework, 4) projects.

-I can imagine how most of these work but how about projects. What kind of projects do you do in modern Greek and how often?

- especially in modern Greek we do 2 projects minimum per school year because the curriculum is very welcoming for this kind of actions. Let me give you an example. We had studied a document “axion esti” Odysseus Elutes which is about the world of Aegean and how it was born through the sea etc....so having this small fragment to start with the students created a powerpoint or a video based on the verse and tried to attribute the verse
according to how they conceived it. So they used pictures, animation, music etc so it was something very creative which as I realised later on it wasn’t just a non productive form of assessment but it gave them much to learn and to remember even two months later when we did another poem of Elutes they remembered this and started pronouncing the all the verses of the fragment we did months ago....and I was so excited i wanted to cry so i guess this ‘new’ and exciting ways of assessing students give them much more than the tests.....

- So this project....did they do it before you analysed a bit the poem or after? -it was done after.... hm.....because the verse was hard and they needed some help from before in order not to misinterpret some verses. Although..... when the powerpoint was presented or the videos etc we assessed it right away....like.....so students themselves assessed their fellow students so when the first person was assessed they got into this mode to find themselves the criteria, and the positive and negative things of the project. But because it was the first time they were doing this peer assessment method they started ‘bullying’ the person and indicated only the bad things so I needed to guide them and ask them to indicate the positive first and we had a corner in the board where we written down and numbered the good and bad and feedback on how it could have been better....i guess this method of assessment was good for many parameters which children need to develop in the modern Greek language like the creation of oral speech, of written speech, to enrich their creativity, use their imagination etc (F).

-what does assessment mean to you?

-well....it means judging...and having a holistic view about a student...see how he/she reacts in the class...like their oral participation...hoe he/she can have an opinion about what is going on......some projects...and assignments i tell them to do...like search from the web about a topic....and tests of course....

-so what are the methods you usually use at the Greek language lesson? -all that I mentioned...

-so what are the purposes for each different method?
-because there are students that react to this methods differently and i do not want to be unfair to any of them....someone can fail on the written test but be really good in oral..some students feel really stressed with written exams and some others feel very shy and do not participate in the classroom so....by using several methods I can be more confident about my judgments..... (S).

-What does the word assessment mean for you in general?

1) Assessment is a method with which the student and the teacher can realise if the lesson is understood and the students have adjusted to the new conditions of the classroom. It’s a very important element of school.

2) Yes, I also agree with you and i also believe that it is a very general term which does not include only the test but also a versatile and many aspects of a student who is assessed every minute in their learning lives.

-So what are the main methods of assessing the students, you said that it includes many aspects?

2) Well beyond the traditional test, it is also the willingness of the student to learn and work hard in the classroom in a productive way offering the production of knowledge

1) It is basically the tests, and the projects, the participation in the classroom......the cooperation with the other peers and with the teacher, there are many many aspects (2:17)…..but as far as which is more important in our schools…I guess it is the tests in every parameter that counts and for the final mark to be conducted….and also the 15 minutes assessed exercises we do in order to see if they understood the lesson of the day….

-Ok so if you turn to the last page, your answers to the questionnaire show that you disagree to what assessment really is…

1) Well to be fair I answered based on what it is the ideal assessment and not what it really is……but my colleague here answered based on what is happening in schools and that’s why our answers differ…..
2) Yes because assessment is not only the test…but unfortunately the grade is usually based on the results of the test because it is the most objective way.

-So let’s leave the answers of the questionnaire then and tell me what do you feel it is happening in reality?

1) It is what mr.p is saying especially in modules with the minimum hours in a school, like if I just have one hours lesson with a classroom each week I cannot really judge and get to know the students, so I base my judgment on the test, but in other module sits easier to observe students in a more holistic way.

-Well let’s just stick to the Greek language lesson where you have lots of hours with each classroom.

-(4:49) 1)it’s what we mentioned before basically, projects, tests, essays.

-So when you mention projects, you mean….

-1) we ask them to do interdisciplinary projects, is what they call them nowadays, like history, geography, IT, like we tell them to draw something in all the classrooms, and in some disciplines are obliged and in some are not, in the Greek language lesson, it is obliged, and they have to do one each semester.

-Do they actually do them or….

1) Most of them do..some others don’t, some are group projects, some prefer to do it individually

-Are they assessed

1) Well yes but….it is just a percentage of it….it is not something set…..

2) It’s up to each teacher

1) But it is always a positive thing if they try…. (6:00)…. Of course we give them comments on the projects; you assess them through the comments and not necessarily through the grade
2) Yes, I agree and you assess also their willingness and how much effort they put to this….and not only the result.

-What is the usefulness of the projects?

1) In many ways I guess, basically they learn how to research and they try to put themselves in it and make their own comments and they try to avoid useless information and collect only the useful from the internet, they learn how to reference, and how basically to make a project and a research and of course they learn something about what they are researching each time…

2) I guess though that we do not have a correct frame….because the ideal nowadays in the motto “let’s make the most with the minimum effort” and as a result as soon as they hear about an assignment/ project the only thing they know how to do best is to surf the net and copy paste without adding anything new

1) We really struggle to teach them how to do a proper research…they just copy paste….and they do not understand even what they are doing wrong but I guess the problem is that they haven’t learn this from a young age and this should start from the primary school and not expect from us at secondary school to teach them these stuff because then they feel extremely stressed especially if 7 different teachers from 7 different modules expect them to do projects…. 

2) That is why I am trying to make them do projects that demand their own work and it is hard to copy paste and find something ready….like….in ancient Greek I made them do something like the comic books….and it was interesting as well……(9:11) or to draw something…..i am generally to find anything new, and not the usual that will lead them to copy pasting and to be more creative

At the beginning you mentioned many ways of assessing children….is each method used for different purposes!??

2) For the student to develop different and several skills, like……each child has different skills which is impossible for you to know so.. you give them the opportunity to develop
through…different forms of assessment…like someone is good in drawing, someone is good in IT so….

1) To be more specific…like the test assess the child’s ability to memorize a huge stack of information like….1-2 chapters….it is harder because the information are many…

2) Yes, but it also assess critical thinking and includes higher order questions and not just lower order questions

1) Yes of course……

2) Even the smallest thing that indicates criticality is when you give them the choice to answer like….2 of the 3 questions and they need to decide for the best……

1) So the test basically needs to develop critical thinking as well but it is harder for children because, it has a massive stack of information but the projects are better in developing research and authenticity….now the other thing that we said about the small 15 minute assessment of the day it is basically to assess if they are prepared and did their homework and understood the lesson (N and P).

-What does the term assessment mean for you?

-It means that I rank students according to their performance, this is the classical term.....the general one, I do not really know the official term....but generally it means that assess other skills and abilities of students as well....like...and some talents they have....and if I can I develop them....

-Do you mean through assessment?

-Well, not really.....they can...but...but....well maybe when they tell them to do projects and assignments....

-Which methods of assessment do you usually use at the Greek language lesson?

-1) definitely the test, 2) their oral participation and 3) their interest for the class and their contribution to the class...
-For what reason do you use each method of assessment you have just mentioned?

-I use several methods because assessment should be multifaceted......to cover a large range of forms in order not to be more reliable.....

-And will this lead to a grade....or somewhere else?!!

-Well....mainly it will end up presented in a grade...a mark at the semester as it is supposed to by the system.... (M. K)

-What does assessment mean for you?

-Assessment means the everyday contact with the lesson and the interest that children show especially after a chapter is completed and they should be able to show what they have learned

-Which methods of assessment do you usually use at the Greek language lesson?

-mainly oral and written forms of assessment but also i give emphasis to my everyday contact with children.

-So orally....do children feel that they are assessed or?

-Yes, I use the old method with the notebook with grades.....like.....especially when a chapter is completed I remind them to review and they know that they are going to be orally assessed or.....I might do it written in order to be sure that I keep track of every single student.

-So written and oral assessments are used for the same purposes or for different ones....

-Well yes they are used for different purposes...like I believe that some students perform better orally and some others perform better in writing so....by using both ways I feel that I am more fair to them and my judgment so if a child is extremely good in oral assessment and everyday but in written exams he/she fails then I do not want to be unfair so i count both and vice versa if someone gets very high grades in written exams but he/she does not participate a lot in the classroom then again I shall count both oral and written for a fair judgment... (E.S)
What does the word assessment mean for you in general?

There are several forms of assessment such as the assessment from the supervisor to the teacher, from the teacher to the students.

Yes let’s just stay at the assessment from the teacher to the students. Do you have several forms in mind or is it straightforward?

Basically the most common one is the test......or a small type of project...or everyday assessment when you are giving them an exercise to solve based on the theory they have learned and they take it home to do it or assess it...like how to use the book properly or to discover something.

Ok, now if we talk only for the Greek language lesson, which methods do you usually use to assess students?

The test of course, linguistic exercise to enhance their vocabulary,

In which way? They do exercise and you correct them at home or?

Well, they are given exercises or vocabulary and to create communicative speech (epikoinwniakos logos) maybe do an essay or a paragraph.

So each one you have referred to like, the test, the vocabulary, the creation of oral or written speech and daily exercise, is it assessed in different ways and for different reasons?

Well.....you need to see if the students have realised the and understood the theory of the module and to.....see to what extent they have built their skills so you basically assess small parameters of the whole module to see to what extent they have achieved and what. Basically I am assessing them but also myself to what extent the goals I have ascertain are achieved. (D. K)
While systematically examining the different interviews, clarifying their meaning here is an overall narrative and a summary of what each teacher presumes for assessment in general:

**M.K**: Rank students according to performance. Try to assess not only knowledge but also skills and abilities and talents. Assessment should benefit the students. It is also about using several methods in order to have a more holistic view about what a child deserves as for the final grade because different students perform differently in various methods.

**E.S**: Through assessment students should be able to show what they have learned. She wants children to feel that they are constantly assessed. She uses a notebook every day for assessment. Believes that different students perform differently in various methods of assessment like orally or written. Trying to have a holistic view on what each child deserves in order to be fair with grade.

**S**: assessment is about judging and having a holistic view about a child in order to be fair. Students perform differently in different methods. Assessment plays an important role to what to teach=teaching to the test. She does not want to remind students that they are assessed because she relates assessment to pressure.

**F**: judging children to see if certain standards have been achieved. The main goal of assessment methods is to assign a final grade. Curriculum forces teachers to teach to the test. Before NNC assessment was about memorization but now they try harder to enhance students’ skills and abilities to research and discover knowledge and have critical thinking.

**D**: assessment is mostly the test. To see if standards are achieved. Trying to be fair. To a certain extent it helps for deciding the next steps in teaching.

**N**: assessment is for students and teachers to realize if standards are met. Different methods should be used for children to show and develop different skills and abilities. Test is usually what counts the most and it encourages memorization.

**P**: it is a general term. It should assess many aspects of a student. Students are assessed every minute. Assessing willingness and effort. Wants children to show their creativity. He wants to assess with innovative methods like making children draw but the system is not
supportive to such actions. The most objective method is the test. He feels restricted by the system. He ends up teaching to the test.

**Coding:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment in General</th>
<th>AiG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To judge</td>
<td>AiG/J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe if the lesson was understood and certain standards were achieved</td>
<td>AiG/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving a final grade</td>
<td>AiG/G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is about having a holistic view about a child</td>
<td>AiG/Hv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being fair</td>
<td>AiG/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of knowledge</td>
<td>AiG/Kn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is the test</td>
<td>AiG/T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is the ability to memorize</td>
<td>AiG/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is about building critical thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A chance to show their research abilities</td>
<td>AiG/CrTh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop</td>
<td>AiG/R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is about children showing not only knowledge but also other skills and abilities or talents they have</td>
<td>AiG/D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AiG/SandAandT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coding can also be found on hard copies*

*How this theme/concept was seen overall, similarities and differences between participants and concepts.*

Assessment according to teachers’ answers is mostly the attempt to judge a child through his/her performance. They claim to use several methods of assessment for various reasons.
6/7 teachers mention that in order to make up their minds about a final grade they count the contribution of a child to the lesson, his/her participation and interest as well as willingness to learn but what counts the most is the grade on the test. One teacher though says that “Its another thing if students try and participate and ask questions in the classroom and another whither their answers are correct or of a high level” (F). 5 out of 7 also believe that it is about checking wither children have achieved standards. Although they do not really associate assessment as an element which could have helped and enhance learning they feel restricted by the educational system by pushy syllabus and specific methods of assessment suggested and they cannot use something extremely different. More specifically one says that if a child is very a very talented writer or can express himself/herself better through drawing I cannot know or assess him/her with this way (P). They support the method of assessing children through individual or group projects because they realise that it is something more fun and exciting for children, something that enhances their knowledge and stays in their minds for longer as well as a way of enhancing their research skills and helps them discover knowledge themselves. The NNC is very supportive to such actions and also forces Greek language teachers to have minimum 2 projects per academic year. As far as oral participation is concerned two teachers are using notebooks in order to push students to be active in the classroom though the others feel that this method puts much pressure to students and it will affect them negatively. They also feel that the system forces them to teach to the test.
**Coding:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment in General</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To judge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observe if the lesson was understood and certain standards were achieved</td>
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<td>AiG/Hv</td>
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<td>Being fair</td>
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<td>Production of knowledge</td>
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<td>Assessment is the test</td>
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<td>AiG/D</td>
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<td>Assessment is about children showing not only knowledge but also other skills and abilities or talents they have</td>
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<table>
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<td>Tests</td>
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<td>Everyday oral participation/interest and contribution</td>
<td>MoA/E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projects and assignments</td>
<td>MoA/P.A</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<td>Trained on how to develop the test</td>
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<td>Use sources in a test in order for children to compare and thus enhance their critical thinking</td>
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<td>The division of the school year from 3 to 2 semesters was helpful</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Tests are classified</td>
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<td>PA/Unf</td>
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<td>Children are immature for such actions</td>
<td>PAandSA/Imm</td>
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<td>Teachers need more training</td>
<td>PAandSA/MT</td>
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<td>Teachers oral questioning is used for</td>
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<td>Teachers give minimum feedback</td>
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<td>Teachers prefer to give oral feedback</td>
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<td>Teachers prefer to give written feedback</td>
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<td>Feedback helps teachers</td>
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<td>Feedback is given both orally and written</td>
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<td>Feedback is given for improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback is about personal mistakes</td>
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<td>grade to be conducted</td>
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<td>giving percentages to each method they use</td>
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<td>Children like challenges</td>
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Appendix N

Differences in teachers’ perceptions about the NNC by years of experience using Kruskal Wallis test with Bonferroni correction

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<tr>
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Appendix O

Analysis of variance to explore differences between students’ perceptions on NNC and their cities

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**Appendix P**

Analysis of variance to explore differences between students’ perceptions on NNC and age groups, Group A (Year 7), Group B (Year 8), Group B (Year 9)

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