

# The Enactment of National Assessment Policy Changes

*An instrumental case study of teachers and  
headteachers in some schools in Scotland*

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MA of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education  
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UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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# Abstract

Education is widely viewed as a instrument for national economic development within a global knowledge economy (Zajda, 2018; Volante, 2017; Ball, 2015). International standardized benchmarking is regarded as the basis for improvement by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with a growing demand for national education systems to implement more accountable robust data to measure school and pupil progress. Scotland has recently implemented The National Improvement Framework (NiF) as a result of the OECD's report 'Improving Schools in Scotland. An OECD Perspective' (2015). The NiF includes national standardised testing for chronological ages legitimised by the rhetoric 'closing the attainment gap' and is intended to provide support for teachers' professional judgement to help identify childrens progress . This study set out to explore how the national education system and professionals in Scotland received and interpreted internationally recommended assessment designs over time. This involved the exploration of teachers' perceptions and professional experiences of assessment systems in Scotland with regards to professional judgment, autonomy and accountability, re-shaping of models of assessment over time, curriculum development within the 5-14 Curriculum and Curriculum for Excellence Framework and, practical and contextual issues. Documentary analysis of policy documents and semi-structured interviews involving a sample of 4 headteachers and 10 teachers from schools within four regions in Scotland were the key data collection tools. The main findings of the research suggest that the Scottish Government is replicating forms of crucial governance exerted by the OECD by introducing the latest assessment innovation- the NiF. Here, the narratives of teachers and head teachers reveal feelings of precariousness with regard to how the data from the NiF will be used and which may lead to the undermining of their professional judgement and autonomy. The narratives also reveal a commitment to collective responsibility, intelligent accountability and shared leadership. Analytical Guidance enabled teachers to iteratively refer back to their experiences during the 5-14 curriculum as well as their practical evaluative experiences of Assessment is for Learning. Narratives also revealed inconsistencies and a lack of clarity between the learning outcomes in the 5-14 and CfE. This was due to the differences in content and fluidity in both curricula.



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Fiona Ellison

Oslo, November, 2018

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# Acronyms

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA – Program for International Student Assessment

AIFL - Assessment is for Learning

TIMSS – Trends in Mathematics and Science Study

SNP – Scottish National Party

PIPS – Performance Indicators for Primary Schools

INCA – Computer Adaptive System

NIF – National Improvement Framework Scotland

EIS – Educational Institute of Scotland (Teachers Union)

SEED – Scottish Executive Education Department

DS-DO – Different Systems – Different Outcomes (acronyms for comparative research)

SS-DO – Similar Systems – Different Outcomes (acronyms for comparative research)

NPM – New Public Management

NSD – Norwegian Social Science Data

UNESCO – United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

DEEWR – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

MCEETYA – Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

TLC’s – Teacher Learning Communities

QLL - Qualitative Longitudinal Design

PSA – Parent Support Advisor

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Significance of the Study

There has been an increasingly high demand for national governments and education systems to implement more accountable robust data in terms of evaluation of school and pupil progress (Fischman et al., 2018; Zajda, 2018; Kamens and Mcneely, 2009; Mowat, 2018; Ball, 2015). Education is regarded as a central tool for national economic development in the global contemporary world (Zajda, 2018; Volante et al., 2017; Ball, 1998) Here, the use of international standardized benchmarking has been regarded as the basis for improvement by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): *“It is only through such benchmarking that countries can understand relative strengths and weaknesses of their education systems and identify best practice and ways forward”* (OECD, 2006, p.18). This emphasis upon retaining parallel standards of cross-national educational systems by international testing encourages efforts and fuels interest in national assessments which may stimulate cycles of reform (Baker and LeTendre, 2005). The OECD has significantly expanded in influence upon national policymaking directed at educational systems over the last three decades (Volante et al., 2017; Sellar and Lingard, 2013a; Mundy and Ghali, 2009; Sahlberg, 2011). This organisation has played a pivotal role in a number of areas including; advising educational development; providing evaluative reports of overall education systems; establishing international benchmarks for comparative purposes; curriculum development; creating modern initiatives and standards (sustainable development, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies); providing policy and practice guidance relating to assessment and evaluation and informing professional practice relating to leadership and professional standards. (OECD, 2006, 2012, 2013c, 2013d, 2015; Martens, & Niemann, 2010; Lundgren, 2006; Marcusson, 2003; Sahlberg, 2011).

It has been argued that these recommendations have created a ‘global uniformity’ of national curricula by the use of international assessments such as TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) (Spring, 2008). Recent studies have shown that nation states are becoming less influential in designing and guiding policy and practice within national education systems as the OECD increasingly exerts soft governance over these systems (Lewis, 2018; Grey and Morris, 2018; Rautalin et al., 2018;

Clapham, 2016; Marcusson, 2003; Dale, 2007). In particular, the OECD places moral pressure on nation states through the publication of comparative educational statistics (PISA) on a triennial basis (Ball, 2018; Niemann et al., 2017). One of the central concerns of the OECD is to address social and educational challenges caused by poverty and inequality (Smith, 2018; OECD, 2017; 2012, Hopmann, 2007).

The Scottish Government has shown a strong commitment to addressing these challenges in the last few years. In particular, the Scottish Government has sought to close the attainment gap between children from wealthy and lower income backgrounds by developing a more progressive curriculum under Labour alongside a flexible, responsive and tailored assessment framework (The Scottish Government, 2015, 2018) under the SNP [Scottish National Party]. However, it could be argued that the developing assessment framework has been problematic as there have been difficulties adjusting from the traditional high stakes testing regime and responding to the values inherent in the Curriculum for Excellence (Hayward et al., 2014). These reforms within education were officially initiated in 2010 and formed part of a broader range of policies underpinned by a ‘Solidarity Purpose’ designed to reduce inequality whilst increasing economic growth in Scotland.

Critically however, the publication of the OECD Report ‘Improving schools in Scotland: An OECD perspective’ in 2015 which called for more robust, standardised quantitative assessment data led to the initiation of national testing in Scotland as part of a broader government strategy to close the attainment gap (Mowat, 2018). The National Improvement Framework (2016) includes standardised national testing for pupils in Primary 1, 4, 7 and Secondary 2 which will be implemented throughout schools from 2017 in Scotland along with additional funding for deprived areas and schools (Scottish Government, 2016). This reform marks a major departure from previous forms of assessment embedded within AiFl (Assessment is for Learning Framework) and non-compulsory computer-based formative testing such as Performance Indicators for Primary Schools [PIPS] and computer adaptive assessment [inCAS] (CEM, 2018). Here, 30 out of 32 Local Authorities are already using standardized assessment systems to track progress, however, Priestley (2015) argues that the government may be introducing a more centralized assessment system in order to create greater quality control and standardization to prevent poor use of data. This departure is arguably incongruent with the underlying rationale of the Curriculum for Excellence which calls for assessment to be firmly

embedded within the teaching and learning process as a developmental and formative tool (Biesta, 2015; Mowat, 2018).

Finally, these large-scale policy processes and assessment changes weigh heavily upon the autonomy, accountability and agency of teaching professionals and school leaders (Ball, 2003; 2010; Biesta et al., 2015; Hamilton, 2017; Gatherer, 2013; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). This thesis will centrally focus upon how some of these teaching professionals and school leaders receive, perceive and enact national policy processes and assessment changes in Scotland.

### **1.1.1 Global Significance**

The OECD has played a particularly influential role in shaping national policy making within the field of education particularly since the 1990's. Founded in 1961, there are currently 34-member countries with over one hundred countries worldwide being influenced by its expertise. The founding purpose of the OECD was to stimulate economic progress and world trade this purpose has broadened in recent years to encompass the promotion of policies to improve both economic and social well-being. (Zajda, 2018; Volante, 2017; Martens et al. 2007; OECD, 2012). As part of this broader purpose the OECD expanded its work in education, developing a broader scope and influence during the 1980's (Mundy, 2009). The underlying rationale for OECD's advancement into education was founded on the recognition that education is an important aspect of a nation's economy. Drawing upon human capital theory and the imperatives of the global knowledge economy the OECD re-defined the purpose of education as being central to national economic competitiveness (Grek, 2009). Adopting a quantitative approach, The United States, France, Austria, and Switzerland OECD focussed on developing evidence-based approaches derived from the analysis of educational indicators and statistics in the 1980s. Critically however, the OECD began to coordinate international education programmes during the 1990s (Fischman et al, 2018; Martens, et al., 2007). As a result, nation states within the OECD began to lose their directive role in guiding educational policies as the OECD began to dominate the leadership of international education initiatives. Marcusson has argued that the OECD advises national agendas and whilst it does not have any financial, legal or regulatory powers it influences nations by means of soft governance (Marcusson, 2003). A key instrument of the *moral* pressures exerted by the OECD is the publication of comparative educational statistics, country reports and international comparative assessment studies. A central aim of these publications is to lead the global education agenda particularly with regard to social challenges and the need to develop educational policies and professional practice to

address issues raised by inequality and poverty (Verger et al., 2018; Edwards, 2018; OECD, 2008, 2010, Hopmann, 2007). Critically however it may be argued that whilst the OECD cannot exert authority over national education systems (through legally binding or coercive instruments of governance by comparative rankings and ratings) it is able to communicate ideas and recommendations as a form of ‘crucial governance’ through the dissemination of hard facts elicited through quantitative measures within the PISA triennial survey (Niemann and Martens, 2018). Importantly, the emphasis on societal well-being and quantitative measures may be at odds with the values and principles underlying national education systems. Here, the dominance of the model used by the OECD can overturn fundamental ideals and principles underpinning national curriculums, assessment frameworks and educational practice (Moos, 2017; Sellar and Lingard, 2013).

The establishment of PISA testing in 2000 enabled the OECD to publish educational indicators globally thereby strengthening the ability of the organisation to exercise soft governance over national education systems. Importantly the OECD has also reinforced the arguments of governments challenged by national opposition to new policy reforms influencing political debate and affecting key values and principles. (Ball, 2017; Figazzolo, 2009; Martens et al., 2007) The central rationale underpinning the educational advice provided by the OECD is that it is important to support national economic growth and the development of educational quality. In particular the OECD places strong emphasis on improved learning outcomes and equal opportunities for all students but through its particular approach (Verger et al., 2018; Edwards, 2018; OECD, 2007; Fowler, 2012; Mausethagen, 2010).

Critically however, as a number of commentators have argued the recent imposition of neo-liberal economic and social policies has led to increased inequality, poverty and social exclusion particularly since the Financial Crises of 2007/2008 (Ydesen, and Au 2018; Ball, 2013; Walker, 2003; Apple, 2001). Within this context there has been a re-orientation towards quantitative approaches and an over simplification of avenues to improving educational quality (Grek, 2009; Simola et al., 2011) Here, a focus on national standardised testing as a way of measuring inequalities in educational outcomes for students within national settings has dominated policy discourse and development. This has led to the eclipse of broader discussions relating to the complex relationship between economic and social inequalities and educational attainment particularly with regard to the structural constraints which lead to underachievement (Mowat, 2018; McCluskey, 2017; Jennings and Sohn, 2014; Kumashiro, 2012).



## **1.1.2 Local Significance: Inequality and Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education**

The issues raised above are particularly relevant to Scotland where the structural conditions that cause inequality are a key area of public debate particularly with regard to the relationship between inequality and educational attainment. (Mowat, 2018; White, 2018; McCluskey, 2017, Sosu and Ellis, 2014; Paterson and Iannelli, 2007).

There is clear evidence of a persistent gap in attainment between pupils from the richest and poorest households in Scotland. This gap starts in preschool years and continues throughout primary and secondary school. In most cases, it widens as pupils progress through the school years. Most importantly, the poverty attainment gap has a direct impact on school-leaver destinations and thus the potential to determine income levels in adulthood.

(Sosu and Ellis, *ibid* p. 3)

The recent imposition of the National Improvement Framework as a form of quantifiable standardised national testing has certainly brought this area of debate to the fore, particularly for teaching professionals and this forms a central area of analysis within this thesis.

A seminal report by the Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] has been particularly influential in driving this agenda. ‘Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment, (2013c) provides a comprehensive OECD review of evaluation and assessment frameworks for advancing school outcomes across twenty-five OECD countries.

Each participating country prepared a detailed background report. A more detailed review was then undertaken within fifteen countries including Scotland. The detailed review carried out in Scotland resulted in the report ‘Improving Schools in Scotland, An OECD perspective’ (2015). This report prompted a national debate in Scotland involving policy makers, teaching unions, teaching practitioners, and parents.

Critically, the EIS’ [Educational Institute of Scotland] response to the Scottish Governments Fair funding to achieve excellence and equity in education consultation (October, 2017) underlines a central concern of teaching unions that changes in the assessment and evaluation framework within the Scottish education system need to be informed and designed by evidenced based practice and supported by adequate resources.

The EIS shares the Government's stated aims of raising attainment and seeking to address the poverty related attainment gap. The EIS strongly believes that change needs to be evidence based, planned by educationalists with recent practical experience of schools, to have stakeholder support, and to be delivered within a realistic timeline with appropriate resources underpinned by local democratic accountability.

(EIS, 2017. Submitted response to Scottish Governments Consultation on Fair Funding to achieve excellence and equity in Education.)

Recent studies have underlined the importance of developing an evidence-based approach led by educationalists with practical experience of schools in Scotland (Brown, 2017; Dimmock, 2016). Here teacher involvement in the policy making process is regarded as being critical to the development of effective and relevant policies (Drew, et al 2016). It may be argued that the tensions between an imposed standardised national testing to help teachers understand learner's needs and professional agency and autonomy may be pivotal in this emerging educational reform. (Biesta et al. 2015; Priestley et al., 2012)

## **1.2 Purpose of The Study**

The background of this thesis presents contextual information regarding the OECD's influence upon national education systems. Further, it also shows that these influences translate into policies in relation to the introduction of national assessment systems. On the ground, the Scottish education systems development and implementation of the CfE has been widely researched and discussed along with its Assessment is for Learning framework with regard to its appropriateness to meeting the needs of all individuals. Most importantly here, the impact of national testing of primary aged children has widely been debated amongst researchers, practitioners and politicians alike. Whilst the influence of OECD policies on national assessment systems and the impact of national testing of primary aged children have been widely researched as discrete topics, the relationship between these topics has drawn little attention. This reveals a significant gap within research in this field particularly in relation to the way in which teachers receive, perceive and enact significant changes to national assessment.

The current study aims to inform knowledge and understanding of the perception and role of teachers and headteachers within the Scottish Education System in designing and implementing assessment and evaluation reforms. This is a qualitative comparative small-scale instrumental

case study carried out in four schools in Scotland, UK. Here, an analytical framework was specifically tailored to support the comparative dimension of this thesis, (see methodology and analytical framework chapters). In total, four headteachers and eleven teachers were interviewed along with documentary analysis of past and present national and international policy documents. These interviews provided rich, in-depth and insightful data into the perceptions of teachers and headteachers in relation to changing assessment frameworks in Scotland over time. In order to understand how teachers, receive, perceive and enact large scale national and internationally influenced policies such as national assessment, the research questions are posed in two parts:

### **Part 1- Policy Making**

1. How have the national education system and professionals in Scotland received and interpreted internationally recommended assessment designs over time?

### **Part 2 – Situated Activity**

2. What are teachers' perceptions and professional experiences of assessment systems in Scotland with regards to;
  - a. Professional judgment, autonomy and accountability
  - b. Re-shaping of models of assessment over time during curriculum development within the 5-14 and Curriculum for Excellence Framework
  - c. Practical and contextual issues

## **1.3 Limitations and delimitations of the study**

The study is a small-scale design involving fourteen interviews with teachers and head teachers across four schools in Scotland. However, the research design aims to analyse in depth the perceptions of teachers and headteachers with regards to assessment as a component within the curriculum. As such it recognises the need to carry out further research on a broader scale. Nevertheless, the data collected from this thesis is substantial enough to create in-depth analysis and draw conclusive arguments which contribute to potential future research including the component of CfE curriculum continuation, coherence and development.

In addition, the National Improvement Framework [NIF] (2015) is a newly introduced, fragile and highly controversial policy which is arguably politically driven. As such, this reform may well be reversed in the near future. However, by interviewing teachers and headteachers

regarding their perceptions and experiences of assessment over time, this work portrays an in-depth representation of how assessment frameworks might be shaped and implemented from the ground. See Chapter 5 Methodology for further details.

The comparative dimension (multi-dimensional) of two curriculums within a singular country over time may suggest limited scope in its analysis and design. However, the uniqueness of Scotland's NIF case is significant to other countries as it diverges sharply away from its holistic and inclusive Curriculum for Excellence. Where cross-country analysis of assessment frameworks is possible, the timeframes and historical background were not exactly parallel. For example, Norway and its national testing with their AiFL program was considered as a possible comparator as they shared similarities. However, Scotland's central aims are to tackle issues such as deep inequality and the 'attainment gap' which are exclusive to their introduction of such assessment frameworks. Here the understanding of past present and future knowledge and perceptions by teachers becomes critical to informing national policies. It would have been useful to undertake a longitudinal study where teachers could be interviewed for the same subjects repeatedly over a period of time. However, this would need to be extended over years and research for the current thesis is time limited. To overcome this limitation the current research utilises an analytical framework which intentionally provides the tools for analysing the reflections of teachers and headteachers in relation to their past experiences of assessment and evaluation. The documentary analysis is supplementary to this (See Chapter 5 Methodology).

The topic is fairly large and does include some broad research questions. Here, it may be argued that this requires a large-scale sample size which is useful in creating findings that may be regarded as more generalisable. However, with limited time, a small sample size and documentary analysis provided rich and in-depth data which are starting points for large scale future research. See Chapter 5 for information on limitations and sample size. An in-depth description of the schools which participated in the study may have provided rich and contextual discussion to contribute and connect to the concerns raised by teachers. However, the sample required anonymity and was not suitable for ethical reasons suggested by the NSD [Norwegian Social Science Data service].

## **1.4 Contribution of the study**

The research places teachers at the centre of the study in order to gain knowledge and understanding of how they receive, perceive and enact the changes to national assessment frameworks in Scotland. Their judgements are regarded as highly central by the Scottish Government themselves as they argue that new national standardized testing will be used to inform this judgement further (The Scottish Government, 2015). Importantly, the findings from the study will also encourage future research to include the perceptions and experiences of education professionals in contributing to the development of curriculum and assessment frameworks, future policies and implementation in Scotland and other national settings.

The analytical framework utilizes the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) who have developed a theoretical tool for understanding agency. Here, the theory allows teachers to reflect back on their experiences, whilst also considering their present practical and evaluative stance, and relating this to future possibilities. In addition, their *voices* under policy made decisions are critically considered (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001). This study will aid the development of analytical frameworks and tools for the analysis of process in other countries, settings and circumstances within the field of education.

## **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis begins with an introductory chapter outlining the significance of the study. Here a contextual background is provided along with the research rationale, aims and objectives of the study. The introductory chapter also provides a discussion of limitations, delimitations and contribution of the study to existing knowledge in the field. This is followed by Chapter 2, which provides the international and national contextual background to the study. Information regarding the historical context of the OECD and Scotland, as well as their current situation is critically discussed with this chapter. Chapter 3 then provides a critical review of a broad range of theoretical and empirical literature in the field. The Analytical Framework (Chapter 4) and methodological design and approach (Chapter 5) for the study is then presented in detail. Chapter 6 provides a detailed, in-depth analysis of the primary data collected in the study. Following this, Chapter 7 critically analyses, discusses and summarizes the key findings and themes of the study. Finally, concluding remarks and suggestions for future research are presented in Chapter 8.

# 2 Contextual Background

## 2.1 International Context

This thesis draws upon recent research evidence from a range of OECD countries to provide a broad context for the analysis of shifts and developments in assessment frameworks in OECD countries over time. Here, full cognisance is taken of the interaction between policy borrowing and broader influences and pressures from INGO's such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO. This interaction is strongly influenced by key drivers within the notion of a global knowledge economy (Edwards, 2018; Erkkilä, and Piironen, 2018). Here, the historically and culturally determined ideological basis within national education systems governed centrally at national level has been challenged by profound and dynamic transformations in information and knowledge at global level (Niemann and Martens, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Hultqvist et al. 2018; Cowen, 2018; Aasen, 2012). A number of authors have argued that a global knowledge economy requires evidence-based decision-making processes at international and national level (Verger, 2018; Evans, 2017; Härter, et al, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Edwards, 2018). Thus, standardised centralised forms of assessment and comparative data are crucial to the efficacy of long-term policy strategies within a global knowledge economy. (Evans, 2017; Lawn, 2011; Verger, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Lundahl and Waldow, 2009). Critically, this has also impacted on power structures that shape the governance of national education systems. A number of recent studies have argued that whilst the OECD does not have legal authority over national education systems it exercises '*soft governance*' as a way of influencing national education systems by providing international quantitative data, information and reviews to enable effective decision making within the policy making process at national level (Volante, 2017; Lewis, 2018; Moos, 2017). This process has also been conceptualised as '*crucial governance*' through ideas and recommendations that are legitimated through hard facts derived from quantitative measures within the PISA triennial survey (Niemann and Martens, 2018). Thus, it may be argued that the OECD influences national education systems through instruments of both '*soft governance*' and '*crucial governance*' across distinct national education systems (Niemann and Martens, 2018; Lewis, 2018; Volante, 2017; Moos, 2017; Meyer and Benavot, 2013; Hopfenbeck, 2014; Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014; Lundgren, 2006),

Recent research has also revealed the complex interaction between international drivers and policy borrowing within and between OECD countries (Lingard, 2018; Clapham, and Vickers 2018; Ashton, 2018; Rutkowski 2007; Minina et al., 2018; Phillips and Ochs, 2003). Exemplifying this Scotland has utilised and adapted curriculum and assessment frameworks from Australia and other OECD countries (Britton, 2018; Hayward, 2018; Lingard, 2018; Schweisfurth and Slade, 2018; Breakspear, 2012; Carvalho and Costa, 2015). The OECD is currently regarded as the leading authority in educational policy largely because of its highly regarded educational measurement indicators, production of norms, and role in governance by comparison (e.g. PISA) (Erkkilä, and Piironen, 2018; Volante, 2018; Grek, 2009). The OECD's Educational Policies, recommendations and programmes strongly influence national governments constructing public discourse and by framing and shaping public discourse and the ways in which policy makers conceptualise and act upon social and economic challenges. OECD Policy Documents, and guidance also influence educational access, and benefits different people groups.

## **2.2 Scottish Context**

The historical and cultural antecedents of the Education system in Scotland are situated within a broadly social democratic polity (Robbins et. al.,2018; Scott and Mooney, 2009; Hindmoor, 2018); Turock, 2007). Importantly Education has always been a devolved responsibility even before formal devolution in 1997 when the Scottish Parliament was re-opened in Edinburgh (Jarvis, 2018; Jones, 2015; Wormald, 2005). This is crucial as it has enabled a more flexible approach to policy borrowing particularly from countries which share a similar social democratic welfare model. This has also led to greater divergence from the Educational systems, curricula and pedagogic approaches in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Furlong and Lunt, 2016; Wilson and O'Prey, 2018). The Scotland Act 1998 gives the Scottish Parliament formal legislative control over all education matters, and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 is the principal legislation governing education in Scotland. Of critical importance for the current study is the degree to which the Education system and more particularly the Assessment for Learning model in Scotland has evolved within a process which combines historical and cultural antecedents and policy borrowing from countries with a similar social democratic background such as Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark.

The recent implementation of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) with a form of national standardised testing was a response to criticisms from the OECD (Pisa) relating to the lack of available research evidence in evaluating policy at national level in Scottish education (Mowat, 2018). In this sense it is important then to understand how the NIF has been situated within the Scottish Education System, as a layer on top of curriculum and assessment reforms from 2003-2018 and especially the Curriculum for Excellence [CfE] and Assessment is for Learning (AifL) to fully appreciate the degree to which this marks a departure from the way in which the Scottish Education system and more specifically forms of assessment had previously developed in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Scottish context.

### **2.2.1 The Curriculum for Excellence**

Scotland's educational system has for some time been underpinned by egalitarian principles as evidenced by the support for an all comer comprehensive school system in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hindmoor, 2018; Jarvis, 2018; Furlong and Lunt, 2016). Belief in and support for this was further reinforced by a national consultation and debate in 2004. Almost all high school age children have attended state comprehensives (around 94%) and societal belief in equality of opportunity has further reinforced commitment to this system (Jones, 2016). However, pupil intake is often shaped by the socio-economic status of local neighbourhoods meaning that some schools have particularly high needs in relation to Free School Meal Entitlement- a commonly used indicator of deprivation. It is within this schooling context that innovative curriculum and assessment reforms began to emerge.

In 2003, work began on the development of a new curriculum Curriculum for Excellence [CfE]. Underpinned by a transformative vision with regard to learning, the Curriculum for Excellence aims to prepare children for living and working in the 21st century. Debated and planned from 2002, and implemented fully by 2011, the curriculum provides a broad general education for ages 3-18. It replaced a more traditional set of curriculum guidelines (5-14) which emphasised the individual nature of pupils journeys. In contrast the Curriculum for Excellence provides experiences and outcomes which give teachers freedom to choose how they teach certain topics and is less prescriptive than the 5-14 curriculum (Priestly and Humes, 2010; Priestley, 2018; Kelly, 2009)



Operating as an inclusive system, Scotland aims to deliver an equitable and empowering education for all. Critically, it provides, knowledge skills and attributes moulded by its foundation of collaborative and autonomous teaching practices (Education Scotland 2012; Donaldson, 2010; Drew et al, 2016; Hardy, 2018). Education Scotland inspects and regulates all schools, in Scotland on a regular basis providing a layer of accountability. The main focus being the quality of learning and teaching provided. The curriculum is divided into two phases: ‘Broad General Education’ and the ‘Senior Phase’. The ‘Broad General Education’ begins in early years at age 3, and continues to level 3 of Secondary School (age 15). The aims of the Broad General Education are to: (i) achieve the highest possible levels of literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills; (ii) develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work (iii) develop knowledge and understanding of society, the world and Scotland's place in it; (iv) experience challenge and success so that they can develop well-informed views and the four capacities. Education Scotland describe these four capacities intended for the purpose of the curriculum and to enable children and young people to become; Successful Learners; Confident Individuals; Responsible Citizens; and Effective Contributors. A central aim of the Curriculum for Excellence was to ‘ensure an integrated approach to the new curriculum, assessment and qualifications that will improve learning and teaching’ (Scottish Government, 2011, p.2). Here the curriculum adopts a holistic view of the child and the learner journey with a focus on enabling a flexible and tailored approach to learning and assessment. Children lead their learning within a ‘broad and interdisciplinary approach to learning opportunities’ (p.2 *ibid*). Thus, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was designed as a more coherent, enriched curriculum in comparison to the 5-14 curriculum.

### **2.2.2 The Role of Assessment in Scottish Education from 5-14 to the Curriculum for Excellence**

Assessment is for Learning (AifL), was initiated in 2002, and published by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). In November 2004, this publication laid out a set of assessment for assessment policy documents for children aged 3–18. Assessment is for Learning as a reform is defined and unpacked by national and international systems in different ways. In Scotland, the purpose of AifL is to make positive change to children’s learning and to

improve their life chances encouraging assessment dialogues and metacognition. In 2001, the overall aim underling AifL was to:

...provide a streamlined and coherent system of assessment to ensure pupils parents, teachers and other professionals have feedback they need about pupils' learning and development needs

(Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005, p.1)

This aim highlights the theoretical underpinnings of AiFL in Scotland that are based upon a more holistic view of pupil progress and assessment. More importantly, it connects with the underpinnings of the Curriculum for Excellence, as its main ethos is to create a system that allows participation among all practitioners, leaders, parents and pupils, creating a learning environment which promotes and enhances reflexive practice for progression and development. However more specifically, the programme's goals include the development of good professional practice and confidence in assessment amongst teachers so that their judgements are dependable; the development of credible quality assurance of teachers' judgements locally and nationally, and to the monitoring of national attainment in a way that provides accurate information about overall standards and trends and that promotes good classroom practice. Recent research has supported the development and implementation of AifL in Scotland, (Spencer and Hayward, 2016; Hayward, 2015; Florian and Beaton 2018; Burner, 2018; Priestly et.al., 2014). Here, a number of policy makers and educational advisors to Education Scotland and the Scottish Government have studied its success over time. Some highlight its success in the development of professionals; in particular, Hayward and Hutchison (2005), Robertson and Dakers (2004) have contributed by outlining the progress of the policy and practice of AiFL.

The assessment guidelines had been published earlier in 1991 in relation to 5-14 guidelines put considerable emphasis on professional practice in assessment as part of learning and teaching, promoting what would now be recognized as 'assessment is for learning'. Here, the 5-14 curriculum was quite prescriptive with teachers referring to benchmarks to determine level ability whereas the Curriculum for Excellence uses its Experiences and Outcomes and more recently broader benchmarks for all 'curriculum areas' to make judgement on the pupil ability and progression in a curriculum area (see for example Benchmarks for Numeracy and Mathematics (Education Scotland, 2017)). However, curriculum guidelines for English language and mathematics and new arrangements for national testing in reading, writing and mathematics were published at the same time. These commanded considerable professional and public attention, so that curriculum content and progression through attainment levels, rather

than the quality of assessment practice in classrooms, became the main focus of schools' planning and action. The increasing emphasis on standards, target-setting and accountability in the mid- to late 1990s ensured that measurement, rather than assessment for learning, remained the main priority. The emergence, then, of the more dynamic and dialogic AiFL process from around 2003/4 encouraged a stronger emphasis on the shared experience of the assessment process (Hutchinson, 2001). It appears to have been keenly adopted by teachers in Scotland. It could be argued that this approach highlighted a dynamic and cyclical process focused on individual achievement.

However, during the development of the Curriculum for Excellence, international as well as national pressures from the various political groups active in Scotland led to an acknowledgement that although performance overall in Scotland's schools was good, the disparity between lower achievers and the rest was such that there was real concern that those from the most deprived and disadvantaged groups were missing out (Mowat, 2017). Additionally, the increasing dominance and influence of a quantitative research agenda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century meant that the introduction of the NiF with its standardised testing and measurement of performance was given prominence and lauded as the answer to any attainment gap. The case of Scotland and its National Improvement Framework [NiF] is a unique in the context of shifting assessment and evaluation models against highly grounded international benchmarks. Although it should be noted that the country at the top of such league tables, Finland, does not engage in formal external testing until students reach the end of high school. The emphasis here is on building teacher development and professionalism through further study and on student engagement in learning conversations with teachers as students are encouraged to progress rather than compete (Sahlberg, 2011). This is at odds with the chronological age competition and quantitative measurement encouraged by the OECD. Firstly, we must view the Scotland's positioning in the International league tables [PISA 2017]. This section has critically analysed literature around education and evaluation systems in order to portray the journey to which has led to the introduction of the NIF and its current implementation under national and international guidance in terms of assessment such as national standardised testing and the possible dissonance with the approach taken by AiFL.

# 3 Literature Review

This chapter provides a critical review of existing theoretical and empirical knowledge regarding the issues highlighted in the introduction of this thesis. The review is in two parts. The first section (3.1) offers a systematic review of literature relating to national responses to international policy influences. Empirical case studies in the field are utilised to contextualise theoretical approaches. The section concludes with a critical review of theoretical perspectives on the influence of international organisations on national education systems. The second part (3.2) provides a critical review of theoretical perspectives relating to the study. Here, theoretical perspectives relating to assessment and evaluation. In addition, the relationship between curriculum development, assessment and the impact on teachers as education professionals is examined in detail.

## 3.1 National Responses to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Internationally there are at least two major levers for educational reform. First, I consider large-scale high stakes standardised testing in the pursuit of accountability which is the focus of this section. Second, the understanding of the central role of the teacher in quality assessment practice, understood to be at the heart of learning and learning improvement (Berry, 2010; Black and Wiliam, 2005; Marshall and Drummond, 2006; Wiliam and Thompson, 2017; Harrison, 2005) is explored. Also influential in reform efforts in several countries is the system push for evidence of achievement tied to a commitment to transparency and accountability (Rubenson, 2008; Addey and Sellar, 2018).

The PISA programme forms are an integral part of the OECD's set of policy instruments designed to influence the shape of national education systems through soft governance and 'crucial governance' or 'soft governance' by hard fact (Niemann and Martens, 2018). Operating on a triennial basis it offers a comprehensive international comparative survey of the learning outcomes of students in OECD countries in mathematics science, and reading. In 2018, the OECD added the concept of *global competence* to the comparative survey of learning outcomes (Care, 2018). Global competence is described as the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different

cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development (OECD, 2009). There is a dearth of research on the impact of the PISA programme on reforms in educational assessment and evaluation at national level. However, the normative pressure placed on national school systems to improve performance within a competitive global environment has been acknowledged within a number of studies (Ball, 2003; 2015). Critically however, there are very few studies which examine the role of stakeholders and actors in shaping national responses to PISA results.

## **3.2 Empirical Case Studies: National responses to international policy influences**

This section presents studies on national responses to international policy influences and will present a critical review of International case studies including (Queensland) Australia, Norway and Scotland. It will engage with the way in which these countries have succumbed to the OECD demands for standardisation, transparency and accountability through a focus on outcomes. Moreover, this section will critically examine studies relating to the Global Education Reform Movement [GERM] (Ball, 2017; Sahlberg, 2011). This section will also critically review theoretical perspectives relating to the influence and impact of international organisations upon national education systems and policies.

### **3.2.1 NAPLAN Australia**

The National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced in Australia in 2008. It is a Federal Government measure that aims to provide teachers, policy makers, parents and head teachers with diagnostic information relating to the performance of students. There were two main drivers for the introduction of this reform. Firstly, political pressures played a significant role in the national drive for accountability through standardised testing. Secondly Australia was heavily influenced by assessment reforms within other OECD countries. In particular NAPLAN was heavily based on the assessment model within England and the United States and although this assessment policy received critical scrutiny, Australia still continued to implement assessment in the form of NAPLAN (Masters, 2010; Ward, 2012).

A central aim of NAPLAN when it was introduced in 2008 was to initiate a robust tool for diagnostic information. This tool would be made available to teachers and schools, education

policy makers and national government (Masters, 2010). A number of studies have argued that this form of performance measurement is closely linked to New Public Management reforms which have been introduced in a number of OECD countries in recent decades (Christensen and Laegrid, 2011; Newman, 2004). Critically as Power (2004) has argued in line with New Public Management [NPM] reforms in other areas of welfare provision, NAPLAN was a quantitative tool enabling policy makers to measure performance, develop managerial strategies and generate changes in professional teaching practice and assessment frameworks (Power, 2004).

Significantly the introduction of NAPLAN was strongly influenced by the OECD (Rizvi and Lingard 2009; Taylor and Henry, 2007). Here, successive Australian governments have followed the OECD's consensus on national education systems as functioning to ensure economic growth at national level. This rationale effectively legitimates the use of international benchmarking of student performance and the publication of comparative data generated by international surveys such as PISA. Critically, comparative international testing is viewed as a way of evaluating national education systems. Recent research has evidenced the acceptance of PISA as a way of evaluating national education systems across most OECD countries. This acceptance is located within a broader sphere of convergence of education systems across OECD countries (Taylor and Henry, 2007; Grek et al., 2009; Wiseman & Baker, 2005).

In Australia and across a number of OECD countries the international comparative data and diagnostic reviews provided by the OECD emerged as a pivotal tool within national educational policy decision-making within national education policy. Grek et al., 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Wiseman & Baker, 2005). Critically also the reception and translation of forms of governance encouraged by the OECD within national education systems is also evidenced by the way in which NAPLAN also led to a focus on the effectiveness of professional practice (Rowe, 2006; Masters, 2010). However, it could be argued that international education policy is clearly positioned as an instrument designed to ensure the adequate performance of national education systems rather than progressing the meaningful development of the teaching and learning process (Wiseman and Baker, 2005). National governments are thus able to utilise international comparative data sets such as PISA in order to reform education systems from above. The use of quantitative performance indicators directed at accountability programmes provides a context in which the professionalism of teachers at school level is placed in the spot light (Zanderigo et al., 2012).

Importantly, the publication of national data, which came about through NAPLAN which was made accessible by the 'My School' platform enabled policymakers to comparatively evaluate organisational performance within an international context. Here, policy borrowing became important in Australia (Lingard, 2010) with the quality and training of teaching professionals being increasingly blamed for poor student performance (Dinham, Ingvarsen, & Kleinhenz, 2008; Gale, 2006; Rowe, 2006). Evidence generated by PISA and TIMSS was used to indicate fundamental failings within the teaching profession in Australia (OECD, 2004). In response to these perceived failings new state based professional standards were developed in Australia (Kleinhenz & Ingvarsen, 2004). The reception and translation of international education policies in Australia has thus led to a focus on accountability within the teaching profession with teachers being blamed for *poor PISA results*. Here, the overall performance of students is highlighted rather than attempts to address issues relating to inequality and the attainment gap between children from different socio-economic and ethnic groupings in Australia (Thompson, and Harbaugh, 2013). Thus, following Steiner Khamsi's (2014) notion of reception and translation. The Australian government regarded assessment reforms within other OECD countries as examples of best practice. Here, the high stakes testing model in the USA and England were regarded as being most suited to the kinds of political and cultural transformations that the Australian government wanted to encourage. The underlying agenda of these changes was shaped by the imposition of New Public Management across public services in Australia. Critically, as part of this top-down governance agenda. New Public Management within education focussed on measuring performance, developing managerial strategies within schools and transforming professional teaching practice models and assessment frameworks.

The translation of these reforms within local schools in Australia framed by this NPM agenda meant that teachers were regarded as accountable for the performance of students. Moreover, as Ball (1998) has argued the Australian government covered with a number of OECD states, most closely with England and the USA in adopting NPM forms of standardised national testing. However, the realisation of NAPLAN as a new assessment model was formed with a recontextualization of policies derived from the international level. The prevailing political context in Australia was one in which there was already a drive for accountability and move towards a focus on New Public Management across a range of sectors. The development of NAPLAN was symptomatic of this drive.

The OECD focus was on the quality and quantity of teachers in Australia as well as on organisations such as the Ministerial Council of Education and the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme (Gonczy, 2008). Professional standards became the subject of close scrutiny even to the point of an econometric study of a decline in teacher quality in 2004. (DEEWR, 2007; Goodrum, Hackling, & Rennie, 2000; MCEETYA, 2004; Skilbeck & Connell, 2004). The study was based on the argument that teacher competence and aptitude could be evaluated against the performance of students using outcomes. Importantly however it may be argued that this form of evaluation does not take account of key contextual variables between classroom and school environments (Kenway, 2013; Lingard, Sellar, and Savage, 2014; Ward, 2012; Considine, and Zappalà 2002). For example student outcomes are impacted upon by class size particularly in relation to teacher pupil ratios. Moreover, developmental differences between children may mean that some classes and school communities require more resources. In addition rural and urban schools may require different levels and forms of resourcing and failure to address these differences may impact on student outcomes. Finally, some schools are situated in economically deprived areas and higher levels of poverty and inequality may impact on student outcomes (Marks, 2014; Lamb, 2007; Checchi, 2006; Collins, McLeod, and Kenway, 2000). The Australian Education Union made the counter argument that teacher's performance 'could not be measured in a quantitative way' (Ferrari, 2007, p.7). Importantly, significant differences in demography and forms of governance between Australia and other OECD countries impacts upon the operationalisation of national standardised testing in distinct settings. Exemplifying this with a population of 24.6 million Australia is significantly larger than Norway which has a population of 5.2 million. (Eurostat, 2018). Moreover differences in the relationship between national and local government in Australia and Norway has implications for the operationalisation of educational reforms within the two settings. Here, both countries aimed to introduce a common national curriculum The Australian government introduced this system in 2014 however as Australia is a federal system the Education Ministers of individual states were responsible for the implementation of the curriculum and as a result there are distinct differences in the curriculum framework and in forms of implementation across the six states of Australia. In contrast, as Norway has a more centralised form of governance it has a uniform common national curriculum across the nation. (Volckmar, 2018; Imsen & Volckmar, 2014; Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014; Department of Education, 2014)



### 3.2.2 Norway

The development of a robust and comprehensive system designed to scrutinise the quality of education across Norway has underpinned policy strategies and initiatives in that country over the past two decades (Prøitz, 2014, 2014; Telhaug et al., 2006; Tveit, 2014). These initiatives were influenced and justified by a seminal report published by the OECD in 1988, 'The Review of National Policies for Education in Norway'.

The report crystallised around three key issues. Firstly, the OECD panel identified the centralisation of governance in Norway as a central impediment to the collation of robust standardised national data sets that the OECD argued were required for effective decision making for the reform and development of the education system. The panel recommended that a system for the systematic and regular evaluation of Norwegian schools should be established. Moreover, the panel argued that there should be clearly identified systems of accountability at each level of the education system. This drive for standardisation and quantification of outcomes from schools is the key driver of documents emerging from the OECD reducing education to a simplistic construction with the idea that good teachers can be measured against standardised expectations of pupils irrespective of individual circumstances or developmental needs. A third major recommendation was that there should be shift away from structural changes towards a focus on the quality of the education system across Norway ironically in a quantifiable measure.

Characterised by a strong emphasis on outcomes and results orientated system OECD reports in 2002 and 2011 reinforced the recommendations of the 1988 report. Critically, a key OECD study in 2011, Review of Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes, Norway was part of a major OECD study involving 15 countries. The study called for a more coherent evaluation and assessment framework in Norway that clarifies and elaborates learning goals and indicators for quality within assessment and evaluation at national level. Finally, the study emphasised the need to consolidate the competence of evaluation and assessment for school leaders and teachers. Critically, there has been considerable resistance from teaching professionals who do not agree with government attempts to shift education policy from process-orientated education toward a results and outcomes orientated system over the last twenty years (Telhaug, 1994). A central argument of teaching professionals is that schools should not be subjected to market competition and forms of New Public Management which valorise management by objectives and results orientated educational strategies. Here

teachers argue that pedagogic approaches are the preserve of the professional autonomous teacher and that evaluation should be organised and tailored by each school. (Telhaug, 1994).

In terms of Steiner-Khamsi's (2014) theory of the reception and translation of policies Norway has implemented reforms at national level in response to a series of OECD studies and reports. Here, the move from process-orientated educational pedagogies based on decentralised governance to a centrally organised outcomes orientated education system has necessitated the transformation of professional teaching practice models and assessment frameworks in Norway. The subsequent debates that have emerged in Norway reveal the challenges faced by teaching professionals in translating government policies and measures into practice. Here, issues relating to professional judgement and autonomy come to the fore.

Historically, Norwegian education policy was founded on the commitment to structures and systems which facilitate the teaching and learning processes led by educational professionals. (Hatch, 2013). Recent studies have shown that whilst some of the OECD recommended reforms have been realised particularly with regard to increased accountability, the fundamental commitment to the centrality of process-orientated education remains in-tact (Hatch, 2013). In particular, a number of studies have revealed the continued overwhelming emphasis on the underlying principles of Assessment for Learning (Tveit, 2014; Hopfenbeck et al., 2013 ; Thronsen et al., 2009). Thus, whilst the recommendations from the 1988 OECD panel and the OECD study of 2011 were given impetus by the relatively poor Norwegian PISA results in 2001, both the reception and translation of International Policies within the Norway has been marked by debates and tensions between policy makers and teaching professionals in Norway (Baune, 2007). Critically however, key components of the reforms advocated by the OECD have been implemented in Norway. These reforms include a national-outcomes orientated curriculum and governing by goals and local accountability (Prøitz, 2014; Aasen et al. 2012).

In addition, a range of measures designed to enhance the effectiveness of evaluation and assessment within the Norwegian education system have been implemented. Here, regulations for assessment have been revised and guidelines have been provided to support an outcome based national curriculum. Critically also, the adaptation of these reforms has led to a national project supporting the development of competences of teaching professionals, school leaders and school owners (Prøitz, 2014). Adopting Steiner Khamsi's theoretical perspective of 'reception and translation' theory (See Chapter 4, Analytical Framework), the reception of educational measures was legitimated through reference to the value of international

comparative data and diagnostic reviews provided by the OECD. Importantly however, as has been evidenced there was significant resistance from teaching professionals during the initial stages of implementation of results led outcome orientated evaluation and assessment systems.

The adaptation of educational reforms characterised by results orientated policies generated at international level by the OECD was thus subjected to a great deal of critical debate during the early stages of implementation in Norway. Critically as Helgoy and Homme (2016) have argued, historically Norwegian education has been located within a social democratic, corporatist political economy within an egalitarian public sector. However, the education system in Norway has been subjected to the extensive implementation of New Public Management over the last 15 years. The promotion of these reforms by centre left governments has led to rapid and fundamental changes in the Norwegian education system. These changes have been characterised by a move towards results led outcome orientated evaluation and assessment systems. Importantly however as Helgoy and Homme (2016) argue, these transformations have been softened by measures to take account of the relationship between school inputs and student outcomes. Here contextual variables relating to factors such as the socio-economic and geographical setting in which the school is located and the degree of alignment between resourcing and the distinct education needs of children within schools were taken into account. These measures were designed to mitigate the impact of New Public Management [NPM]. The negative effects of marketization on social inclusion and equality were also mitigated by educational reforms. The adopting of new post NPM measures within educational policies since 2005 perhaps signals a new period of reception and adaptation and a move away from the view that there will be an inevitable convergence with educational systems across OECD countries. The education systems in Norway and Finland are based on social democratic principles underpinned by egalitarian values and a focus on enabling trust between stakeholders across the education system at national and local level (Afdal and Nerland, 2014; Mølsted and Karseth, 2016; Sahlberg, 2011). Here, both countries create scope for local flexibility in the design and implementation of local curriculum. Critically however as Molstad argues;

In Finland, local curriculum work is constructed as a pedagogical process for developing local curriculum. In Norway, local curriculum work is constructed as a process for applying and thereby delivering the national curriculum. This illuminates that forms of state-based curriculum imply various ways of local curriculum control.

(Molstad, 2015; p.1)

Importantly however within a broader political and social context both countries share a commitment to promoting the social and economic conditions required for political democracy, trust and social justice. Here, it may be argued that whilst there is evidence of the influence of marketisation and New Public Management the fundamental principles of social democracy still largely shape welfare and education policies across the Nordic States (Esping-Andersen, 017; Andrain and Smith, 2006). The impact of these principles is particularly evidenced by educational policies in Finland.

### **3.2.3 Finland**

The achievements of the education system in Finland have been articulated by a number of authors. (Hautamäki and Harjunen et al. 2008; Saari, 2009; Sahlberg, 2011). The OECD echoes these achievements in The Educational Policy Outlook for Finland in 2013,

Finland has been and continues to be one of OECD's top PISA performers since 2000, with students performing in the top ranks in reading, science and mathematics between 2000 and 2009, and low impact of students' background on educational performance.

(OECD, 2013 Education Policy Outlook, Finland, p.4)

Whilst Finland's performance in PISA surveys has been consistently strong compared to other small countries within the OECD, the most recent PISA survey in 2016 indicated that Finland was fourth in reading, 12th in maths and 5th in Science. This represents a fall from 1st in reading, 4th in Maths and 3rd in Science in the 2000 PISA survey. Despite this situation Finland has maintained the key tenets of its current educational policies. As Sahlberg (2015) has argued

The Finnish way of thinking is that the best way to address insufficient educational performance is not to raise standards or increase instruction time (or homework) but make school a more interesting and enjoyable place for all. Raising student motivation to study and well-being in school in general are among the main goals of current education policy in Finland.

(Sahlberg, 2015, p.6)

Significantly, the underlying principles of Finland's education system are radically different from those of the OECD. Teaching professionals and school principals in Finland have articulated the view that large-scale standardised tests are only capable of measuring a narrow range of the full continuum of school learning and that the OECD and PISA encourages the

borrowing of policies that are not relevant to the specific historical and cultural evolution of education systems within national settings. An important achievement of the Finnish educational system has been the low variation in results across and within schools. Thus, the attainment gap between distinct socio-economic, ethnic groups and genders is minimal. The focus in Finnish schools is to work with all learners whatever their family background or socioeconomic status. All students in Finland follow the same subjects within a common curriculum.

Critically there is a central focus on teachers' autonomy, working conditions and social prestige in Finland. There is a burgeoning body of literature relating to the success of the Finnish educational model and a number of factors have been identified however the over-riding factor that has led to the consistency and sustainability of the education system in Finland is the quality, and commitment of teachers within the system (Hautamäki, and Harjunen, 2008; Terhart, 2013; Van Veen and Slegers, 2006; Hargreaves, 2009).

Teachers benefit from a substantial professional preparation within strong socio-ethical foundations relevant to Finnish society. Teachers thus benefit from the respect and trust of Finnish citizens and teaching is regarded as being as important as medicine. Over 20,000 people apply to become primary school teachers each year with only 2000 being selected. Importantly also teachers play a central role in school planning and curriculum development and all local schools are allowed to take account of sociocultural conditions in their community. This flexibility enables the Finnish education system to respond sensitively to educational contexts. Importantly this contrasts with macro environments and socio-political contexts such as the USA and the UK which adopt the global corporate educational model. Here it may be argued that in adopting this model, accountability relies upon national standardised testing of student performance which in turn assumes the quality of teaching within individual schools. The Finnish model lies diametrically opposed to this approach since it adopts an ethical educational paradigm which focusses on the professional autonomy of teachers and the importance of individual and community context bounded by a key purpose – to make schools enjoyable places to be and so to be motivating for individual children's learning and development (Sahlberg, 2015; Hautamäki and Harjunen, 2008).

A central characteristic of this educational paradigm is the way in which the assessment and evaluation of teaching and learning processes is encouraged. Exemplifying this, the assessment of teachers in Finland is undertaken by peers in an informal way. The focus on informality

aligns with the cooperative teaching process. This level of cooperation means that teachers are mutually dependent on one another. Thus, teacher autonomy is experienced through a commitment to individual teaching practice and to the meaningful educational experience of professionals and students in the whole school.

In terms of culture and values, trust is central to accountability within the Finnish education system. When inadequacies are identified in relation to the performance of an individual teacher the rest of the teaching team support the teacher in a respectful way and training is used to overcome limitations and difficulties. This form of collective accountability is regarded as important in Finland as it enables greater flexibility and responsiveness to teaching and learning needs and curriculum development within the school. The OECD (2014) has highlighted the value of this form of collective accountability arguing that Finland has created a self-fulfilling and positive teaching and learning process by focussing on collective self-respect and autonomy for its teachers. Sahlberg (2011) has argued that this level of flexibility and freedom contrasts markedly with the rigid procedures that can develop as a result of external standardised testing cultures within other nations. It has been argued by a number of theorists that external standardised testing may lead to accountability being experienced by teaching professionals as an individual burden and as a sign that they are not fully respected or trusted by stakeholders within their education system (Terhart, 2013; Van Veen and Slegers, 2006; Hargreaves, 2009; Moore et al. 2002; Sloan, 2006).

The Finnish Education system was subject to key reforms in the 1970s. Central to these reforms was commitment to equal opportunity through comprehensive education. Here, the education programme was designed to ensure that all students had equal access to high-quality education whatever their ethnic background or socio-economic status. Critically, the *Peruskoulu* in Finland is the concept that educational outcomes are not influenced by differences in wealth, home background or ethnicity. All students are required to learn in comprehensive schools in Finland (Sahlberg, 2011). The reforms of the 1970's formed a turning point in the Finnish education system as grammar schools, civic schools and primary schools were merged into a comprehensive municipal school governed by local education authorities. Thus, the fundamental principle upon which the Finnish education system is built is the aim to raise national performance relating to teaching and learning by giving every child support rather than focussing on high performing learners. Teachers have high expectations of all learners. Importantly, this egalitarian approach means that learners are not divided into subgroups

according to their previous or expected performance. For Sahlberg (2011) this form of segregation is characteristic of the global corporate education model advocated by international organisations such as the OECD.

Finland's distinctive educational model is characterised by the conceptualisation of evaluation as self-evaluation at school level, local level and national level. Here, the focus is on using cooperative structures, networking and participation to ensure continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes. Continuous professional development is regarded as being central to this. The Finnish education system does not implement standardised testing or test-based forms of accountability. A central rationale for this lies in issues which may arise from the results of high stakes external tests being used in evaluating teaching practice. It is argued that this may lead to teachers redesigning their teaching to meet the needs of tests. Here students may be encouraged to focus on certain subjects such as maths, science and reading to ensure positive PISA survey results. Moreover, it is argued that students will then focus on surface learning and memorising rather than critical thinking and deeper learning.(Sahlberg, 2015). Thus, priority is given to creativity and respecting each learner and the pace and style of their learning. Each learner's unique cognitive development is given priority. The importance of ensuring that teaching and learning strategies meet the unique needs of each learner is also acknowledged by the OECD (2011).

The influence of international policies on education in Finland is thus mediated by a very strong cultural and socio-ethical foundations. In addition, dialogical, cooperative and participative forms of governance at school, municipality and national level are not conducive to top-down external influence of international organisations such as the OECD. Critically, at the heart of this system teachers are accountable to the students in their care. Teachers are trusted by the local school community and national policy makers to deliver this care. Accountability in the Finnish education system is thus bottom up, dialogical and based on cooperation. Trust in educational professionals in Finland is the bedrock of the education system. Here, the commitment of national and local policy makers to dialogue and cooperation with teachers to ensure the well-being and learning of all children within a whole school approach characterises the Finnish education system. The OECD's influence in Finland suggests a very light touch soft governance where ideas and advice may be listened to but the strength of the ideas and principles inherent in the system mean that these would carefully be mediated rather than simply applied. As the discussion below reveals it may be argued that the OECD's influence in

Scotland suggests a stronger form of ‘crucial governance’ where hard facts drawn from quantitative measures within the PISA triennial survey and from OECD national diagnostic reviews were utilised to develop the most recent reform The National Improvement Framework in Scotland. (Niemann and Martens, 2018).

### **3.2.4 Scotland**

In common with the underlying principles of the education system in Finland, the Scottish education system emphasises the importance of teaching and learning processes which are pupil centred and delivered by teachers who are recognised as agents of change with substantial influence on the development of the curriculum (Drew et al., 2016). Moreover, recent reforms in the education system in Scotland have re-orientated planning to regional and local level. However, recent studies have also revealed that there is potential tension since the central government agenda takes precedence as can be seen in the NiF which provides a small degree of flexibility as long as teachers adhere generally to the prescriptive guidance of the NiF (Hamilton, 2017; Priestley, 2015). The design of the Curriculum for Excellence reflects principles of flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of learners, schools and local communities which are regarded as fundamental. Recent research relating to the impact of the Curriculum for Excellence has underlined the benefits of the reform in relation to professional autonomy. (Priestly, 2018; Priestley & Humes, 2010). Here the CfE is evidenced as pedagogic innovation which enables teachers to develop teaching and assessment practices by adopting a reflective culture within schools (Hedge and Mackenzie, 2016; Priestley and Minty, 2013). A number of theorists have evidenced the reflective culture as being embedded within pedagogic approaches within teaching for a number of years. (Hutchinson, and Hayward, 2005; Priestley and Humes 2010).

Implemented in 2011, The Curriculum for Excellence was widely regarded as an innovative S3–18 curriculum, (McAra, Broadley & McLauchlan, 2013). The curriculum is built on the notion of autonomy as a multi-dimensional concept that is responsive to the specificities of school and community contexts. Importantly the concept of autonomy is also conceptualised as relational within the context of a whole school approach as well as being personalised to individual learners. The curriculum focusses on four key capacities for learners as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Importantly, assessment within the curriculum focusses on Assessment is for Learning. Assessment is for



Learning (AifL), was introduced in 2002. In November 2004, the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) provided guidance on assessment and curriculum policies for children aged 3–14 which reflected the holistic and collaborative principles embedded within the Curriculum for Excellence. (Hutchinson, 2001) Assessment is for Learning's appearance is defined or translated by national and international systems in different ways. In Scotland, the main aim of AifL is to make progressive contribution to children's learning to improve their life chances through dialogic engagement with young people. Here it may be argued that this reflects the pedagogic approach in Finland where trust within positive relationships between teachers and students is regarded as intrinsic to effective teaching and learning practices.(Sahlberg, 2018). In 2005, the overall aim of SEED was to:

*“...provide a streamlined and coherent system of assessment to ensure pupils parents, teachers and other professionals have feedback they need about pupils' learning and development needs”*

(AifL - Assessment is for Learning, Information Sheet, p.4 2005)

This aim highlights a key principle underpinning the Curriculum for Excellence, which is to create a system that allows participation among all practitioners, leaders, parents and pupils, creating a learning environment that promotes and enhances reflexive practice for progression and development with pupils and teachers. However more specifically, the programmes goals are to: (i) Develop good professional practice and confidence in assessment amongst teachers so that their judgements are dependable. (ii) Put in place credible quality assurance of teachers' judgements locally and nationally, as part of understanding and sharing standards (iii) Monitor national attainment in a way that provides accurate information about overall standards and trends and that promotes good classroom practice.

Recent studies relating to the development and implementation of AifL in Scotland have highlighted key messages related to professional development and the teaching and the personalisation of the learning process in Scotland (Hayward and Hutchison, 2005; Robertson and Dakers, 2004).

The influence of the OECD on recent reforms within the education system in Scotland has created a great deal of debate. A key catalyst for the reform of the assessment and evaluation system in Scotland were the PISA results in 2016. These results were purely based on scores in Maths, Science and Reading. Whilst Scotland's scores were comparable to the OECD average in all three areas, these scores had decreased significantly since 2012 and were lower than scores

in 2006. Moreover, Scotland was ranked lower in the PISA table in all three areas than at any point since the beginning of the OECD PISA Programme.

The Scottish Government noted that whilst

...the results show that closing the poverty-related attainment gap is a complex challenge which is not unique to Scotland. The welcome improvements in performance of young people from deprived backgrounds, which we saw in the previous results between 2009 and 2012, have been maintained. However, there is still a gap between pupils from the least and most disadvantaged backgrounds – around 3 years’-worth of schooling according to the OECD.’

(John Swinney, Deputy First Minister, Scottish Government speech November, 2016)

The Scottish government’s response to PISA results and the 2015 OECD review of education in Scotland was to develop The National Improvement Framework. This was a framework for national standardised testing. The central rationale for the development of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) was to respond to the recommendation from the OECD that “there needs to be a more robust evidence base right across the system, especially about learning outcomes and progress.” (OECD, 2015 p 12). This contrasts sharply with the Finnish education system where there was little indication of an ‘attainment gap’. Importantly the Scottish Government also argued that its own Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy published in April 2015 underpinned the rationale that ‘we needed to do more to make our education system among the best in the world’ (Swinney, 2016). The reception of policy recommendations from the OECD was made clear by the John Sweeney, Deputy First Minister of Scotland,

These reforms are based on the 2015 review of education in Scotland carried out by the OECD - the same body which runs the PISA assessments published today. In its review report, published this time last year, the OECD said that Curriculum for Excellence was “an important reform” that was the right approach for Scotland. The OECD said we had got the design right but that we needed to take further steps to secure the benefits of this new approach in all parts of the country.

(John Sweeney, Deputy First Minister, Scottish Government speech November, 2016)

In terms of Steiner Khamsi’s notion of reception, The Scottish Government has focussed on closing the attainment gap by adopting the OECD’s recommendation to develop a more detailed measurement system (OECD, 2015). As previously mentioned, standardised testing is to occur at the beginning of primary school (P1) and in P4 and P7 as well as during secondary school (S2). Here, it is argued that this system will provide teachers with benchmarks to assess children’s progress. Critically, the Scottish government also argue that the National

improvement Framework will not ‘constrain teacher professionalism’ (2015, p.2). In particular, the Scottish Government argue the need to adopt a key recommendation from the OECD to strengthen professional leadership which is to use data gathered from national tests to inform schools on how to develop this leadership. However, it could be argued that an emphasis on testing and measurement in order to inform teachers what is going wrong so that they can adjust their teaching does not seem to suggest trust in teachers or their professionalism (Wyatt-Smith and Klenowski, 2014; Harlen, 2005; O’Niell, 2013).

Recent research has begun to focus on the implementation of the National Improvement Framework in Scotland particularly with regard to the integration of national standardised testing within the Curriculum for Excellence and alongside existing assessment strategies with a focus on Assessment is for Learning (Priestly et al, 2015; Priestly, 2016). The current thesis focuses on the perceptions and experiences of teaching professionals in Scotland to gain an insight into the impact of assessment reform on teaching and learning processes, teacher agency and professional autonomy. In doing so the research highlights ways in which professional teachers at national level translate and adapt national educational reforms that have been strongly influenced by international policy recommendations and which may be at odds with the principles underpinning the system while also challenging the trustworthiness of teacher professionalism.

### **3.3 Section Summary**

This critical examination of these individual countries case studies has shown that the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) may strongly influence the relationship in reception, translation and responses of national governments to international policy influences (Rubenson, 2008). The commonality between the four case studies reveals the focus from the OECD on instituting systems that produce reliable standardised robust data that does not take account of the role of education professionals and other key stakeholders within national education systems. Finland is the exception, as its success in regard to outcomes without national standardised assessment throughout the school years and its emphasis on enhanced teacher professionalism and trustworthiness run counter to this particular reform pathway. Moreover, studies relating to convergence theory argue that the influence of the OECD on national education reforms has led to the pre-dominance of national standardised testing within most OECD countries (Verger, 2018; Ydesen and Au, 2018; Fischman et al. 2018 ).

A number of researchers have pointed to the negative impact of the OECD's influence on national education systems. (Niemann, and Martens, 2018; Lewis, 2018; Volante, 2017; Verger, 2018; Ydesen and Au, 2018; Figazzolla, 2009) In particular the triannual PISA survey has deeply influenced educational practice in a number of OECD countries. As has been described earlier in this chapter, the PISA survey itself tests the achievements of 15-year-old students in Maths, Science and reading and is conducted in over 60 countries. Countries are ranked according to these achievements and there is substantial media coverage of these rankings. Here, as we have seen in the country studies above poor or unexpectedly poor results from the PISA survey often lead to a radical overhaul of education systems. Indeed, the so-called PISA shock has led to major criticisms of national governments and perceived political need for action in response. A number of experts in the field of education have expressed deep concern about these often far reaching reactive reforms. (Hopfenbeck, 2018; Wiseman, 2013; Owens, 2013; Dall, 2011; Silander and Valijarvi, 2013; Andrews, 2013; Kamens, 2013; Lockheed, 2013; Sellar and Lingard, 2013a; Mayer and Benavot, 2013).

As the country studies earlier in this chapter have revealed the specificity of each national setting has exposed cultural and historical differences in the development of education systems and practices. Finland stands out as it has adhered to underlying approaches and principles in education with the intent to ensure that schools are interesting and enjoyable. Whilst Finland has not reacted to the most recent PISA results by implementing radical reforms in evaluation and assessment, Australia, Scotland and to a lesser degree Norway have reacted to the International Education Agenda articulated by the OECD. As has also been shown the response of educational professionals in all of these countries indicates the contested nature of national standardised testing and outcome orientated education. Here, reforms in many OECD countries have focussed on the accountability of professionals in ensuring that children perform well at standardised tests. Yet, as we have also seen standardised testing itself is the subject of a good deal of critique by educationalists.

PISA has led to the escalation of standardised testing within national settings often being used to legitimise the extensive use of testing (Ball, 2001). Exemplifying this, in the USA, PISA led to the Race to the Top programme and the extensive use of standardised testing for students. Students were ranked and labelled within this programme and the results are published widely. The stigmatisation of students and schools within this system has undermined the motivation of students (White 2018; Lingard et. al., 2014; Kenway, 2013). Critically also it has been

argued by a number of theorists that PISA leads to short term reactive policies designed to improve rankings but not to deal with longer term issues particularly with regard to sustainability and closing the attainment gap within national settings. Here, as has been seen with the implementation of the National Improvement Framework in Scotland whilst the aim is to close the attainment gap between wealthy and poor students it is clear that the depth of and complexity of economic and social inequality in Scotland requires a long-term multi-sector policy approach. Moreover, it is important to ensure that children do not become de-motivated by tests (Harlen and Deaken-Crick 2010; Goldstein, 2004). Importantly PISA currently also assesses a narrow range of educational outcomes and does not take account of artist or physical development or collective imagination and endeavour. Although it is the case that it will measure Global Competence in the next survey (OECD, 2018). Significantly, the OECD focusses on the economic role of education in society rather than promoting active citizenship. As we have seen in the Scottish case study, the Curriculum for Excellence focusses on active citizenship for a global knowledge economy and is concerned with democratic participation, well-being and self-growth. A central concern as was evidenced in the Norwegian case study is the impact of the OECD on professional pedagogies within national settings. Here initial resistances to reform from input and process-orientated to outcome results orientated teaching was symptomatic of concerns relating to the impact of standardised testing on the teaching and learning process and the autonomy of teachers. Finally, as the emergence of debates between teaching professionals, school leaders and policy makers within national settings has shown, the legitimacy of the OECD to influence national education policy needs to be critically examined.

In conclusion as has been shown in all four country studies Stierer-Khamsi's theories of reception and translation and theories of convergence are relevant to understanding the influence of international organisations on national education systems. This will be used within the analytical framework of this thesis. In addition, global convergence theory is evidenced throughout the country studies as being pertinent to a deeper understanding of the influence of the OECD on national education systems. This will also be discussed in more depth in the analytical framework.

### **3.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Evaluation, Assessment and Achievement**

The concept of situated learning defines classroom assessment as a way of broadening learning, enabling children and young people to engage actively in reflective practice and to lead their own learning. This section synthesises a range of theoretical perspectives relating to the role of assessment, achievement and evaluation. It is critical to explore various approaches to evaluation and outcomes in order to formulate reasonings behind introducing national evaluation systems. This section also positions teaching professionals and school leaders at the centre of critical and theoretical debate. The section begins by constructing and conceptualising a framework for assessment by using a Scottish example. It then sets out to define evaluation and raise questions regarding the dynamics of data and outcomes within formative and summative assessment types.

### **3.4.1 A Framework for Assessment**

Conceptualising assessment and overall evaluation in education has been a central focus in contemporary research. In particular, it has been noted that there are increasingly high expectations of teachers and students to succeed on prescribed levels of national and internationally set benchmarks (Kamens and McNeely, 2009). These expectations are growing and expanding, with increased emphasis upon 21st Century Skills, knowledge and competencies in the face of demands from modern and global challenges (Care, 2018; Grayson, 2014; OECD, 2009).

In a search for a response to these demands, Fiala (2006) studied and compared the aims of 161 countries by analysing international documents between 1955-65 and 1980-2000. Five similar fundamental changes were discovered: “(1) higher levels of interest in individual “personal and emotional development” and in “citizenship” as concrete national development aims in and of themselves in 1980–2000, (2) greater emphasis on the development of “national identity,” (3) more stress on “equality” and “democracy” as goals of education, (4) increased interest in education for “world citizenship,” and (5) dramatically less focus on education for economic development and on the single-minded concern with education for “employability.” (Kamens and McNeely 2010, p. 9, p. 10). However, the content of curricula and their assessment frameworks have been affected by the increasing demands of the OECD over time (Volante et al., 2018; Verger et al., 2017). In addition to this, national demands and expectations include; closing the attainment gap and reducing inequality, improving teacher development standards and improving curriculum quality and coherence have dominated

education reform agendas (Hayward, 2007; Hayward et al. 2014). Within this context the construction of a contemporary and projective framework for evaluation and assessment in any country will prove to be complex. However, the case of the Scottish Education System and its current 'Framework for Evaluation/assessment' (Figure 1, below) provides methodological tools of which are currently sensitive to the autonomy of teaching professionals who are central agents of this framework. Here it may be argued that the voices and perceptions of teaching professionals in relation to the imposition of the National Improvement Framework alongside additional national standardised testing requirements are critical to the successful of an formulation assessment framework (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001; Biesta, 2015; Emirebayer and Mische, 1998; Jones and Egley, 2011). Emphasising this as Figure 1 (below) illustrates how Scottish teachers can face a complex interaction of external and internal demands and procedures related to assessment and evaluation within their everyday practice.

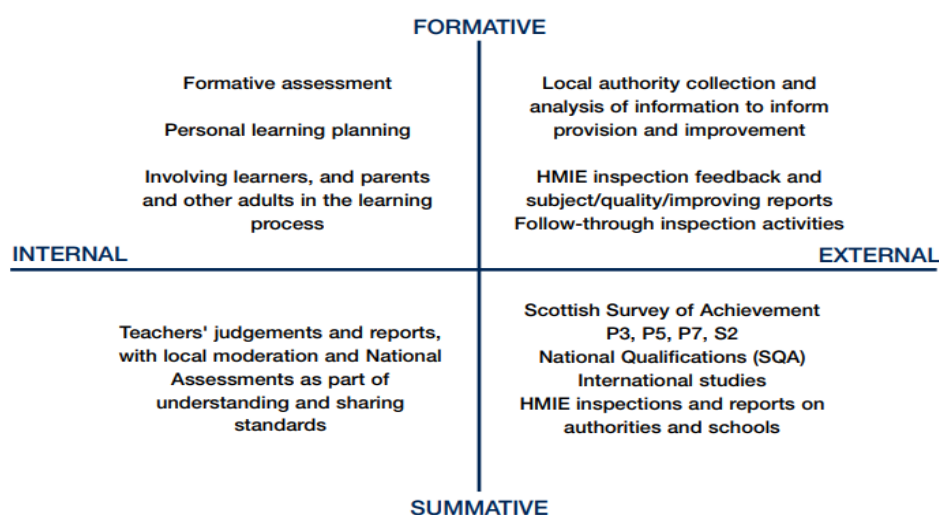


Figure 1: Framework for Assessment (Education Scotland, 2006, p.7)

### The Role of Formative and Summative Evaluation

The role of formative and summative assessment in education has provided a central focus for educational theorists and practitioners for many years. A key aspect of this debate has been the relationship between formative and summative assessment. Summative assessment is regarded has traditionally used to judge what the learner had achieved at the end of a course or block, (Taras, 2009; Harlen and James, 1997) whereas formative assessment is the process through feedback is provided at each stage of the learning journey to enhance learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Nash, 2011; Shute, 2008; Shute and Kim, 2014). A number of theorists have

argued that combining both forms of assessment is a more useful way of informing the judgement of teaching professionals when formulating an overall evaluation of individual progress (Harlen and James, 1997; Black et al., 2004; Taras, 2001).

Stobart (2008) conceptualised learning as a social process that lies at the heart of social constructivist theories. Here, the individual and collective understandings of the process of learning are brought together. Thus, constructivist theories focus on learning as a tool through which individuals understand their own world whereas notions of situated learning are located within collective understandings of the teaching and learning process.

A simple definition of formative assessment is evaluation by the use of ungraded “brief tests” used by both teachers and pupils that are used as aids in the learning process. It has now become an effective tool for teaching where assessment for the use of grading, judging and then classifying is not the primary use of assessment (Bloom, 1969; Wiliam, 2006). An assessment of a student is formative if it is contingent on their outcome and if it shapes that student’s learning (Black and Wiliam, 1995).

McManus (2008, p.3) further defines formative assessment as

...a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievement of intended instructional outcomes.

Here, the formative approach to assessment is actively played out on the level of situated classroom activity where the pupil holds as much ownership over his or her progress and achievement as the teacher (Black et al, 2004). However, Glaser (1990) points out that assessment as an apparatus must be used in support of student learning, rather than an indication of current or past achievement as the teacher (Black, 2004). In this instance, Glaser (1990) argues that assessment is an ongoing journey which supports learning. Here, the traditional method of learning *of* assessment has transformed into assessment *is* learning (Sahlberg, 2018; Popham 1995; Wiliam 1992; Bloom, 1969; Glaser, 1990) Furthermore, Golstein (1992) asserts that testing should not be seen as a static activity as it may have little impact upon the pupil. If the pupil holds ownership over his or her learning, then their outcome will improve. The equal role of individual students in the decision-making process is viewed as central within personalised learning and is viewed as an essential aspect within the Curriculum for Excellence.

Assessment that is personalised ensures that every learner is involved in decisions about the type of assessment that allows them to show what they have learned most effectively. Just as



personalisation means a broad range of approaches to learning and teaching, it also means a variety of approaches to assessment. Assessment approaches within qualifications are being broadened to reflect personalisation more directly.

(Education Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence Briefing Paper, 2012, p.2)

Moreover, practicing and engaging in ‘authentic’ orientated assessment is what Stiggins (2002) suggests is the best approach in order to apply skills and knowledge that a pupil has mastered progressively. Here, the performance of the students becomes a more *meaningful* task to assess. As Bransford and Vye (1989) argue, knowledge cannot simply be passed onto us, we must construct our own meaning of the world by the use of first-hand interactions, experiences and information (Gulkers et al., 2004). In *authentic* assessment practice, Glaser suggests that assessment should:

...display to the learner models of performance that can be emulated and also indicate the assistance, experiences and forma of practise required by learners as they move towards more competent performance

(Glaser, 1990, p.480)

In other words, situations where problem-solving is taking place within a classroom; portfolios in which criteria is to be broad and in-depth; dynamic testing which assesses pupil responses to various kinds of instruction are needed as a wider range of assessment strategies which in turn will produce a wider range of scope of cognitive knowledge and skills (Harlen, 2005). Glaser asserts that the hybrid *ipsative-criterion referenced* approach must take into account individual circumstances in order to encourage the learner to progress. In the context of formative assessment, if criterion referencing were to be the only method of assessment, then pupils would effectively become discouraged by targets and standards created by actors other than themselves. Within formative assessment, information should be used *diagnostically* with regards to the perspective and needs of each pupil which is an essential part of teaching (Sahlberg, 2018; Taras, 2001; Black et al, 2004; Stiggins, 2002; Dunn and Mulvennon, 2009). Contextually, this method can be used as an effective way of revealing and pin pointing the nature of specific problems that the pupil may be facing with regards to their academic development.

To Glaser (ibid) both students and teachers must be able to receive ‘executable advice’ during assessment; as in knowledge must be constructively assessed in order to aid further

progression. In turn, students will learn how to assess and evaluate themselves in a constructive and progressive way. Assessments must in themselves focus upon the student's ability to use the skills and knowledge learnt, in order to move forward (Taras, 2001; Glaser 2001). In this case, formative assessment is essentially *criterion-referenced* and at the same time is *ipsative* or pupil-referenced (Glaser, 2001). This is where judgement is placed mostly upon how much effort has been put into a pupil's work and the content of their work over time. A piece of work and its feedback being judged is not only dependent upon the relevant criteria, but is also dependent upon the pupil themselves (Harrison, 2005) However, this is dependent upon the school and teacher in supporting and facilitating effective ongoing progression of each individual pupil. According to Stobart (2008) Teacher judgements must be in collective alignment with the way pupils perceive their own individual progress, including supporting feelings of uncertainty. As Sahlberg (2017) argues

Data from standardized tests cannot inform a teacher about these important hidden cognitive forces. Therefore, it is small data that can help teachers understand why some students don't learn as well as they could in school.

(Sahlberg, 2017. p.3)

### **Summative for formative purposes**

Broadbent et al., (2018) suggest that summative assessments can be used for formative purposes. Here, summative assessments evaluate performance at a set point in time, particularly after the end of a unit or set of material (Stiggins, 2002; Bell & Cowie, 2000; Black and William, 1989; Black et al, 2004). Various scholars and teaching practitioners would suggest that summative assessment would not be a sufficient as a singular method of evaluation (Bell and Cowie, 2000; Weinger, 2005). Combining the two creates a mixed methods approach to assessment with a qualitative and quantitative component which provides information to the teacher which then enhances teacher judgement. This is only on the basis that summative assessment is used for formative purposes of internal use with regards to the assessment framework above Harlen (2007) points out the purposes of summative assessment in relation to its internal and external uses. Here, summative is used internally within school for the sake of keeping records and making reports of progress passed onto teachers, children and parents. Externally, summative assessment is used for statutory requirements such as national testing. With regards to the external uses, Harlen (2007) further argues that the outcomes of these assessments are accountable for some of the 'high stakes' that

are attached to summative assessment results. This implies that differences in outcomes may be due to the pressure placed upon children to achieve. The effectiveness of teachers is often judged by a certain proportion of children reaching certain levels within national tests.

### **Section Reflection**

The problem with summative assessment not only lies in the situational social and emotional impact it has upon the child, but the long-term diagnostic affect it has upon judgement on the basis of a single method of evaluation within the overall assessment framework. However, Pollard et al. (2000) as well as Harlen, (2007) have evidenced that when accountability of a school is based upon a single method of evaluation such as external summative assessment data, that data impacts upon the methods chosen by teachers within internal summative and formative assessment. Here, teachers become vital in gathering information that encompasses summative and formative forms of assessment on an interpretive and long-term observation basis (Harlen, 2007; Harlen and Deakin-Crick, 2010; Livingston and Hutchinson, 2007; Hutchinson and Hayward, 2007). The following sections discuss this in further depth.

### **3.4.2 The Role of the Teacher in Assessment**

Effective change happens when people believe that what they are doing matters in their world and that they are not simply responding to what someone else has identified as important.

(Hayward et al., 2014, p.50)

This section seeks to explore and define the role of the teacher in internal assessment within the assessment framework. In particular, their role in enacting *assessment for learning* under the conditions provided by education authorities and policy makers and school leaders. Most importantly, this section confirms the importance of the role that teachers play, and highlights how theories of assessment are carried out through their action as agents of change (Kirk and McDonald, 2001; Biesta et al., 2015). Thus, their suggestions for improvement are regarded as central to the development and success of any assessment framework that has been implemented over a period of time (Hayward and Spencer, 2010). This is demonstrated in the following subsection.

## **Assessment is for learning and its actors**

Hargreaves described Assessment for Learning as ‘a teaching strategy of very high leverage’ (2004, p. 24). Here, following Hayward et al’s (2014) study on exploring the success of AiFL, several positive aspects of this programme have come to light. Teachers have highlighted that the programme has had a positive impact upon their teaching practices and approaches, and a significant enhancement in their confidence as teachers. During the process and implementation, teachers also became aware that:

- Attention has been diverted from curriculum coverage and turned to an increased focus on learning how to learn and improve teaching.
- There is an increased concern to develop, support and facilitate learners to become independent in their learning.
- There is a realisation that there is a need to ensure understanding as a consistent element of teaching.
- Teaching practice needs to develop new strategies in order to facilitate pupils in enhancing new and dynamic ways of thinking.
- Pupil self-esteem and confidence in engagement in their work has improved, along with their attainment.

These reflections or realisations are significant to AiFL and its development and improvement (Hayward et al., 2014).

### **The role of the teacher: Drawing on findings from the study (above)**

Consistency in this reflexive approach to teaching and learning for practitioners is what Kirk and Macdonald (2018) suggest contributes to their ownership and continuous improvement of the curriculum (Hayward and Spenser, 2010). Additionally, the study found that even when attention is drawn away from the curriculum content, the technicalities of teaching (learning to teach, teaching to learn) contribute to the development of the curriculum either way. Thus, their shared ownership in the making and developing of the *curriculum* is crucial as teachers’ voices become sufficiently heard.

The previous study by Hayward et al. (2014) demonstrated the role that teachers play as they facilitate the improvement of assessment is for learning. Here, educational theorists such as Dewey and Vygotsky shared a similar view that learning is socially constructed in nature and that the autonomy of the pupil should be promoted by the facilitator within the learning environment

(Glassman, 2001). This mirrors the growing concern to support and develop students to become independent in their learning as previously expressed by teachers from the study. However, in promoting independent learners, teachers commonly find difficulty in balancing control and relaxation over instruction and activities (Hayward et al. 2014). This may affect independence in tasks such as self-assessing and peer assessment for the learner (Glaser, 2001; Wiggins 1992). In addition, Black and Wiliam (2004) found that the focus had shifted away from the teacher thinking of themselves and placing more emphasis upon the pupil. The role of the teacher here is to explain the process of assessment and step back for the learner to carry on assessing themselves (Black and Wiliam, 2004). Similarly, the ‘realisation that there is a need to check for understanding as a consistent element of teaching’ proves the facilitation of learning to assess and learn uncovers new procedures and checklists for the teacher, moving away from checking for understanding at the end of a unit such as in a test or summative assessment approach (Shepard, 2000). This holistic approach in evaluating is a preferred method of choice for teachers in respect of gaining understanding of progression and identifying the ‘next steps’ in learning. Here, Scott (2003) argues that the use of dialogue and communication between pupil and teacher enhances the judgement of the pupil in developing the next steps.

## **The Teacher Pupil Relationship**

### **Feedback and Dialogue**

It has been suggested that formative assessment is essentially about ‘feedback’ (Scott, 2003). Ramaprasad (1983) highlights the notion that feedback bridges the gap between summative and formative as well as the relationship between the learner and the teacher. Furthermore, Sadler supports this claim, and further recognises that feedback is integrated into the learning cycle as long as it is used by the learner. Sadler identifies key premise for pupil improvement which requires for them to become pro-active in the “capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production’ (Sadler, 1989, p.119). This cannot be achieved without the use dialogue of both actors in *doing* feedback (Wiliam and Black, 2004; Sadler, 1989).

### **Quality of interaction**

Black and Wiliam (1998a) argued that ‘the quality of the interaction [between pupil and teacher] ... is at the heart of pedagogy’ (p.16). The foundation of assessment for learning is the relationship that is built between teacher and pupil. Here, Drummond (2003) argues that the use of checklists, criteria and figures creates an imbalance in this relationship, placing the power in the assessor’s

hands. In contrast to this divide, an everyday observation and interaction that seeks to identify improvements to be made contributes to the quality and integrity of the interaction is key for the development of both actors (Harlen, 2007; Drummond, 2003).

### **Adjusting and adapting**

A key advantage in formative assessment is the ability to adapt to the particular needs of the child (Black and Wiliam, 1998). The results of an assessment are formative in nature if they are used to adapt to meet the needs of the child or student. In addition, another key advantage of formative assessment is that it allows the teacher as a reflexive practitioner to use their knowledge and socially constructed life experiences to make a subjective judgement over *how* the child should move forward. This becomes more effective than summative assessment where standardization does not consider relevance in regards to issues the child may be facing (i.e. situational constraints, dyslexia, poverty, problems at home). It therefore offers personalisation of assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Harlen and James, 1997). Within this, the teacher must come to an understanding that to ensure formative assessment becomes effective, their strategies and practices to teaching and learning must then *adjust* and *adapt* (Black and Wiliam 1998; 2004).

### **Collaboration, professional development and shared Leadership**

Formative assessment requires collaboration between teachers as well as parents in order for learning to move forward and progress (Hayward et al., 2014). In order for information regarding the level of ability and progress to be passed onto significant actors in the students' circle, all actors must become engaged in collective participation (Popham, 2001; Garet et al. 1999). The same applies to when a new framework or initiative has been introduced, as Black and Wiliam (2004) argue that the initiative should start with teachers sharing findings, strategies and previous knowledge at the start of the school year which then leads to an explicit formulation of an "action plan". Here, professionals develop new approaches of practice through the use of effective collaboration and engagement, creating professional learning communities (Garet et al. 1999; Wenger, 2010; Ainscow, 2016). However, it has been noted that effective professional development needs to attend to both content and process for improvement purposes (Reeves et al., 2001). With regards to process, professional development is most effective whilst it relates to the local circumstances in which teaching practitioners function (Cobb et al., 2003). This process tends to take place in situation over a period of time rather than during a workshop or a meeting (Cohen and Hill, 1998). However, teachers may collaborate under a support system by gathering their collected data or experience over time as Black and Wiliam (2004) have suggested. Here, the

introduction of Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) which focus upon assessment for learning in Scotland, have demonstrated the effective use of collaboration and improvement in teaching practice towards improved student attainment (Ainscow, 2016; Wenger 2010; Donaldson, 2011; Wiliam and Thompson, 2006; Hayward et al, 2014). Moreover, collaborative forms of responsibility amongst educational professionals are regarded as being central to establishing trust between teachers and school leaders. Here it may be argued that collective responsibility for student learning encourages a more shared approach to leadership (Lambert, 2002; Lambert et al, 1995; Muis and Harris, 2003). Here it has been argued that it is essential that teacher leaders move away from the traditional notions of leadership in the individual sense, and instead working together towards characterizing leadership in the form of shared leadership (Muijs and Harris, 2003). Thus, teachers are encouraged to lead within and beyond the classroom and work as part of a community working towards improving educational practice (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001; Bowls and Troen, 1994).

### **Professional Judgement: “Assessment overload”**

A disadvantage of Assessment for Learning which uses both summative and formative forms, is that there are more requirements to meet which leads to an experience of an assessment overload (Harlen and James, 1997). Here, teachers are required to; meet expectations made by other actors surrounding the child’s progress, manage demanding and complex situations, adjust to the personal, social and emotional issues of a class of thirty children or more, and meet the demands and expectations of modern competencies and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills towards ensuring better learners in the future (Leiberman, 1995; Bennett and Gitomer, 2009). Here, the structures and cultures that frame professional practice and capacity should enable teachers to meet these demands and collaborate more effectively (Priestley, et al., 2015). The considerations should include the way in which assessment systems impede upon professional autonomy and practice (Harlen and James, 1997). Sahlberg (2007) has argued that an emphasis on standards and accountability ignores the teaching and learning process and would not encourage teachers to improve.

### **Accountability versus Autonomy**

Educational systems in the UK appear to have embraced the age of accountability standards and benchmarks meaning that the significance of educational assessment has intensified (Ball, 1998). In turn, schools, local authorities, and most importantly teachers have become more accountable in retaining benchmark standards belonging to prescribed national and international demands (Livingston and Hutchinson, 2017). However, providing a framework which enhances autonomy

and empowerment of professionals may allow decisions to be made that are based upon content within a curriculum, how children should be assessed and set level standards (Conley, 1991). This understanding of autonomy is what Engelstad, (2003) conceptualizes as the “freedom to act” or positive freedom which means to enable the participant to act upon their own assumptions within social settings. This contrasts heavily with the concept of ‘freedom from coercion’ or negative freedom is freedom of which is damage by external actors or impacts of which are experienced as forced. Here, it is important to understand the distinction between the two in relation to how individuals perceive their freedom or autonomy under certain circumstances and whether they feel liberated to act on their own. Mausethagen, (2015) argues that this depends upon the mutual trust between multiple level actors in carrying out professional obligation within a particular setting or circumstance. It may be argued that, in Scotland, the emphasis on external testing in primary schools at three key points in order to inform teaching decisions suggests a lack of trust in teacher professionalism.

### **3.4.3 ‘Assessment literacy’, ‘Intelligent accountability’ and Validity**

Similar to Englestad’s (2003) theory on freedom, O’Neill puts this into practice and suggests that professionals who work in public services which are accountable to their stakeholders should inspire their trust. Here, stakeholders should depend upon professionals to act in their own autonomous interests. However, Livingston and Hutchinson (2017) contend that increased accountability and directing pupil learning towards auditing performance may lead to a lack of trust by teachers and additionally limit the autonomous agency in adapting to individual needs. Within educational settings balancing monitoring and auditing requires trust in professionals and an emphasis upon self-evaluation (O’Neill, 2013). Here, according to Cowie and Croxford (2007) measuring should not distort the purpose of schooling and these should purposefully encourage the development of each individual pupil to the fullest potential. Adopting the *Intelligent accountability* approach to education policy with regards to monitoring and evaluating requires transforming a culture of trust within a system which values professionals in their judgement of pupils and their progress (Sahlberg, 2007; O’Neill, 2013). This approach starkly contrasts with *consequential accountability* where school performance and raising attainment is measured and judged by strict inspection and standardized testing. Indeed, in order to ensure true validity, confidence has to be placed upon the quality assessment, processes and its evaluation tools underpinned by *intelligent accountability*. Here, Mansell and James (2009) argue that this validity is ensured by assessment literacy of certain considerations and methodological concepts such as



*interpretation plausibility, ethical considerations, measurement of quality* over pupil learning, and the impact of assessment over learning and outcomes. Evaluation and monitoring can be regarded now as a *bottom up* process and in the hands of the professional who can then share and offer support in developing policy within the education community (Livingston and Hutchinson, 2017).

### **The use of data and pupil outcomes**

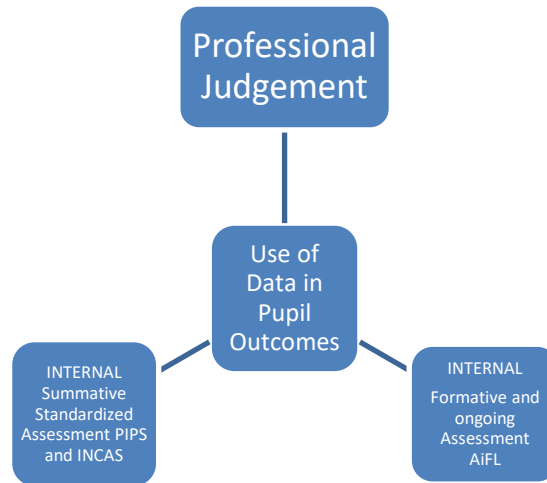
As previously mentioned in the introduction, there is a concern amongst teachers, headteachers and parents over how data and results from national standardized tests will be used (Hamilton, 2017; Mowat, 2018; Marcus, 2016). This section focusses upon the internal use of data and its relationship and contribution to the external role of evaluation (Figure 1).

The crucial feature of formative evaluations, for both Scriven and Bloom, is that the information is used in some way to make changes.

(Wiliam, 2006, p.254).

Ravitch, (1996) argues that in order to retain coherence and make changes within a system of evaluation, performance standards should be collectively understood in order to gain equality of educational opportunity. These standards, he argues, should be judged by similar measurements of performance to ensure validity and reliability even when assessment is informal or formative. However, Popham (1995) argues that perceptions are subjective when making observational judgement within context, and additionally, measuring in the same circumstance is difficult when faced with complexities such as varying level abilities within a classroom (Leiberman, 1995; Black, 2002). Nevertheless, Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) argue that light should be shed upon the search for the existence of scientifically based evidence that supports the theoretical and empirical claims that formative assessment directly contributes to educational outcomes. However, Black and Wiliam (2004) suggest that positive educational outcomes depend upon the gathering of data from the emancipation and support of evaluation used internally, only undertaken within the school community and by its agents. Here, the use of formative assessments is used to diagnostically make judgement within the classroom as well as to facilitate improved pedagogical practice and instruction (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2009; Doyle, 2003).

## The Use of Data in Pupil Outcomes Tripod:



*Figure 2: The use of data and outcomes: classroom level (Drawn from above literature and elaborated by researcher)*

The tripod diagram above illustrates internal use of data in pupil outcomes. However, Scriven (1967, p.41) suggests two roles of which evaluation might play *externally*. On one hand, the role of data assists the on-going improvement of a curriculum. On the other,

...the evaluation process may serve to enable administrators to decide whether the entire finished curriculum, refined by use of the evaluation process in its first role, represents a sufficiently significant advance on the available alternatives to justify the expense of adoption by a school system. (pp. 41-42).

Here, the tripod method serves two sides of the assessment framework; the internal and the external. This may assist in the debate over the use of national standardized assessment as it connects both external and internal evaluation tripods and serves two purposes according to Scriven (1967). It may inform judgement; however, its purpose is to improve and refine a curriculum. This regards data as a quantitative apparatus dealing with evaluation in large numbers. However, qualitative data informs judgement in small numbers. Thus, the purpose of large-scale data is to identify gaps for improvement within a system or area on a national level (Scriven, 1967).

### **Trickle-down and Trickle-up systems**

The internal and external use of data discussion is mirrored by Stiggins (1992) who argues that

assessment for accountability and classroom-based assessment contrast fundamentally and should not be merged. Here, standardizing classroom tests defeats the purpose of seeking to understand the complex reality of the child. (Sahlberg, 2017). With regards to national standardized testing, the test developer seeks to isolate traits common to all, and to then extract discrete competences, skills and aspects of knowledge in order to gain an insight into the unique and complex learning journey of each individual child. Thus, trickle down testing systems gather data which will be used at local or national level to support teaching practice and trickle up testing systems involves information generated at classroom level which is then disseminated upward to local and national level spheres of decision making. The potential of trickle up systems has been articulated by Sahlberg (2017) who has argued that the use of small data including student narratives, student self-assessment and reflection provide insights into student learning and responses to teaching practice which can be utilised to inform teaching and learning and broader process within the school community. Thus,

Small data can be a powerful idea and a response to increasing attempts to pursue data-driven policies and learning analytics in schools. But small data takes time.

(Sahlberg, 2017, p.3)

### **3.4.4 Curriculum development**

When developing a curriculum, Kelly (2009) points out that careful and strategic planning depends upon three models for coherence and conceptual clarity. One of these models is ‘Curriculum as a process and education as development’ (Priestley and Humes, 2010, p.3), these ideas coincide with the principles of AiFL. Here, a process curriculum is based upon democratic ideals of which enable individuals to become reflexive, autonomous and critical thinkers. This type of curriculum is developed through open-ended and flexible enquiry rather than being based upon pre-determined objectives. However, Stenhouse recognized that the process model relies upon the quality of the teacher, particularly with regard to teacher judgement. A process model is demanding, however offers a degree of professional and personal development (Stenhouse, 1975). This raises fundamental questions over teacher agency and ecology within the teachers working environment (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). Further, Edwards (2007) contends that this development can be constrained by quality assurance protocols, assessment regimes and external inspections of which have inevitably created impossible teaching practice. Additionally, this contrasts with the *objectives* model of curriculum development; notably common in systems such as in the 5-14 curriculum where

performance targets and outcomes are the focus of achievement for a curriculum (Kelly, 2009). Here, the process model raises concerns regarding tensions between the desire of centralizing and formalizing assessment of pupil progress and the informal way of developing through learning. Thus, teachers understanding of these tensions are crucial to the process model of curriculum development (Hayward et al., 2014). They should also share an understanding of how a curriculum is monitored and how society perceives the development of the curriculum with regards to accountability. This may have an impact upon how the curriculum is enacted and operationalized.

Most recently, it has been widely recognised in research on the Curriculum for Excellence that the development of a curriculum thus relies upon the facilitation of supporting teachers and their collective agency (Scottish Executive, 2006, p. 4). In order to achieve this, understanding conceptions, operations, curriculum processes and particular curriculum aims will ensure clarity, coherence and continuation of this process model. In other words, an understanding of '*what is going on*' in *their* curriculum (Hayward et al., 2014; Priestley and Humes, 2010; Kelly, 2009; Donaldson, 2010; Stenhouse, 1975; Drew et al, 2016).

### **3.5 Chapter Conclusion**

In section summary 3.1 key theories such as reception and translation, convergence, globalisation and *glocalisation* theories were found to be critical to gaining insight into the influence of international organisations on national education systems. In section 3.2 key theories such as the role of beliefs in teacher agency and voice, professional judgement, autonomy and accountability and leadership theory and organisational change were found to be central to understanding processes of curriculum and its relation to assessment and evaluation in national settings. These theories are integrated within the Analytical Framework of this thesis in chapter 4.

# 4 Analytical Framework

This chapter presents the analytical framework of this study. These key theoretical ideas were initially underpinned by the literature discovered in the previous chapter. Firstly, the chapter will present the analytical framework built by theories relating to teacher voice and teacher agency (Biesta et al, 2015; Priestley et al., 2013; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Kirk and Macdonald, 2001). The concepts of autonomy, accountability and leadership will then be discussed to support the framework of agency and voice (Sahlberg, 2018; Muijs and Harris; 2003; Engelstad, (2003). This framework has been formulated in order to analyse *perceptions* and ways of *enacting* on the policies that teachers have *received*. Finally, the chapter presents concepts behind international policy reception and translation by Steiner-Khamsi (2014).

## 4.1 Teacher Agency and Voice

As agents of change which requires strength, resilience and more importantly here, voice. Biesta et al., (2015) looked at ways in which experienced teachers achieved agency in their day-to-day working contexts under the implementation of the *Curriculum for Excellence*. The central focus of the study was to identify factors which promote or inhibit teacher agency within such situational contexts and curriculum changes. Further, the role of teachers' beliefs is at the forefront of this study and this current thesis as it is widely recognised that teachers as agents are pivotal to change, challenge and implementation (Priestley et al, 2013; Priestley et al, 2015; Goodson, 2003; Priestley, 2011; Leander and Osborne, 2008). Agency has been largely theorized in sociological literature in discussions over the structure-agency debate (Giddens, 1984).

This concept of agency highlights that actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment [so that] the achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and context unique situations.

(Biesta and Tedder, 2007, p. 137; emphasis added)

Agency here is described as being something that individuals do rather than what they possess. More specifically, agency requires an emphasis upon the 'quality of the engagement actors with temporal relational contexts for action not a quality of the actors themselves' (Biesta et al, 2015 p.626).

Here, the thesis views agency as a mechanism for investigation of issues within education and most importantly, assessment. The previous quote by Biesta et al. (ibid) questions the perceptions of agency where the focus should be upon the quality of teachers engaging in action within contexts with a temporal lens rather than the quality of the teachers themselves. Here, Priestley et al. (2012) contends that the extent to which teachers achieve agency depends upon the situational contexts and environmental conditions that they are actively engaging in. There are particular constraints such as a prescriptive curriculum and strict testing regimes which limit this agency. However, utilizing a theoretical framework for analysing agency enables us to identify whether or not this agency is limited or whether it is liberated.

#### **4.1.1 Three dimensions for analysis**

Furthermore, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) framework for agency expands the analytical framework so that it can view agency from the past, to the present and the future. Their ideas are reflected upon pragmatism. The reflections of teachers' agency enables insight into their expertise from the past, how they practice and the projections they have of the future. Their agency has been built by a dynamic interplay of these three key dimensions and 'how this interplay varies within different structural contexts of action' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 963). As this is an interplay of three dimensions, Emirebayer and Mische (1998, p.972) illustrate that they vary as a '*choral triad*' which resonate separately, however do not always have '*harmonious tones*'.

##### ***Iterative Dimension***

This dimension of agency activates selections of thoughts, experiences and actions by actors from the past. This is consistently incorporated into practical action which enables actors to maintain stability in their identities and interactions within institutions over time (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 626).

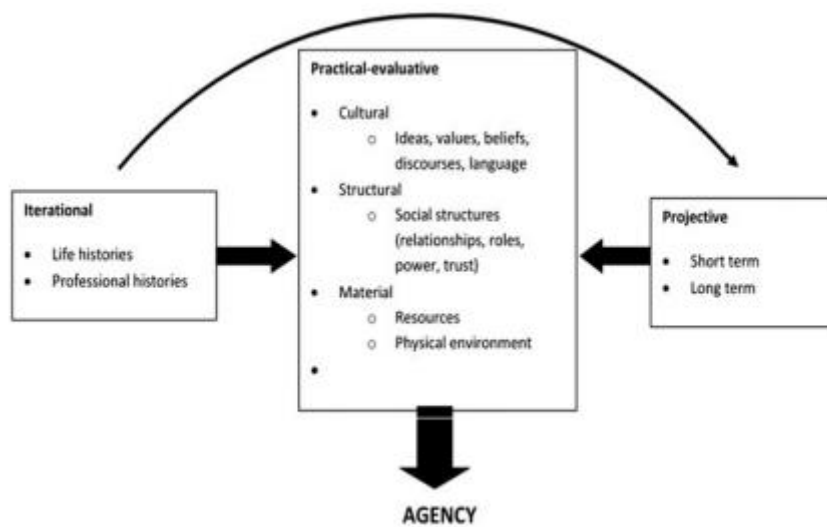
##### ***Practical-Evaluative Dimension***

The *practical-evaluative* dimension is essential to understanding transformations to contexts over time. This dimension enables actors to make judgements by the use of normative assumptions against 'alternative possible trajectories in response to emerging demands, dilemmas and ambiguities of presently evolving situations' (ibid, p.971).

### ***Projective Dimension***

The projective dimension incorporates the ‘imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future’ (ibid, p.971)

These intertwined dimensions demonstrate how agency is regarded as a combination of context and time. Emirbayer and Mische conceptualized this as ‘temporally constructed engagement’ where it is not only important to understand the individuals’ life-course, but to engage and understand transformations of social contexts over time:



*Figure 3: Model for understanding achievement of agency elaborated by Biesta et al, (2015)*

This diagram of the *three-dimensional interplay* was adapted and illustrated by Biesta et al, (2015). It represents the role of beliefs in teacher agency, looking at where beliefs originate from. It views professional histories, current structural and cultural circumstances and future projections. This thesis utilizes this framework to take into account perceptions and experiences from the *past, present* and *future* to grasp an understanding of how teachers receive, perceive and enact policies such as national standardized testing. As an addition, in order to understand agency in assessment reform, Kirk and Macdonald (2001) argue for the awareness of *Teacher Voice* which provides a key to understanding the problems concerning transformation of with regards to implementation. This will assist the analysis of the findings further with regards to seeking to understand the perceptions or challenges of teachers and head teacher as they look to the future.

## 4.1.2 Autonomy vs Accountability

Autonomy theory is much like agency theory as freedom can be restricted by coercion or in other words, by pressures from above (Engelstad, 2003). As accountability measures increase, this may inhibit actors experiences of positive freedom. This was previously mentioned in the literature review where positive freedom refers to autonomy to act on assumptions within social settings; this contrasts with negative freedom or freedom from coercion, where external factors impact upon their experiences as agents. This typically depends upon how autonomy and the legitimacy of this is perceived by actors or professionals. Thus, the idea of mutual trust between external structures and internal actors becomes important in expanding positive autonomy (Mausethagen, 2015). Here, viewing and also *achieving* agency as temporally constructed engagement depends upon the structural environment of which the professional is positioned and situated in. The relationship between internal and external actors influences the way in which professionals perceive their autonomy or freedom (Engelstad, 2003; Biesta et al, 2015; Priestley et al, 2015). However, this requires a certain amount of accountability and professional responsibility. Sinclair (1995) for example argues that accountability is intrinsically related to the personal values and beliefs such as respect for human dignity. Here, accountability is determined by dedication to personal, ethical and moral values (Sinclair, 1995). Similar to Biesta et al's agency theory, experiencing accountability is a way of enhancing professional development through learning. This depends upon whether or not accountability has been experienced within the context of positive freedom or whether it has been experienced as a form of surveillance and coercion (Mausethagen, 2015).

## 4.1.3 Intelligent accountability and Collective responsibility

Intelligent accountability also stresses the principle of mutual responsibility. This means that accountability dynamics can be regarded as a two-way process. On the one hand, schools should be held accountable to decision-makers and the community for the overall outcomes of schooling.

(Sahlberg, 2011, p.54)

As previously mentioned in the Literature Review, intelligent accountability according to Sahlberg (2007) involves a collective responsibility over the achievement and outcomes of all students. It is built upon mutual accountability, mutual trust and collective professional responsibility. Moreover, it integrates internal accountability involving school processes, critical reflection, school community interaction and self-evaluations with external forms of



accountability such as monitoring and sample-based assessment. This ‘collectively accepted conception of learning’ (Ibid, 2011, p.54) transcends traditional forms of assessment and evaluation. Additionally, Aho et al. (2006) argues that collective responsibility forms an important component of cooperation and trust-building within educational systems. Here, current approaches such as distributional school leadership, raising status of teachers and developing professional learning communities facilitate trust building and cooperation.

## **4.2 Distributional Leadership Theory**

As has been evidenced above theories of distributional leadership are central to understanding the construction and role of Collective and collaborative accountability and evaluation within education systems. Theories of distributional leadership encourage schools to re-locate leadership from notions of fixed, pre-determined attributes and roles towards a role that is recognised as flexible and evolving, (Hardy, 2018; Harris, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2009; Hallinger and Heck; Leithwood and Mascall, 2008, Gronn, 2000). As Sahlberg (2018) argues, the notion that everyone involved in the practice and delivery of education can participate in collective and democratic forms of leadership with a school community is pivotal to theories of distributional leadership, (Harris, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2009; Gronn, 2002). Here it is argued that all participants within the school community have leadership attributes which they can operationalise within collective leadership. (Gronn, 2000).

As discussed in the literature review distributed leadership theory therefore is particularly helpful in providing greater conceptual clarity around the terrain of teacher leadership for three main reasons. Firstly, it encompasses the practices and actions of a range of groups of individuals in a school who work at guiding and mobilizing staff in progressing teaching and learning within schools. Secondly it infers a social distribution of leadership enabling the operationalisation of leadership to be distributed across the work of all who work within the school community. Here leadership is delivered through the interaction of multiple leaders. Finally, interdependency involving the shared responsibility for leadership is integral to distributional leadership. A critical aspect of distributional leadership are power relationships within schools which become more equalised as previously fixed leadership roles within the school hierarchy become blurred. (Harris, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2009; Gronn, 2000). Centrally, distributed leadership is characterised by collective action, shared agency and empowerment. Teacher leadership is underpinned by the notion that all members of the school

community have the capacity to lead and that leadership is a form of agency that can be shared across the school community (Leithwood et al. 2009; Muijs and Harris, 2003; Harris, 2013). Importantly, it is also characterised by a form of leadership unrelated to notions of headship (Gunn, 2000). This thesis utilises notions of distributional leadership within the analytical framework to understand and elucidate how it is operationalised within schools. In particular, this thesis critically analyses the construction and role of collective agency and empowerment within collective and collaborative accountability and evaluation (Hardy, 2018; Sahlberg, 1992)

### **4.3 Policy Reception and Translation**

Theoretical understandings of influence and role of international organisations and policy borrowing across national education systems have coalesced around two approaches. Here as Steiner Khamsi (2014) argues normative approaches to policy borrowing promote the importance of comparison of national educational systems in order to identify best practice which can then be transferred to other national educational systems. A distinguishing feature of ‘best practice’ within normative approaches to policy borrowing is the notion of best performing educational systems. Critically, performance is measured through benchmark performance indicators or external references constructed by international organisations such as the OECD. In contrast, analytical approaches to policy borrowing focus on the analysis of why and when external references are referred to and also critically explores the influence and impact of imported policies and professional practice models on existing educational policies and professional practice models. Here the focus of many studies is also on the political and governance processes through which these transfers occur particularly with regard to power relationships between stakeholders within national education systems. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) has developed concepts of reception and translation to facilitate the critical analysis of these two key stages of policy borrowing.

Reception examines the first point of contact with the global educational policy as it impacts at local level. The analysis focuses on the selection process. Here the questions raised is why these new forms of best practice have been selected for implementation within the host educational context. The analysis then moves on to the critical analysis of the second stage of policy borrowing. This analysis focuses on the local adaptation of the educational policy or practice borrowed from global education policy or from a specific external national education system. Here, Steiner Khamsi (2014) utilises the concept of translation to address the global adaptation

of the internationally derived educational policy or form of best practice. Steiner Khamsi's (ibid) analytical framework is utilised within the analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews in the current thesis to shed light on the way in which forms of assessment and evaluation which have been borrowed from global educational policies and practices have been received and translated within the Scottish educational system. This analysis is contextualised within a critical analysis of the reception and translation of policy borrowing with other national contexts within the literature review and also within the discussion chapter.

This thesis aims to gain further understanding of the processes and implications of policy borrowing for national education systems. Integral to this understanding, are debates relating to the soft convergence of national education systems under INGO's. In particular, the analysis centres on the convergence of national education systems with a focus on how INGO's impact on identity and national decision-making processes (Ball, 2003; Dale, 2000; Rutkowski, 2007).

### **Chapter Summary**

This analytical framework has been formulated to analyse and support the data and discussion as well as to address the research questions. It has conceptualized the theories to frame two parts of the Findings Chapter (Chapter 6); Part 1: Analysis of International and National Policy documents and Part Two: Situated Activity. These theories and concepts include; The three Dimensions of Agency and Voice by Emirbayer and Miche (1998), Autonomy versus Accountability, Intelligent accountability and collective responsibility, Distributional Leadership, and Steiner-Khamsi's theory regarding Policy Reception and Translation.

# 5 Methodology

This chapter identifies the rationale behind the methodological approaches used throughout this study. As previously mentioned, this is a qualitative and in-depth comparative study of two past and present curricula within Scotland. This chapter will present; (1) the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the type of research carried out, (2) the analytical tools strategically implemented to interpret the data collected, (3) the ethical considerations, quality measures and limitations of the study. Throughout this chapter, various methodological tools are presented to help provide an insight into the process of this study. The research makes use of the Adaptive Research Model design where ‘*social research is understood as a continuously unfolding process*’ (Layder 2013, p.12). This flexible approach is appropriate for the reflexive nature of this research.

## 5.1 Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

The research strategy includes the *ontology* of constructivism which views social reality is constructed by the subjective experiences of individuals as they interact with the external world (Bryman, 2012, Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The foundation of this qualitative study philosophically lies under an interpretivist epistemological stance. Here, *epistemology* refers to questions regarding how the social world can be researched (Bryman, 2016). According to the *interpretivist*, it is important for the researcher as a social actor to become aware of the differences between people in terms of how they interpret their lived experiences. This allows the research to dig deep into questions regarding individuals’ views formed as part of their experiences within a socially constructed world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Shutz, 1962).

Furthermore, Burrell and Morgan (1992) describe a typically contested debate within the realm of social research between two significant stances of methodology that is, the *ideographic theory vs nomothetic theory*. Within *ideographic* theory, the central concern is to gain an in-depth understanding of an individuals experience by obtaining knowledge first-hand. *Nomothetic* theory focuses upon the research protocol and technique, with an emphasis upon testing hypothesis (Burrell and Morgan, 1992). The study aims not to generalize and therefore the focus of the study is to gain an in-depth investigation of the perspectives of professionals in the past and present situational context (in Scotland).

## 5.2 Research Design and Process

The multi-level and multi-dimensional comparative design chosen for this study was formulated in order to understand the role and perspective of educational professionals by an in-depth and coherent narrative of their experiences under two significant past and present curricula (5-14, CfE with AiFL), and of their future prospects (CfE with NIF). This small-scale qualitative study utilised a two staged methodological process to investigate the three central research questions identified in the introductory chapter of this thesis:

### Part 1 – Policy Making

1. How have the national education system and professionals in Scotland received and interpreted internationally recommended assessment designs over time?

### Part 2 – Situated Activity

2. What are teachers' perceptions and professional experiences of assessment systems in Scotland with regards to;
  - a. Professional judgment, autonomy and accountability
  - b. Re-shaping of models of assessment over time
  - c. Curriculum development within the 5-14 and Curriculum for Excellence Framework
  - d. Practical and contextual issues

The first stage undertaken was *documentary analysis* and the second analysed *empirical* interview data. In the third stage, involved the collection of empirical interdata with teachers and headteachers from diverse primary schools in Scotland. In the third stage the primary data was conceptualised, categorised and saturated down into four multilevel themes formed from the effective use of the methodological and philosophical approaches chosen for this study (see chapter 6). This *categorization* approach assisted in the process of formulating theory and a theoretical framework. Here, Bryman and Burgess (1994) explain that:

Further research is undertaken until the categories are 'saturated', that is, the researcher feels assured about their meaning and importance. The researcher then attempts to formulate more general (and possibly more abstract) expressions of these categories, which will then be capable of embracing a wider range of objects. This stage may spur the researcher to further theoretical reflection and in particular he or she should by now be concerned with the

interconnections among the categories involved and their generality.

(Bryman and Burgess 1994, p.3)

Essentially, the inductive method allowed the study to slowly and reflexively unfold an interpretation of the data (Amoroso and Ragin, 2011).

### 5.2.1 Adaptive Research Design

The Adaptive research design was chosen for this study as it is contemporary and problem based in nature. Issues are likely to occur during the process of this study as for example the NIF is currently politically contested and has also been introduced recently. There are possibilities that lead to change in the research which may include altering the research questions and changing sample selection. Layder (2013) argues that, since institutional and political dynamics can easily shift or alter environments and their agents, this design is most appropriate (Anderson, 1999: Hallowell, 2005, Jensen, 1991).

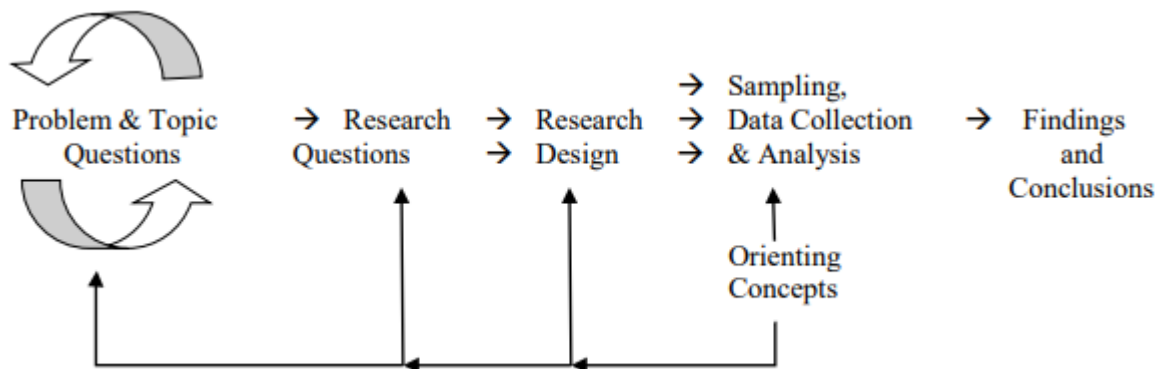


Figure 4 Adaptive Research Model. Continuous Process Overview (Layder, 2013)

To Layder (2013), a flexible design is a logical method as opposed to a fixed design where disruptions can cause significant halts in the research process. (Meyer, Gaba, & Colwell, 2005). The Adaptive Research Model highlights five key elements which coincide with this study:

- (a) Problem Driven Research – Problem Questions concerning “why” and “how” (i.e. *why* national standardized testing in Scotland is being implemented, and *how* do professionals receive and perceive this)
- (b) Adaptive Design – Adjusting throughout; thinking and re-thinking theory as data unfolds. (i.e. inductive approach)

(c) Imaginative Sampling – flexible yet rational sampling; always referring to the problem questions (or research questions) posed in the beginning.

(d) Orientating Concepts – and categorize (see Chapter 6, Findings)

(e) Adaptive Research as an Iterative Process – makes similar links to the study’s theoretical framework (see Chapter 4, Analytical Framework); enables the researcher to be open to “emergent possibilities,”

(Layder, 2013, p. 12)

### **5.2.2 Instrumental Case Study**

This study is considered as *instrumental case study* as it is based on a single country. An instrumental case study involves an aspect of the case rather than an aspiration to undertake a comprehensive study of the case study in all its dimensions (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2014). Here, the *aspect* of the case researched is teacher professional narratives on curriculum reform and assessment processes in some primary schools in Scotland. The analysis of findings is located within an international context and utilises the theoretical lens of reception and translation of international policies and practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Whilst the study focuses upon teachers’ professional narratives of curriculum reform in Scotland over time. It also synthesizes a critical comparative analysis of other OECD influenced country contexts within the analysis. Here, the focus is upon Scotland’s full context and historical specificity. Here, Ragin (1987) argues that each case is to be considered as a whole, taking into consideration of the of all conditions and factors. Two distinct methodological tools have been utilized to consider context, conditions and factors (i.e. rationale, historical background, inequality) of which are documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. There have been several arguments surrounding whether single-country instrumental case studies should be considered as comparative studies (see, Sartori 1991, 252; Collings 1971, 492). Critically, however, in this case, the instrumental case study *does* sample four key regions within Scotland with each region varying in demographic and socio-economic characteristics such as, ethnicity, levels of poverty and inequality, and inequities in levels of resources available to schools in urban and rural areas. These characteristics can emerge through teachers’ professional narratives. Further, all of these regions may be argued to be affected to a certain degree by the work of the OECD and its recommendations. Therefore, the instrumental or intrinsic case study

utilises the lenses of teacher's professional narratives to gain an insight into the broader complex conditions that influence the experience of assessment reform.

### **Considering a Longitudinal Design**

As this study is focussed upon temporal dimensions and the focus of 'shifts in assessment over time', it could have been considered a *Longitudinal Design*. Here, *qualitative longitudinal* research (or QLL) often involves repeat qualitative interviews with research participants (Bryman 2016). However, interviews were only carried out at a single point in time to gain a wider coherent and in-depth narrative of past, present and future prospects of teachers within this situation. In the socially constructed world of the case study, temporal and recently historical influences play an important role in terms of affecting professional perspectives. Here, teachers are interviewed with regards to policy shifts over time, therefore this *instrumental* case study does contain a temporal element. Nevertheless, the use of a *longitudinal design*, prospectively, could be carried out in future research regarding this particular case.

## **5.3 Exploring Comparative Dimensions**

Locating the comparative dimension in this complex study became a challenging part of planning process as it focussed upon a single nation across two periods of time in a broader international context. Here, it has been noted that comparative methods in social research require two distinct cases with similar methodological tools (Bryman, 2016; Bray and Thomas, 1995; Ragin and Amaro, 2011). Furthermore, Steiner-Khamsi (2014) point out that comparative research, particularly in education is often based on the notion of SS-DO (same system-different outcomes) or DS-DO (different systems-different outcomes). However, careful research, planning and theoretical consideration unearthed a multi-dimensional, comparative (Bryman, 2016; Bray and Thomas, 1995; Ragin 2014). This section takes an exploration of common comparative social research to locate and identify the comparison within this study.

### **Qualitative Comparative Analysis**

The study mainly compares two curricula in two periods of time in a single country (5-14 and CfE). These units of comparison are parallel in regards to similar historical and cultural contexts, however differ with regards to assessment frameworks and the way these are operated and perceived by practitioners (Bryman, 2016; Ragin and Amoro, 2011). A multi-dimensional



approach has been used to consider and compare the relationship of macro, meso and micro levels to identify how assessment frameworks and such policies are received over time as stated in Research Question 1 (RQ1). The study synthesizes the use of Qualitative Comparative Methodology with the chosen analytical and conceptual framework to fully understand the perceptions of past present and future projections by teachers. The figure below illustrates the multiple levels within which actors can receive and translate assessment reforms.



*Figure 5: Levels of Analysis. Elaborated by researcher*

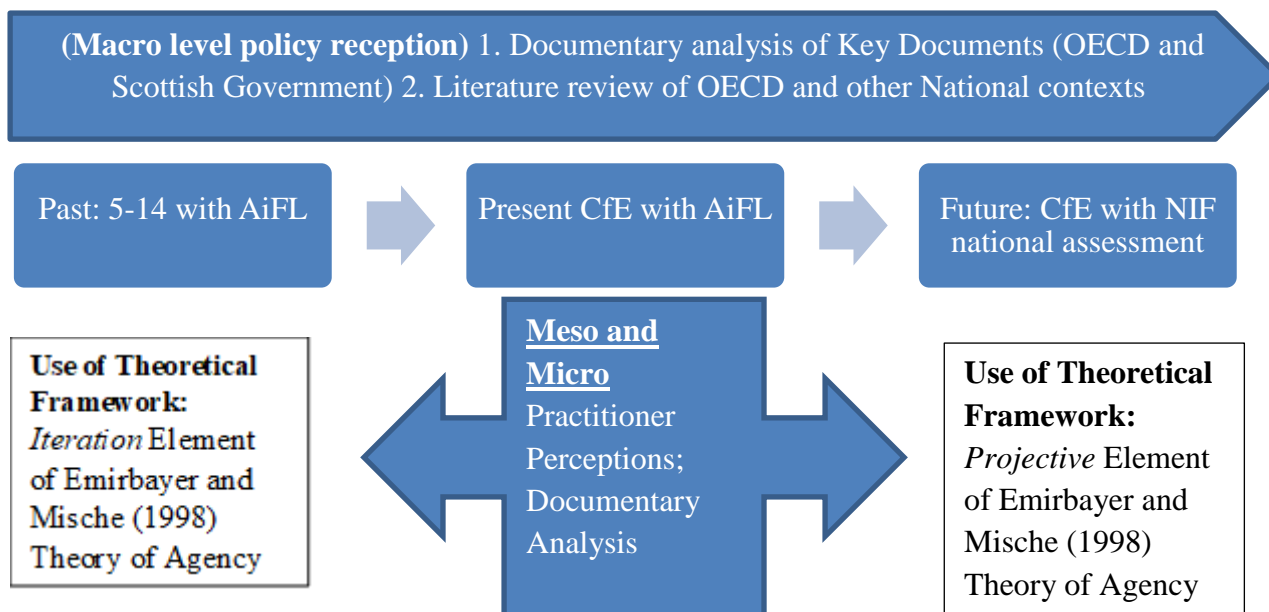


Figure 6: Diagram of Research Design and Analysis. Elaborated by Researcher

## 5.4 Research Sample and Selection Methods

The research sites included four primary schools in four separate regions in Scotland. The regions were purposefully selected to provide variation in contextual situations and approaches. However, the schools were chosen because of the ease of access and from then, *Opportunistic* sampling followed. The search started in September 2017 in a rural school I had previously worked at, close to my home town in the Scottish Borders. The search gradually grew as I contacted three other schools across Scotland. Each headteacher provided me with a number of teachers who were interested in being interviewed. Opportunistic Sampling was suitable for the Adaptive Research approach used during research (Layder 2013; Bryman 2016). Here, *opportunistic* or *emergent sampling* occurs when the researcher makes decisions over sampling during the process of collecting data. This enabled me to become flexible in each setting as time progressed and participants preferred not to discuss a largely contested area (i.e. national testing portrayed through the media). This study uses a qualitative strategy, and it is small-scale in nature, however, the participants of this study provided in-depth, rich and insightful data in their interviews.

Participants	School 1 (S1) East Lothian	School 2 (S2) Scottish Borders	School 3 (S3) Aberdeen	School 4 (S4) Inverness
Teachers (T)	2	2	3	4

Headteachers (H)	1	1	1	1
			Total (T)	14

Table 1: Participants of the study (elaborated by researcher)

## 5.5 Data Collection and Tools for Analysis

As part of the data collection, *semi-structured interviews* and *documentary analysis* were carried out. These tools were selected to ensure that each research question was addressed. This was organized in a three-stage process where key documents were analysed and then synthesized with analysis from secondary literature and data collected from interviews. In Stage One critically analysed a broad range of secondary data and literature to provide a conceptual and empirical basis for the investigation of the role of specific concepts developed by the OECD in the construction, design and delivery of new assessment frameworks within specific national settings and curriculum developments. Stage Two of the research focuses on how specific *concepts* developed by the OECD have influenced assessment frameworks within distinct national settings. This involved a documentary analysis of key policy documents at national level. This stage uses a thematic approach with a specific focus on how key concepts are constructed within national policy documents. An analysis of different ways in which concepts relating to assessment and standardised testing are constructed within the policy documents in the two settings and the influence of the OECD on the design of national assessment frameworks will also form part of stage two of the study. Stage Three of the study took the findings from the interviews and synthesized them with Stage One and Stage Two.

### 5.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews (Stage Three)

An interview guide was drawn up prior to the fieldwork. This comprised of two separate guides; one for teachers and one for headteachers (see appendices 1 and 2).

It is typical of qualitative research to have an unstructured and less formal approach to gain an in-depth insight into the interpretations of participants (Bryman 2012). It is also critical to strategically plan and formulate an interview guide to provide rich and useful data however, this can be carried out in a flexible and reflexive way such as the *Adaptive Method* (Layder, 2013). Therefore, in order to capture an in-depth discussion and interpretation from teachers and headteachers, the interviews were semi-structured and carried out in a slightly informal

manner. Initially, I mapped out an interview guide; a list of questions and topics that addressed the research questions (RQs) which allowed a certain amount of leeway for the interviewee to reply (Bryman 2016). All interviews in the study were audio-recorded. Qualitative interviews were recorded in order for the researcher to stay aware of what was being discussed. This allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions which drew attention to additional and relevant answers (Bryman, 2016). Knowledge based questions or open-ended questions were most frequently asked here as the focus was on teacher experiences on practice and associated issues.

The level of knowledge and information that teachers had of the NIF was expected to vary, in comparison to the AiFL, since the latter was well bedded in within schools generally while the former was a comparatively new initiative. It was predicted that the results and findings would demonstrate a high volume of in-depth interpretation and knowledge of each component by use of this interviewing approach. This form of data collection is particularly useful when using an interpretivist epistemological point of view by any researcher (Burrell and Morgan, 1995) since it focuses on teachers interpretations of assessment reforms. Here, it was predicted that the results and findings would demonstrate a high volume of in-depth interpretation and knowledge of each component by use of this method and interviewing technique. Other techniques such as *probing and prompting* were used very frequently whilst undertaking all interviews. In addition, Bryman (2016) suggests that all questions will be answered, however, will not always be in the correct order and the research may ask follow-up questions. This underpins the need for the researcher to be flexible while maintaining a sense of key areas to be discussed. These approaches to interviewing allowed the participant to clarify and explain what was yet to be uncovered by the researcher.

### **5.5.2 Documentary Analysis (Stage Two)**

Documentary Analysis was a strategy used to gain a critical understanding on the macro-and meso-level. Documentary Analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). Analysing documents incorporates *coding content* into *themes* similar to how interview transcripts are analysed (Bowen, 2009). Here, the documents considered as a suitable source for the comparative historical investigation into the phenomena of uploading and downloading within Steiner Khamsi's notions of 'reception' and 'translation' of education policies from

international to national and local level over time (5-14 and CfE). The researcher has to maintain a high level of sensitivity and objectivity in order for the results to be valid and credible (Bowen, 2009; Bryman, 2016). Therefore, content analysis included searches for occurrences of specific concepts, words and phrases that sought to answer research questions 2 and 3 drawn out in Chapter 1: Introduction and earlier in this chapter. (O’Leary, 2014). The documents analysed were as follows:

1. Reviews of National Policies for Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland (2007)
2. Assessment Framework for Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland Building the curriculum 5: a Framework for Assessment (2011)
3. Assessment Guidance within the Five to Fourteen Curriculum (1991)
4. OECD Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment (2013)
5. Improving Schools in Scotland. An OECD Perspective (2015)
6. National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education - achieving excellence and equity (2015)

Content analysis provided the basic method for investigating commonalities between each document and the interview data. A thematic analysis of the two data sets complimented this by recognizing significant themes. The analysis took emerging themes and refined them for further analysis, typical in *inductive* or *Grounded Theory* methodological approaches (Bowen, 2009)

### **Qualitative Content and Thematic Analysis**

All interviews and documents were synthesized after the two-stage process. The transcriptions represented a rich dataset, therefore I decided to use qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a method that searches for patterns and connections within the data which then convert into raw categories and then themes (Bryman 2012). This is a widely used flexible approach in qualitative research and is helpful in organizing and creating a focus for the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This also allows for the data to be filtered and narrowed down for further organization and focus. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a six-phase approach to thematic analysis:

**Phase 1: *Familiarizing Yourself with the Data*:** Audio recordings were listened to prior to transcription to gain a deeper understanding of the overall key ideas within each interview. Documents were also read once before analysis and coding.

**Phase 2: *Generating Initial Codes*:** Mind Maps were drawn out to review connections between codes or minor categories, and to establish overarching themes.

**Phase 3: *Searching for Themes***

**Phase 4: *Reviewing Potential Themes***

**Phase 5: *Defining and Naming Themes*:**

A thematic diagram was developed which was data driven while also drawing from the analytical framework (see Chapter 4: Analytical Framework and Chapter 6: Findings)

## **5.6 Quality Measures**

In order to ensure quality in the data the research must consist ‘sound, well-grounded, strong and convincing’ evidence (Kvale and Brinkermann, 2009, p.246). The complex nature of this study depended highly upon the way it was operationalized. The choice of methods and the way in which they were applied enabled the data to coherently unfold; enabling the construction of categories and themes to emerge to formulate a theoretical framework. The credibility or internal validity of the study refers to the level of contingencies between the findings of the study and the theoretical concepts that were constructed (Bryman, 2012; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In addition, there has been consistent reflexivity between the data and the theoretical ideas. This enabled new concepts to emerge which contributed further to the analytical framework. The particular use of methods, literature sources and procedures have been instrumental in ensuring the validity of the findings within this study. In addition, the researcher is required to undertake good research practice in order to reach internal validity. The researcher must not conclude or ‘infer’ a phenomenon by using the data findings to make generalizations on the issue as a whole. For example, the small sample used cannot generalize the phenomena that national standardize testing is completely disregarded by all teachers by the whole Scottish nation. The data does however consider the perspectives of the small number of participants within Scotland regarding changes of assessment and perceptions of national testing. Here, to ensure authenticity, the interviews were undertaken in a sensitive manner as they may feel nervous (especially with regard to new policies being introduced such as the NIF). This enabled the participants to feel a sense of trust in myself as a researcher as it is typical of professionals

to answer questions as if they are under surveillance, or as if they are being judged. In summary, within qualitative research, validity is to be addressed with honesty, richness, depth and scope (Cohen, et al., 2007). Reliability refers to whether the results are repeatable (Bryman, 2012; Amaroso and Ragin, 2011). This is to ensure that there are no biases and that the methods used consistently measure what they were originally intended to measure. The thesis clearly presents the appropriate steps that are required to be taken to ensure clarity and reliability (e.g. research purpose, research questions, interviews, documents chosen, how the sample was collected, coded and analysed). These choices have been justified throughout the study.

### **5.6.1 Ethical Considerations**

Firstly, this study has had ethical clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services Organisation [NSD]. Secondly, this study has taken additional measures to ensure ethical security and clearance before during and after research fieldwork. Before fieldwork, consent form was drawn up and presented to participants to sign (see appendix). This consent form outlined a clear description of the focus of the study, the purpose, the aims and the research design (Bryman, 2012). During the fieldwork, transcriptions were kept in a secure folder which had restricted access with a password. Names and identification of individuals (including names, telephone numbers, email addresses) were kept in a separate and secured folder, also protected with a password. These data sets were only accessed by the researcher and the supervisor(s) of the project and has been treated with strict confidentiality. Lastly, all data will be deleted 12 months after the end of the project, including identification, transcriptions and audio recordings. To sum up, key strategies involved anonymisation of participant names, a process of informed consent before and during the data collection and secure storage of data files for a limited period of time.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a detailed discussion of the rationale and methodological approaches used within this study. In particular, the chapter has outlined the theoretical and philosophical foundations of the research with a justification for the analytical tools which were utilised to interpret the primary data collected within the study. Moreover, the chapter has carefully considered the ethical considerations, limitations and quality measures of the study. The chapter has also provided a detailed discussion and justification of methodological tools used

to investigate primary data. Focussing on a qualitative and in-depth comparative study of two past and present curriculums across Scotland, the analysis of data will be located within a broader consideration of processes relating to reception, and translation within the realm of international education. This has been enabled by a critically reflective approach to the interpretation and analysis of data as it emerges during the data collection process as an evolving process.

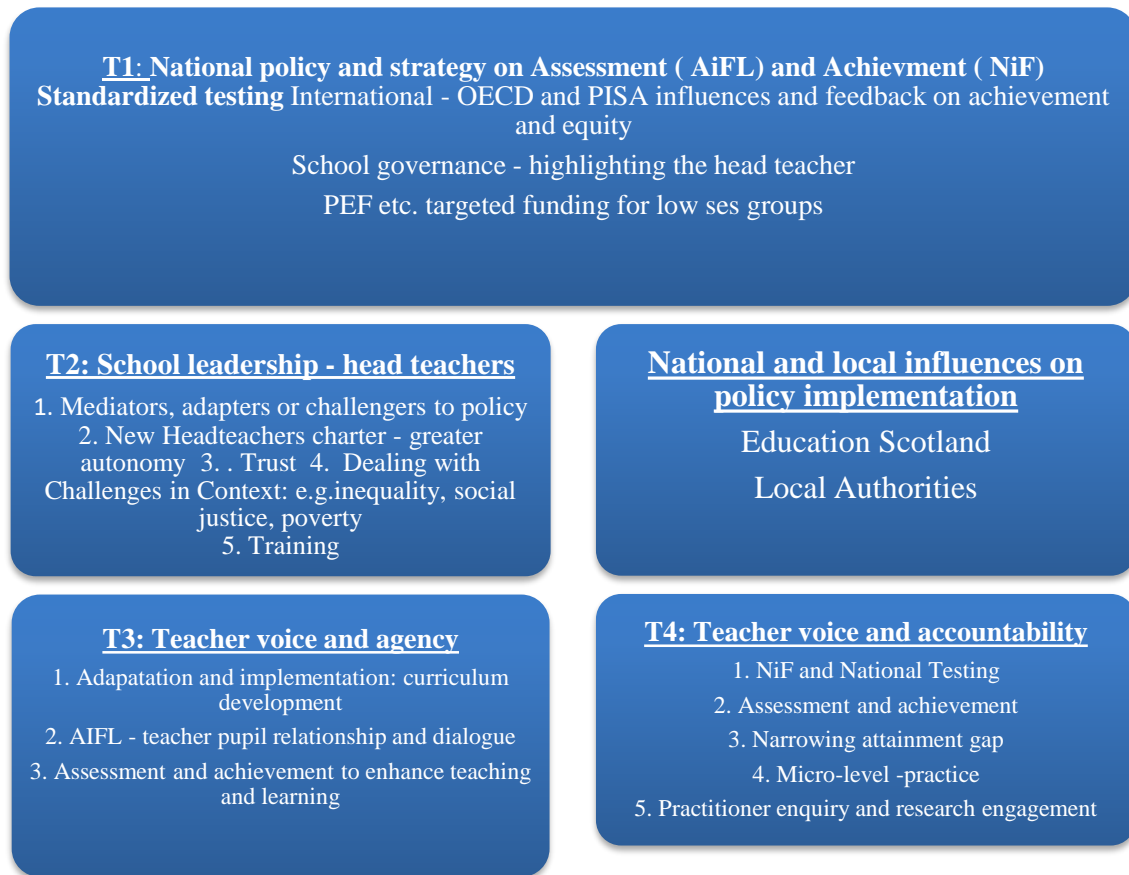


## 6 Findings

This chapter presents a summary of the findings from the analysis of selected policy documents at international, national and local level and data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with teachers and head teachers. As previously discussed in the Methodology chapter the underlying research and design is an instrumental case study based on a conceptualisation of education as a dynamic multidimensional model combining macro and micro dimensions, (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2012). Crucially this conceptual model provides scope for the critical analysis of education within distinct national contexts in terms of transformations over time with a specific focus on the influence of global and international drivers and institutions. The comparative dimension of the thesis is a time comparative of two curricula (i) National Curriculum (5-14) and its associated national testing and Assessment is for Learning (AiFL) approaches National Testing and (ii) Curriculum for Excellence and (iii) NIF (current and future summative assessment). This comparative is contextualised within an analysis of OEDC policy documents.

This chapter is organized in accordance to the themes as illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 7). These themes are National Policy Strategy on Assessment and Achievement (T1), School Leadership (T2), Teacher Voice and Agency (T3), Teacher Voice and Accountability (T4). As the chapter develops some of these themes become interconnected as subthemes. With a specific focus on the analysis of transformations in Assessment and Achievement, in Scotland. Part One of the findings section will conclude with a summary analyses of findings from each documentary analysis through the theoretical lens of Steiner Khamsi's notions of 'reception' and 'translation' of education policies from international to national and local level over time. Part Two of the findings chapter will explore and understand the perceptions of teaching professionals in Scotland with regard to the transitions in assessment and evaluation in primary school education through curriculum changes over time. Part Two is analysed through the theoretical lenses of Agency and Voice of the role of Beliefs in Teacher Agency and the Three Dimensions of Agency (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001; Emirbayer and Miche, 1998; Biesta et al 2015). This will also draw on key ideas on teacher agency and distributional leadership The discussion chapter will contextualise these findings within an analysis of existing international research and literature in this field. The diagram below demonstrates the macro, meso and

micro levels of themes discovered and categorized from the data.



*Figure 7: Themes and categories discovered in the data (Elaborated by researcher, co-edited by supervisor)*

## **6.1 Part One: Analysis of Policies at International, National and Local Level**

### **6.1.1 T1: National Policy Strategy on Assessment and Achievement**

Assessment and Achievement was recognised as a central starting theme as it was considered to have seen significant changes over the last 10 years or more in Scotland; firstly in terms of Assessment is For Learning (AiFL) and more recently in terms of the imposition of standardised testing as a means of closing the attainment gap (National improvement Framework). International accountability and critique through OECD (or PISA) formed an additional powerful narrative encouraging the national government to prioritise ‘improvement’ in results as a key marker of system efficacy and societal fairness. Importantly, in the last few years,

Scotland had begun to bring in standardised testing, at key points (P1, 4 and S3) in an apparent move away from the more holistic and reflective AIFL although the latter is still in place. It is within this sometimes contradictory policy context during a period of policy and practice transition in Scotland that research was carried out in a small number of Scottish schools.

The design and operationalisation of the AiFl and NiF in Scotland have been shaped by national and local authority policies and guidance. The influence of the situated policy context on the design, and operationalisation of assessment frameworks within distinct national education systems is illustrated within the literature review chapter (Chapter 3). A comparative historical analysis of transformations in assessment and evaluatory frameworks in Scotland reveals the changing forms of governance and teacher roles at the level of policy over time. More broadly, the influence of forms of governance and teacher roles has been evidenced as central to the adaptation of OECD led educational guidance within a number of national settings (Steiner Khamsi, 2012). This study has critically explored the influence of governance and teacher roles in Australia, Finland, Norway and Scotland in the Literature Review (Chapter 3).

### **6.1.2 Analysis of Policy and Guidance Documents**

International and national policy documents shape the conditions under which education may be realized in different national contexts over time. Key OECD Policy documents relating to Assessment and Achievement and Standardised Testing are analysed below using Steiner Khamsi's notions of 'reception' and 'translation' of education policies from international to national and local level over time. This analysis will focus on the development of Aifl and The National Improvement Framework in Scotland. The notion of reception and translation have been utilised by a number of recent studies Ochs, 2006; Ochs & Phillips, 2002; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). This study conceptualises reception as an understanding of why recent educational reforms originating from international policies have been adopted in Scotland. More specifically this involves an analysis of the rationale or the appeal of a reform resulting from international educational policies or practices. Further this study conceptualises translation as the aim of understanding the process of local adaptation, reframing or modification of educational reforms which are imported from international educational policy or practice. The analysis of selected international and national policy and guidance documents is framed by the central research questions within this thesis and adopts a thematic analysis guided by Theme 1 (T1) Assessment and Achievement within the analytical

Framework Diagram above. Key sub-themes include International, National and Local Policy context, AifL and NiF. The integration of new policies, benchmarks and standardised tests within existing frameworks and the influence of Pisa and the OECD, particularly with regard to international downloading of policies and practices relating to assessment.

## **Document One: Reviews of National Policies for Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland (2007)**

### **Background**

In 2006, The Scottish Government requested that the OECD scrutinise the operation of the school system in Scotland within the context of the OECD's reviews of national policies for education. A key concern of Scottish local authorities was the sufficiency of recent reforms in when compared with other countries facing comparable challenges. Following inspection in 2007 the OECD published a report on 'Reviews of National Policies for Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland' in December 2007. The report utilised an international perspective in assessing how well Scottish schools perform examining both PISA findings and national test results in the context of educational reform.

### **Extract One (my emphasis)**

Scotland performs at a consistently very high standard in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Few countries can be said with confidence to outperform it in mathematics, reading and science. Scotland also has one of the most equitable school systems in the OECD . . . Head teachers are amongst the most positive of school principals in the OECD in judging the adequacy of staffing and teaching resources, and students are generally very positive about their schools. **Underpinning the impressive international performance of Scottish schools is a system of near-universal and high-quality pre-school education.** On national tests, many children are one or two years in advance of expected levels. Notable progress has been made in improving the achievement of children living in poverty.(p.14)

In the extract above the significance of the performance of children in national tests is highlighted. In addition there is an emphasis on the significance of the role of head teachers 'in judging the adequacy of staffing and teaching resources' as well as the voice of students who are 'generally very positive about their schools'. This opening extract reflects most of the document in not explicitly referring to or recognising the role of teachers as practitioners in the achievement of this 'consistently very high standard'. Conversely the importance of the role of local authorities and management is repeatedly emphasised as the following extract shows.

### Extract Two: (my emphasis)

The OECD examiners were impressed by the capacity of Scottish primary schools to respond to public expectations of continuously improving standards and consistency of outcomes. This is in a context in which Scotland depends more than ever on the quality and impact of its schools. Indicators of improvement as well as high international standards also show that Scotland's confidence in its comprehensive system of secondary schools is well-placed. (p.2)

The document also draws attention to 'heavy investment' in The Teachers' Agreement (2001) with its 'wide-ranging impact on teacher morale'. Moreover, significance is placed on the wider reliance on the 'professionalism and commitment of the educational departments' as a good policy strategy (Extract Three below)

### Extract Three

Publicly-funded school education is the responsibility of Scottish local authorities. It is through them that an equitable distribution of resources across Scotland is managed, and they are also responsible for ensuring that schools are responsive to community needs, adaptive, and effective. **The community assets represented by schools are in capable hands. The professionalism and commitment of the education departments of the local authorities makes wider reliance on them a good strategy.** (p,2)

Importantly, whilst the document emphasises the significance of 'investment in the profession through substantial salary increases, improved working conditions, and continuous professional development' there is no explicit recognition of the role of teachers in the achievement of 'impressive performance international performance of Scottish Schools' (Extract One). As Extract Four below reveals there is acknowledgment of the impact of poverty and social exclusion on the very wide attainment gap between children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes and children from more affluent homes in Scotland.

### Extract Four

One major challenge facing Scottish schools is to reduce the achievement gap that opens up about Primary 5 and continues to widen throughout the junior secondary years (S1 to S4). Children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to under-achieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide. Little of the variation in student achievement in Scotland is associated with the ways in which schools differ. Most of it is connected with how children differ. Who you are in Scotland is far more important than what school you attend. P.15

The document prescribes a response which focuses on the causes of under-achievement. Whilst acknowledging the importance of socio-economic achievement it also priorities a number of other factors including ‘ ‘school culture’ and teacher values. However, there is no mention of the role of the skills of teachers as reflective practitioners within this process. Critically, the document identifies two key instruments of ‘change and adaptation’ in schools, ‘innovation and flexibility in teaching resources’. (p.6). Here greater management freedom in these two areas is advocated. Critically also a new compact with local government is also recommended. The compact the document argues ‘establishes expectations in exchange for autonomy and encourages and protects innovation and risk-taking through an authoritative’ mandate. (p.6). It may be argued that this recommendation laid the foundations for the design of the National Improvement Framework produced in 2016.

### **Document Two: Assessment Framework for Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland Building the curriculum 5: a framework for assessment (2011)**

This document describes the standards and expectations for the assessment within the Curriculum for Excellence. The assessment framework was developed from a reflective analysis of the outcomes and experiences of the Curriculum for Excellence within the National Qualification framework. A key aim of the document was to ‘ensure and integrated approach to the new Curriculum, assessment and qualifications that will improve learning and teaching’ (p.2). In addition as Extract Six below reveals the framework focusses on enabling a flexible and tailored approach to learning and assessment.

#### **Extract Six**

Assessment practice will follow and reinforce the curriculum and promote high quality learning and teaching approaches. Assessment of children’s and young people’s progress and achievement during their broad general education to the end of S3 will be based on teachers’ assessment of their knowledge and understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities, as described in the experiences and outcomes across the curriculum. (Curriculum for Excellence, p.11)

As extract six reveals, in contrast to the guidelines for assessment for the 5- 14 Curriculum, the principles for assessment underpinning the Curriculum for Excellence are unified by a the central aim that the curriculum leads assessment practice thereby enhancing teaching and learning practices. This contrasts sharply with the constrained framework for assessment within the 5 -14 Curriculum with a focus on ensuring measurability of outcomes. As Extract 7 below

reveals The Curriculum for Excellence invites a more holistic view of the child and the teaching and learning experiences enabling a ‘broad and interdisciplinary approach to learning opportunities’

### **Extract Seven**

Assessment of the broad range of planned learning is required across the full range of contexts and settings in which the curriculum is experienced. These contexts include the ethos and life of the school as a community, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement. They cover learning both within and out with education establishments and classrooms. . (Curriculum for Excellence, p.12)

The document also reveals a focus on child centred learning and a recognition of unique developmental trajectories of individual children, (Extract Eight below). This is incongruent with the introduction of standardized testing within the National Improvement Framework.

### **Extract Eight**

Assessment will focus on the application of standards and expectations of each learner’s progress and achievement in: > knowledge and understanding. (Curriculum for Excellence, p. 39)

The reorientation of the assessment towards meeting the learning journey of the child as a unique individual is also articulated in the following extract.

### **Extract Nine**

A standard is something against which we measure performance. Curriculum for Excellence has the clear aim of building on current practice to raise achievement. Standards and expectations in this context are set out for the whole curriculum in the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence and their equivalent within specifications for qualifications. Within a level for a curriculum area or a part of an area such as reading, the experiences and outcomes describe the sorts of knowledge, understanding, attributes and skills expected. . (Curriculum for Excellence, p.42)

As Extract Ten (below) demonstrates assessment approaches within the Curriculum for Excellence encourage innovative ways of demonstrating achievement whilst continuing to emphasise the importance of ensuring that achievements are demonstrated in ways that are appropriate to children’s learning.

### **Extract Ten**

Assessment approaches should help learners to show their progress through the levels and enable them to demonstrate their achievements in a range of ways which are appropriate to learning. For learners to demonstrate

that their progress is secure and that they have achieved a level, they will need opportunities to show that they: have achieved a breadth of learning across the experiences and outcomes for an aspect of the curriculum. (Curriculum for Excellence, p.42)

The Curriculum for Excellence also emphasises the equal role of formative and summative assessment within the learning process. This suggests a learner centred approach to focussing on the uniqueness of each individual. This seems to contradict the approach taken in the National Improvement Framework that imposes chronological points for compulsory and narrow forms of summative assessment. Here we can see competing ideologies at play concerning the nature of teaching and learning and how and when it can be or should be evaluated. Moreover, as Extract Eleven below states ‘formative’ and summative assessment are not regarded as ‘types’ of assessment but instead describe ‘how assessments are used. This point may be regarded as central to the analysis of the purpose of the NiF framework and in particular this raises the key question of how the National Improvement Framework will be integrated within the assessment process AifL and within the Curriculum for Excellence itself.

### **Extract Eleven**

The central purpose of assessment is to support learning and this is best achieved by a combination of formative and summative assessment. This means assessing learning both in an ongoing way and by ‘stepping back’ at regular intervals to take stock of learners’ progress and achievements. The terms ‘formative’ and ‘summative’ do not describe a type or form of assessment, but instead describe how assessments are used. Evidence and feedback from any assessment can be used formatively to inform planning for improvements in learning, as well as contributing to periodic summaries of progress and achievement for reporting and monitoring. . (Curriculum for Excellence, p.42)

As the Extract Twelve (below) indicates the view that the learning process is essentially a journey involving the interaction of teachers and children is central to the assessment principles within The Curriculum of Excellence.

### **Extract Twelve**

As part of ongoing learning and teaching Teachers assess constantly as part of daily learning and teaching. They do this, for example, by watching and listening to learners carrying out tasks, by looking at what they write and make and by considering how they answer questions. They get to know their learners well, build up a profile of their progress, strengths and needs and involve them in planning what they need to learn next. . (Curriculum for Excellence, p.42)



Critically, as Extract Thirteen illustrates below, ‘the CfE emphasises the importance of the whole school approach within the assessment process. Here partnership between stakeholders is is regarded as vital within the learning and assessment process.

### **Extract Thirteen**

Building the Curriculum 5 identifies a wide range of examples of organisations and partners who can actively assist learning experiences, the development of the four capacities and the fulfilment of entitlements. Adopting a partnership approach builds on key aspects of national advice and guidance including Lifelong Partners (our school/college partnership strategy),. Joint planning and coordination is necessary to ensure that everyone involved is clear about their own roles and responsibilities in relation to assessment. (Curriculum for Excellence, p.42)

The importance of dialogue and collective responsibility between professionals as an ecological approach is emphasised as an important component of cooperation and trust-building Extract Fourteen (below).

### **Extract Fourteen (my emphasis)**

Teachers and other practitioners will continue to work collaboratively to develop approaches to monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement planning, building on the existing strengths of their practice. Learners have a key role in moderation activities and teachers have an important responsibility in developing that role. Moderation activities will involve all teachers in engaging regularly in ongoing professional dialogue and collegiate working including by participating in local and national networking activities. **Ongoing professional dialogue is a key component for coherent planning, checking, sampling, reviewing and providing feedback for improvement.** (p.48)

### **Document Three: Assessment Guidance within the Five to Fourteen Curriculum**

As Extract Fifteen (below) reveals the Five to Fourteen Curriculum was underpinned by a rationale which focussed on enabling young people to attain qualifications which enable ‘productive employment and active citizenship’.

### **Extract Fifteen (my emphasis)**

Schools, parents and society care that young people succeed in terms of attaining the knowledge, skills and in time the qualifications required for a personally rewarding life, **productive employment and active citizenship.** Equally, they care that young people develop into healthy, fair minded, considerate and responsible human beings, (The Structure and Balance of the Curriculum. 5-14 National Guidance p.3)

Within this ethos, assessment is regarded as being ‘integral’ to the process of teaching

### **Extract Sixteen (my emphasis)**

Assessment is bound up in and **integral to the process of teaching**. Continuously, throughout the process of teaching and learning, evidence of pupils progress emerges. Effective teaching continuously gathers and judges this evidence, Teaching and assessment approaches should be informed by current research, based on a sound knowledge of pupil needs and make the best use of available human, physical and material resources. (The Structure and Balance of the Curriculum. 5-14 National Guidance; 3.25 Teaching p. 22)

National Testing in primary schools in Scotland, was established in the 1990's. This form of testing was integrated within the assessment framework of the 5-14 Curriculum. Critically however guidance related to National Testing emphasised the importance of professional judgement, and locates testing within the ongoing process of teaching, learning and assessment. Thus, the guidance confirms the role of National Testing as being part of a range of tools that can be used within the teaching and learning process

#### **Extract Seventeen (my emphasis)**

**National Tests are intended to confirm the teacher's judgement about an individual pupil's attainment of the Levels set out in the guidelines as attainment targets.** .....It is important to emphasise that National Testing is part of the ongoing process of teaching, learning and assessment and should not significantly disrupt the normal work of the class. National Tests are only one of a number of assessment strategies teachers will use to determine how a pupil is progressing and to identify development needs. National Tests should complement other forms of assessment and should not be used to replace them. (Assessment 5-14 A teachers guide to National Testing in Primary Schools, 1993. P 23)

Within this context, individual teachers are given autonomy to decide the timing of national testing for individual pupils according to the stage that they are at. Importantly also, the guidance states that schools should 'not block test whole year groups' (Extract Eighteen)

#### **Extract Eighteen (my emphasis)**

Each pupil should be tested using National Tests only when the teacher decides, using all available evidence, that s/he has completed one Level in Reading, Writing or Mathematics and is ready to move on to the next. ... **Schools should not block test whole year groups or test pupils retrospectively.** (Assessment 5-14 A teachers guide to National Testing in Primary Schools, 1993. P 23)

The analysis of The Assessment Guidance within the Five to Fourteen Curriculum has revealed a central focus on the use of national testing as a way to inform the judgement of teachers with regard to each individual pupil's attainment at each level and according to attainment targets. In contrast the National Improvement Framework( Nif) focusses on the Scottish Governments 'vision' and 'priorities' 'our children's progress in learning'. Moreover the NiF is regarded as

key in driving work to improve Scottish education and close the attainment gap. A more detailed analysis of the National Improvement Framework (2016) (Document Seven) below.

### **Document Four: Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment (2013)**

This document was selected for documentary analysis as it was informed by a comprehensive OECD review of evaluation and assessment frameworks for advancing school outcomes across a broad range of countries. Twenty-five countries were directly engaged in the review and 28 countries participated in the study. These countries are characterised by a broad range of economic and social contexts, as well as a variety of approaches to evaluation and assessment in school systems. Fifteen countries, including Scotland, took part in a detailed review, which was undertaken by a team consisting of members of the OECD secretariat and external experts (OECD, 2013). Within this context, the document illustrates Steiner-Khamsi's notions of 'reception' and 'translation' of education policies from international to national and local level over time. (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014 – see also Chapter 4: Analytical Framework). The opening statement of this document underlines the shifting focus on accountability within national education agendas

#### **Extract Nineteen**

There is widespread recognition that evaluation and assessment arrangements are key to both improvement and accountability in school systems. This is reflected in their increasing importance in national education agendas.p.23

Further, as Extract Twenty (below) global skills requirements and 'rapidly changing societies' underpin the rationale for convergent trends in the policy and governance of national education systems. Here, decentralisation and school autonomy has led to a greater focus on learning outcomes and the evaluation of schools, headteachers and teachers.

#### **Extract Twenty**

As countries strive to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in rapidly changing societies, some common policy trends can be observed in one form or another in most OECD countries, including decentralisation, school autonomy, greater accountability for outcomes and a greater knowledge management capacity. Decentralisation and school autonomy are creating a greater need for the evaluation of schools, school leaders and teachers (p.26)

Significantly as Extract Twenty-One (below) emphasises the evaluation and assessment of students, teachers, headteachers, schools and national education systems is regarded by the OECD as an important tool for understanding the learning journey itself.

### **Extract Twenty-One**

Governments and education policy makers are increasingly focused on the evaluation and assessment of students, teachers, school leaders, schools and education systems. These are used as tools for understanding better how well students are learning, for providing information to parents and society at large about educational performance and for improving school, school leadership and teaching practices. (OECD, 2013. p.28)

Moreover, as the extract below illustrates the focus on equity, quality and effectiveness is clearly aligned with the instrumental need to meet economic and social needs generated within a globalised economy.

### **Extract Twenty-Two**

The expansion of educational evaluation results from increased demands for effectiveness, equity and quality in education so new economic and social needs are met. (p.36)

The emphasis on comparison across schools and regions within nation states is evident below. Moreover, the focus on the use of national standardised assessment as an outcome orientated measure of student learning is clearly articulated.

### **Extract Twenty-Three**

The introduction of national standardised assessments for students in a large number of countries reflects the stronger focus on measuring student outcomes. These make data on student learning outcomes available, providing a picture of the extent to which student learning objectives are being achieved, and they grant the opportunity to compare student learning outcomes across individual schools, regions of the country and over time. (p.12)

The encouragement of the use of large data sets to inform policies and managerial decisions with regard to resource distribution within and across schools is clearly evident in the extract below. This exemplifies a focus on trickle down approaches to educational reform.

### **Extract Twenty-Four**

Larger and more varied uses are given to evaluation and assessment results. Countries are giving a more varied use to evaluation and assessment results. There is a growing interest in using evaluation results for formative purposes. School leaders, teachers and policy makers are more and more using evaluation results to identify areas where schools are performing well, and where they may need to improve. curriculum development and definition

of standards, or strategies for professional development. **These data may help shape policy and/or school management decisions on resource distribution,** (OECD 2013, p 16) (my emphasis)

As the extract below reveals the use of evaluation and assessment results for accountability purposes is found to be significant amongst the countries surveyed by the report.

#### **Extract Twenty-Five**

Another increasingly marked focus is the use of evaluation and assessment results to hold policy makers, school leaders and teachers accountable. (OECD 2013, p 18)

A range of accountability purposes are outlined in the extract below. The broad range of stakeholders holding school leaders and teachers to account is emphasised. Moreover, system level reports provide ‘an assessment of the ‘state of education at national level’ (p7)

#### **Extract Twenty-Six**

Accountability as a purpose of evaluation and assessment is gaining in importance. Countries are increasingly using evaluation and assessment for accountability purposes. This can take a variety of forms. First, there is a growing trend of public reporting, including the publication of standardised student assessment results at the school level for use by parents, government officials, the media and other stakeholders, the publication of school inspection reports, school annual reports, and system level reports providing an assessment of the state of education. (p 18)

Finally, the influence of PISA as a benchmark for the effectiveness of national education systems is articulated in Extract Twenty-Seven. Here, Steiner Khamsi’s notions of reception and translation and theoretical contributions evidencing the convergence of national educational systems are clearly evidenced by the document (Ball, 2003; Rutkowski, 2007)

#### **Extract Twenty-Seven**

National education debates are increasingly shaped by international comparisons, particularly of student performance in international student surveys. **The growing availability of internationally comparable data on student performance has, in important ways, influenced national discussions about education and fostered education policy reforms in countries (p.34)**

### **Document Five: ‘Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective’ (2015)**

Commissioned by the Scottish government, with a focus on quality and equity, the purpose of this OECD policy review was to support the development of education policy, leadership and education practice in Scotland. A central focus of the review was the Curriculum for Excellence

(CfE) as it is operationalised within Broad General Education (BGE, up to age 15. In particular the review. Critically as the extracts below illustrates, the document integrates insights from PISA and evidence from other OECD countries to emphasise areas which would benefit from further change and development. The document begins by reviewing international evidence and then comparing this evidence with comparable data from other countries including, Norway, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Ireland and Canada. As the Extract below reveals the document focuses on policies, frameworks and interventions that have been put in place to improve educational outcomes and close the diverse equity gaps in attainment.

### **Extract Twenty-Eight (my emphasis)**

This chapter seeks to present an up-to-date picture on quality and equity in Scotland and relevant trends using international and national sources. It starts by reviewing international evidence and compares Scotland with certain other countries.. The international picture is then complemented with Scottish evidence on dimensions of quality and equity relevant to Broad General Education. **The chapter also summarises the numerous policies, frameworks and interventions that have been put in place in order to improve education outcomes and to close the diverse equity gaps in achievement and attainment.** (p.46)

The report consistently utilised PISA results to compare Scotland with other OECD countries despite clear differences relating to the economic, social, cultural and demographic characteristics of these countries. Importantly as Extract Thirty below evidences, the reviewers do not attribute changes in educational performance at National Level to the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence.

### **Extract Thirty (my emphasis)**

How has this situation changed over recent years? The picture varies depending on the literacy area in question Performance in the PISA surveys going back to 2003 shows that the now-average levels in Scotland in mathematics was not always thus, and it was up among the leading countries just after the turn of the millennium. The major drop took place from the high 524 in maths in Scotland in 2003 to only 506 three years later. Performance has been steady since then. **Clearly, the timing of this decline cannot be attributed to the Curriculum for Excellence as it predates CfE by many years. OECD,** (my emphasis) (p.56)

The reviewers also show confidence in the potential of the Curriculum for Excellence to improve feelings of happiness and well-being in Scottish Schools in the extract below.

### **Extract Thirty -One (my emphasis)**

PISA 2012 asked students to evaluate their happiness at school and to reflect on whether their school environment approaches their notion of an ideal situation. Around 8 in 10 Scottish students felt happy at school – the same as

across the OECD – and 66% believed that conditions were ideal in their school, which is significantly above the OECD figure of 61% (Figure 2.3).

The review also emphasises improvements delivered by the introduction of The Curriculum for Excellence in the extract below. Here, positive teacher student relations are emphasised with at least three in four Scottish schools reporting positive relationships between students and teachers.

### **Extract Thirty-Three**

Positive teacher-student relations are valued in the Curriculum for Excellence as contributing to the ethos and life of the school as a community and all staff are encouraged to develop supportive relationships with children and young people. At least three in four Scottish students surveyed through PISA answered positively to questions related with teacher-student relations, including whether they get along with their teachers, whether teachers take the students seriously, and whether teachers are a source of support if the student needs extra help. (p.32)

The extract below indicates a high degree of convergence between Scotland and other OECD countries with regard to differences in achievement associated with socio-economic background, immigrant status, gender and location. Importantly, the extract also emphasises the equal weight given by the OECD to performance and equity in educational outcomes.

### **Extract Thirty-Four**

As in other countries, the achievement of students in Scotland is associated with socio-economic background, immigrant status, gender and location. In fact, these differences are around similar magnitudes to those observed for the OECD as a whole. A major international finding of the PISA studies is that high performance does not need to be sacrificed to achieve greater equity in education outcomes and equity does not have to be diminished in pursuit of high performance (OECD, 2013a). (p.24)

The ‘highly inclusive’ nature of Scottish schools is emphasised in the review. The reviewers argue that the school that Scottish students attend is less a reflection of social background and has less of an impact on their achievement than other factors in their background (Extract Thirty- Five)

### **Extract Thirty-Five (my emphasis)**

PISA data permit the calculation of an index of social inclusion, which is the degree to which students of different socio-economic status attend the same school (or the degree to which different schools have different socio-economic profiles). **This index suggests that Scottish schools are highly inclusive.** The index for Scotland was

well above the OECD average (86% compared with 75%) and brings Scotland into the group of countries with high levels of inclusion at over 85% (Finland, Norway and Sweden). **Therefore, the school that Scottish students attend is less a reflection of social background and has less of an impact in their achievement than other factors in their own background.** (p.36)

The reviewers endorse the positive impact of The Curriculum for Excellence on the resilience, confidence and motivation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds indicating that more time was needed to realise the full potential of The Curriculum for Excellence in promoting self-confidence and motivation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It may be argued that this is once again an endorsement of The Curriculum for Excellence.

### **Extract Thirty-Six**

Although socio-economically advantaged students outperform their disadvantaged peers in general terms, many disadvantaged students succeed at school and achieve high levels in the PISA assessments. These are the ones the OECD has dubbed “resilient” students - those who succeed in school despite a disadvantaged socio-economic background.<sup>4</sup> (OECD, 2013a). ..In Scotland, 8% of all students and a third of the disadvantaged students (32%) were identified as “resilient” in 2012. The Curriculum for Excellence is intended to foster many of the factors associated with resilience: students’ self-confidence in themselves and their own academic abilities; motivation; being engaged; and receiving support from their teachers. **We would therefore hope to see improvements in Scotland on this indicator in the forthcoming waves of PISA, when CfE has had more time to embed, such that students will have been to school with CfE throughout their early learning and throughout their schooling.** (p.42)

Finally, the documents commends the performance of rural schools in Scotland as endorsing the significance of the four CfE capacities. Extract Thirty-Seven (below)

### **Extract Thirty-Seven**

In OECD countries in general, students in rural areas do not enjoy access to equivalent educational resources and tend to have lower performance than their peers in urban settings. The situation is the reverse in Scotland. PISA 2012 shows Scottish students attending rural schools scored significantly higher in mathematics than their peers with a similar socio-economic status in schools located in a town (21 points difference – equivalent to 6 months of schooling) and similar to those in a city (18 points difference but not statistically significant). **This suggests that rural schools in Scotland are providing at least the same educational opportunities, if not better, compared with urban schools.** (p.42)



## **Document Six: 'National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education - achieving excellence and equity' (2015)**

The influence and unquestioned reception of the OECD on the design and development of The National improvement Framework for Scottish Education is clearly stated in this document

### **Extract Thirty-Eight**

The development of the National Improvement Framework is based on the best practice which exists internationally on the use of data and intelligence to improve education at national, local, school and individual child level. **This includes the OECD publications Synergies for Better Learning and Education Policy Outlook (Scottish Government. P6)**

The extract below reveals the focus of the Nif on the use of trickle-down standardised information to inform teaching and leadership within schools. Here the focus is on equity and closing the attainment gap.

### **Extract Thirty-Nine**

The Framework will see new and better information gathered throughout primary and early secondary school years to support individual children's progress and to identify where improvement is needed. The data will be used to close the gap in attainment between children from the least and most deprived communities (p.2)

Importantly, the extract below, emphasises the importance of alignment between all levels of the national system. This alignment is regarded as requiring clear responsibilities at national, local and school level. Moreover, there is a clear emphasis on an outcomes orientated approach to assessment and evaluation at all levels.

### **Extract Forty**

show clear alignment with the goals for the education system and classroom practice; • recognise that outcomes for children can be improved by improving practice at different levels of the system; set out clear responsibilities at national, local, and school level and ensure everyone involved has the capacity to play their part effectively; look at all levels of the national system together and ensure they are aligned; (p.4)

Importantly, the document does emphasise the centrality of core principle of the Curriculum for Excellence. Here the framework is regarded as supporting high-quality learning and teaching. Importantly, the document regards national standardised assessment as informing teaching judgement.

### **Extract Forty-One**

The actions set out in this document have all been developed to support high-quality learning and teaching, the core principle of Curriculum for Excellence. Over time, the Framework will provide a level of robust, consistent and transparent data across Scotland that we have never had before, to extend our understanding of what works and to drive improvements across all parts of the system. This includes the development of national standardised assessments in primary and early years of secondary school to inform teacher judgement. (p.11)

The importance attached to influence of the OECD in the design of the National Improvement Framework is underlined in the extract below.

### **Extract Forty-Two**

The above principles are central to the design and development of the Framework. The 2015 OECD review stated that: "... an important step (in developing the National Improvement Framework) will be to identify key principles ... that would provide transparency throughout the system and criteria for subsequent evaluation of the system itself." Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective. OECD, 2015. (p.17)

Moreover, the influence of the OECD on the development of the framework is clearly emphasised in the extract below. Here the Scottish Government identifies recommendations from the OECD review 'Improving Schools in Scotland' as being the central driver of the NIF.

### **Extract Forty-Three**

Key drivers of improvement will build on much of the positive work already underway in Scottish education... As recommended by the OECD in the 2015 OECD review, these areas have been identified to ensure that we have the right type of evidence sources which contribute to our priorities and minimise unintended consequences: "This Framework has the potential to provide a robust evidence base in ways that enhance rather than detract from the breadth and depth of the Curriculum for Excellence. Given Scotland's previous bold moves in constructing its assessment frameworks on the best available research evidence at the time, it now has the opportunity to lead the world in developing an integrated assessment and evaluation framework." Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective. OECD, 2015 (p.26)

## **6.2 Part Two: Practice level Semi-structured Interview Data**

The following section highlights and addresses the central themes emerging from the analysis of semi-structured interview data with teachers and head teachers from the participating schools. Three key themes which emerged from these interviews at practice level are; Teacher Voice and Agency (T3); Leadership (T2); Voice and Accountability (T4) (presented in this order). The findings demonstrate how the curriculum has adapted AiFl and assessment

frameworks from 5-14 to Curriculum for Excellence over time from the perspectives of both teachers and head teachers.

### **6.2.1 T3: Teacher Voice and Agency**

The role of teacher voice and agency has been identified as central to the development of effective professional learning and assessment strategies (Priestley, 1998; Biesta, et al., 2015; Kirk and Macdonald, 2001, see Chapter 4: Analytical Framework). The findings of this thesis highlight an important aspect of teacher voice as being not only related to strategy and practice at classroom and school level. Here, the positioning and role that teachers play within the implementation of new and old attainment and evaluation policies is found to be equally important to the effective implementation and integration of new assessment frameworks into existing curriculums. This analysis looks through the lens of the practitioner and their experiences as a professional constructing a curriculum formulated by actors other than themselves and engaging with assessment approaches that are contradictory at times, creating an uneasy dissonance.

#### **1. Adaptation and implementation: Teacher's perceptions and experiences of the transition from the 5-14 Curriculum to Curriculum for Excellence**

This section will look at the transition and narrative of assessment and curriculum over time from the perspective of practitioners themselves. This corresponds with the subtheme of Adaptation and Implementation from T3 (Theme 3, Teacher Agency and Voice).

Adapting to changes is an integral part of the profession of teaching. The Curriculum for Excellence over time has potentially transformed practice and has also adapted quite significantly since its reform. Here, previous research studies suggest that teachers in Scotland have had to adapt to and implement Assessment is for Learning to the point where it has almost become *ritual* in every day practice (Hayward, et al., 2014; Black and Wiliam, 2004). The findings demonstrate the positive impact, practitioners believed it had upon their own professional development as well as attainment outcomes of the pupils themselves. Typically, the more experienced professionals have a clear understanding of the shifts from 5-14 curriculum and its assessment framework to Assessment is for learning within the context of CfE as the following extract shows:

S4T4: 5-14 was much more specific than curriculum for excellence, it was actually... I don't mean easier... but you could follow it, I mean for a new teacher 5-14 as much easier to have because you could see it said you had 2,3,4,5 and 10 times table you know at a level and then the other tables. Whereas curriculum for excellence is you don't know three tables or whatever it is.

This teacher expresses her current experience of the Curriculum for Excellence within the context of her previous experiences within the 5-14 framework using the 5-14 framework as a reference point. Here she argues that there is a lack of specificity creating more of a reliance on teacher judgement. She then makes a further statement regarding the ambiguity of the current curriculum guidelines and her professional judgement still utilizes the approach used within the 5-14 curriculum. Her approach to assessment is driven by the measures she adopted when she taught during the 5-14 curriculum and she consistently refers back to progression within particular stages of ability and age:

S3T2: Curriculum for excellence is not as specific. I still in my own head use CfE and then think... not thinking in 5-14 terms but balancing them both together, I balance them both together as a teacher now. I use them both in my own head. I mean I don't go to the 5-14 documents or anything like that but I know roughly because I have been teaching for so long, what stage 5-14 was at for each one so and use that to you know...

This finding supported by Emirebayer and Mische' (1998) iteration dimension of teacher agency as this teacher clearly feels the need to locate her new understandings within her previous experiences by "balancing them both together". This raises the question of the way in which teacher themselves integrate their own benchmarks for assessment is for learning under the curriculum where their experiences still hold previous and different levels of benchmarks for everyday evaluation and judgement of pupil progress. Another teacher further exemplifies this point here by stating the levels that are still at the back of their mind:

S3T1: It was just sort of coming to an end by the time I had started so I still have that you know kind of that 'oh well if they are at kind of P2 sort of stage they should be writing about 3 sentences'. You know how it was that kind of.... Which our E's and O's now are very different but it's funny it's just still at the back of my mind. You probably... if you talk to more experienced teachers that have been teaching a lot longer, they might still have that still at the back of their mind but coming through. They talk about linking it to a level C or a level E or whatnot.

This quote indicates that this teacher may be using past experiences and knowledge to integrate into the present everyday practice by selectively reactivating previous patterns of thought and action' (Emirebayer and Mische 1998, p. 971). By routinely incorporating frameworks of progress and achievement that she regards as being 'still at the back of my mind', this teacher constructs her own agency by *using temporally constructed engagement* of her past

professional, *practical-evaluative* and *iterative experiences* (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Here, in particular, she uses these certain levels and expectations from the back of their mind existing curriculum schema to make sense of the current curriculum and its Experiences and Outcomes which is more fluid and flexible than the guidelines used in 5-14. Professional judgement with regards to assessment here, may be argued as being more robust by the use of a mixed method approach by a more experienced teacher who has taught during the 5-14 period. For Emirbayer and Mische (1998) this contributes more broadly to 'stability and order to social universes which sustain, interactions and institutions over time' (p. 971). This highlights the iterative process whereby teachers adapt and make sense of new frameworks of assessment and evaluation. This may suggest that as new frameworks and system initiatives are introduced, teachers may reflectively refer back to their past experiences. In addition, this iterative method of practice may be seen as a way of challenging any given policy introduced and implemented from above. Moreover, the future evolution of the Scottish education system and most modern systems relies upon the way in which teacher's project and reconfigure their understandings of new guidelines and frameworks. Here, the way in which experienced teachers receive new guidelines such as AiFL, CfE and the NIF, may be 'creatively reconfigured in relation to their hopes, fears and desires for the future' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; p.971)

In terms of professional teaching practice this may suggest less reliance on central prescriptions relayed by curriculums and the increasing role of professional capacities to adapt new assessment and curriculum guidelines according to previous professional experiences. Here, the 5-14 curriculum in Scotland is evidenced as offering a useful template for professional practice when implementing the new NIF Assessment framework. Critically the extracts above demonstrate ways in which the 'objective model' has been identified by professionals (Kelly 1990). It may be argued that this model is adopted because the linear progression of evaluation of pupil progress is not present in current guidelines (i.e. Experiences and Outcomes) of Curriculum for Excellence for further clarity and understanding for teachers. This further suggests the rationale behind the Scottish Government introducing a national standardized testing framework such as the NIF to give added clarification, understanding and objectives for teaching professionals.

In addition, some of the more experienced teachers expressed that 5-14 provided clearer guidance for teachers.

S4T4: As well now, we have got, the highland numeracy progression and all that sort of thing now... and continuums for writing and that sort of thing that the Scottish Government has made up so there is that support if you haven't had the 5-14 background. In terms of evaluation and assessment it's sort of the same, we knew what exactly to aim towards for each case.

Here, this teacher argues that professional experience of the 5-14 curriculum provides an essential baseline for judgement of attainment levels in literacy and numeracy within the Curriculum for Excellence. This particular teacher echoes the views of another teacher within this study (School 3 Teacher A) who expressed how the 5-14 benchmarked levels were in “the back of [her] mind”, whereas new more inexperienced teachers are not able to refer to these benchmarks.

This teacher also perceives that the current guidance in the Continuums for Writing and Numeracy have been provided by the Scottish Government in recognition that teachers without previous experience of the structured guidance of the levels that pupils have reached offered by the 5-14 curriculum require additional support. It may be argued that this guidance supports professional judgement within assessment.

More broadly, effective transitions towards new curriculums and assessment frameworks are revealed as being reliant on the capacity of professionals to adapt. Here, as the interview extracts above have shown, both iterative and projective processes are used to enable professionals to understand shifting assessment frameworks and processes (Emirebayer and Mische, 1998; Biesta et al, 2014). In particular, the use of the 5-14 curriculum as a guideline for professional judgement relating to gauging the level of pupils attainment was alluded to by some teachers (School 3 Teacher 1; School 4 Teacher 3) Several studies have evidenced the central role of previous teaching experiences within professional adaptation particularly with regard to new assessment frameworks (see Biesta et al 2014; Hutchinson and Hayward, 2005; Hallam et al., 2004). New policies impact upon the current coherence of the CfE and AiFL. How do these policies maintain a broad range of professional identities which have and are still adapting to the CfE? (Lingard and McGregor, 2013; Thompson and Harbaugh 2013) It is also important to reflect upon How Assessment Changes have impacted upon Curriculum Development (Priestly, 1998)

## **2. AiFL – Teacher-pupil relationship and Dialogue**

Responses to Assessment is for Learning were generally positive. Many teachers approved of its progress and integration into the curriculum relating the ways in which it makes a meaningful

and holistic difference to pupil assessment and evaluation. The following extracts demonstrate ways in which teachers express *the practical-evaluative* dimension of their work which concurs with the view of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) of ‘the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action in response to the emerging demands, of presently evolving situations.

S1T1: Very positive. It’s the only way to teach. It’s part of teaching; if you weren’t doing it, you wouldn’t be doing a good job.

In the following extract the teacher expresses her view that AiFL is integral to teaching and learning. She not only describes her experience but defines AiFL and its purpose:

S2T3: So in some ways AiFL is what you do with the children and its explicit with the children so that the children are aware that they are assessing so they take part in the assessment as well and they are assessing each other and the more that that is done, the better the children know that they are on a scale that they are trying to improve and where are they on the scale and what are their own targets. So I think that kind of target setting is better... (School, Teacher )

Here the teacher is faced with the *demand* to deliver AiFL as part of an effective and appropriate learning experience for children enabling them to understand the role of assessment within their personal learning and development. Professional experience has equipped teachers with the knowledge to assess pupils in an appropriate way.

S4T4: Dialogue is really important: its everything. I think in teaching its much more important than any written piece or written feedback that you do The dialogue between both pupils but also between staff its where you gain the most. Also, for them to feel I think more connected to you as a teacher I think that’s very, very important.

In the above quote the teacher identifies dialogue as being crucial to the teaching and learning process. Emphasising the importance of enabling pupils to feel more connected to teachers within the learning process this teacher argues that dialogue plays a more important role within the assessment process than written feedback. The extract below also evidences how important dialogue is in the achievement and outcomes of each individual child.

Researcher: How important is dialogue between you, your pupils, parents and teachers?

S4T2: Really important, I feel, not too much because I’m a bit of a talker, but very focused dialogue and we get to do that here because we have our learner profiles, our blue profiles and the way that we have sort of streamlined I would say the dialogue, we have a learning conversation each term and we have conversations around our targets all the time and between learning outcomes. For example right now we are doing writing and

that came from Wednesday and we've been looking at improving it and targets and we are on Friday and now the children are focused in on what they need to do to improve or they have come to me for a little workshop where I can assess their needs and they can get what they need from me kind of thing.

The teacher offers a personal reflection of her role as a practitioner. From the practical-evaluative dimension the organisational support offered by the school itself provides a formal procedure through which effective dialogue can occur. In terms of this teachers own practice, this approach integrates formal and informal assessment as a two-way process between the teacher and the pupil. The extract 'assess their needs and they can get what they need from kind of thing' illustrates a highly interpersonal and holistic approach to assessment and evaluation. This teacher further evaluates her own professional practice and that of other teachers when discussing her approach to dialogue. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of the relationship between teacher and pupil:

S4T2: The dialogue is super important as long as they understand it as long as you keep it not too wordy and child friendly and give them plenty of opportunities of them talking to you rather than you just speaking to them. That's something I have to watch. As long as they understand it because I hear an awful lot of the time they hear waffle from teachers and I feel they go away with nothing. So you have got to be very focused with what we are talking about. Just that relationship you have with the child if you haven't got that the conversation and the dialogue isn't going to go too well.

Her values and beliefs center upon her own improvement as a professional and the importance of her role in using dialogue with pupils for assessment purposes, as she feels that a one-way teacher led didactic approach in which the adult dominates all conversations with pupils are not conducive to a child-friendly context. Here, mutual dialogue enables the child to have plenty of opportunities to talk about how they can improve. The values and ethos of the curriculum for excellence mirror this approach. In particular two of the four Capacities; *Successful learners* and *Confident Individuals* emphasize the importance of children sharing ownership of the teaching and learning process.

S3T3: Very important. Yeah. It's what makes AifL. You use it to speak to your stage partners all the time especially when you have got your monitoring and tracking. We all use our ILD to get contact with the parents and show them what they are doing and how they are doing. It helps with their confidence and some of it is a lack of confidence which means they are unwilling to try. Most of the feedback is there and then and same with the members of staff where if one of the children in their group is struggling we can adjust to it there and then. So a lot of it is verbal really so. I use, like other teachers, traffic lights for pupils work and so I have some pupils who actually put themselves down on red or amber and I have to have that dialogue that actually says well you have done 20 sums and only 2 of them wrong means you have got it and that way you always have to do it as a dialogue and it's a slow



process to reassure them that actually you don't have to be perfect. That's also going to hinder their progress because they don't want to give it a go if they don't want to succeed. So yeah so I think dialogue is very important for lots of reasons and actually it is more subtle, sometimes its that drip drip drip of reassuring a child so that they get a sense of what it real because you've got those who think they have done fantastically and you have those who don't appreciate just what they are.

There is a clear goal here and throughout the transcripts where pupil progress is to be achieved through dialogue and learner autonomy. This teacher makes active and effective use of the structures and support systems around her 'especially when you have got your monitoring and tracking'. This experienced teacher uses her iterative reflections to explain how spoken dialogue has the advantage of 'giving feedback there and then' and adjusting it there and then.

S3T3:...it's a slow process to reassure them that actually you don't have to be perfect...

Here, AiFL and the dialogue used as a tool by practitioners within creates a developmentally appropriate way of evaluating pupil progress over time. Simultaneously, it enables children to retain their self-esteem and to value their own capabilities, facing and overcoming challenges and experience learning as a gradual journey.

### **3. Assessment to enhance teaching and learning**

This sub-section focusses upon the values and beliefs of teachers in this study with regards to Assessment and Achievement as an over-arching theme. Teachers mostly reflected upon the use of AiFL towards achievement and enhancing teaching and learning. Teacher Voice and the practical-evaluative dimension plays a pivotal role in these reflections where the question of importance of AifL in improving attainment and outcomes is posed:

Researcher: How important is AiFL in Improving attainment and outcomes?

S3T1: Really important. I find it's really good to communicate with my class when we are doing the AiFL strategies because they always think they have done 'Green' and they always think they have done really well. So any piece of work where we use the faces or traffic lights I model it with the children so It says "I think..." and then they have got the success criteria and then weve got "My teacher thinks..." and then if we have got different opinions in how we think we are both doing then we can negotiate around that and discuss our next steps. For example, if I had a pupil who wrote "I think that I am doing well in my fractions" and I wrote "I think you need to improve on your fractions" We would meet in the middle and I would explain to him specifically what he needs to improve on and we go from there. It works the other way around where the pupil sometimes feels they are not doing as well as they think they are and sometimes I have to give them some reassurance in order for them to realise.

This statement demonstrates another benefit of AiFL in communicating realistic goals and targets to pupils. The organized feedback, dialogue and communication is effective in maintaining continuous assessment as well as a strong bond between teacher and pupil. She is also describing process of everyday negotiation where the child is put at the centre of decisions in progression. Here she sub-consciously raises her Teacher Voice by describing her everyday practices using AiFL methods, and expressing how paramount it is to improvement of her pupils progress indicating her best practical-evaluative skills.

Many schools and teachers use traffic lights, thumbs up thumbs down and other signalling methods to communicate feedback effectively, particularly with pupils with special needs: .

S3T1: It raises attainment basically and gives children confidence and gives them a clear view of what comes next. We did quite a lot of training in this and how we support them in their assessment and progression in learning and I think that was quite helpful because a lot of children are not use to seeing the big picture over a long of time and also not use to planning and being independent because they are so use to us spoon feeding them and telling them what to do and how to do it. For children with additional needs its harder because we have to communicate with them more clearly and the size of the steps we take with them are very small and some of them we have to use traffic lights or thumbs up thumbs down so the dialogue with them can be very difficult. It can be hard when you have varying abilities in the class particularly with regard to asn pupils such as ADHD pupils whos progression is slower than others. So we really need to take care and be sensitive I think with them. Sometimes you will be doing things over and over again with them and others in the class will be racing ahead of them.

This particular teacher uses her Teacher Voice to effectively express several key aspects of AiFL in enhancing teaching and learning. She sums up the purpose and realistic objective of AiFL declaring that it ‘raises attainment basically’, ‘gives children confidence’ and ‘gives them a clear view of what comes next’. Her professional experience has equipped her with the confidence to express this opinion and to show how far her professional judgement has benefited from her iteration as a practitioner in this particular setting and circumstance. Additionally, she makes an argument that reinforces the importance and effectiveness of AiFL in ‘giving children a clear view of what comes next’ within the curriculum. She is arguing here for an integrative teaching practice which enables and encourages resilience and independence in children’s as learners and self-evaluators. Resilience within children and the *autonomous learner’s* concept has widely been researched and recognised by the OECD and The Scottish Government under key skills. Here as an assessment framework, recognised by teachers, AiFL provides a framework for the realisation of these key skills. As illustrated by the interviews with practitioners above, it may be suggested that AiFL has the potential to integrate well within progressive and holistic 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculums. It has the capacity to incorporate into all aspects of everyday teaching practice, interaction and thought, enabling children to lead their

own learning. In addition, the malleability of AiFL is brought into sharp relief in this interview by the importance she places on being sensitive of the ranging levels of ability of each child. This approach of assessment may be seen by many educators as a radical way of measuring progress as there is no set standardized evaluation according age and stage (within AiFL), however, it acts continuum for long term and meaningful approach to all children and their wide-ranging abilities.

Another teacher recognized this evaluative continuum by describing AiFL as a 'journey':

S4TB: Yeah cool, I think again it's the *journey* that you are taking with the child and I think that for example can I compare it with summative, so let's say you are comparing it with from what I use to have when I was in school from summative assessment to summative assessment you are really missing so much and you're teaching to a test and then you are grading to a test and then you are asking where is the journey and then you are worrying about how they have not got where you want them to be bla bla bla, whereas AiFL is more looking at where they are and moving constantly all the time to improve. If a child knows where they need to go, they are going to be able to work towards it as is their teacher, I believe. I think yeah... I think it has improved. You can be so focused on their learning and what they need to do.

Here the teacher joins the child on the journey which enables her to understand where they are and move 'constantly all the time' towards achieving the child's potential. She implicitly emphasises the more meaningful and coherent framework offered by AiFL when she questions 'where is the journey within summative assessment'. Here, she uses her iterative experience from past life history express her view and opinion of summative assessment (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). She also relates feelings of anxiety in 'worrying about how they have not got where you want them to be...' Her Teacher Voice is being fully heard here as she expresses the personal and professional pressure she feels to ensure children reach their potential.

Throughout these interviews, it became clear that teachers were eager to express their beliefs and values. In the following extract, the teacher compares 'the old ways' as involving a teacher led approach in which agency was based on what teachers 'felt and saw'. In contrast the focus on assessment and achievement to enhance teaching and learning within AiFL involves both pupils and the teacher sharing an understanding of how to progress and achieve agreed goals:

S2:T3 I think in the old ways it was very much teacher led. Very much what the teachers felt and saw and pushed it on. Whereas now I think it is much more autonomous and child friendly, we have more a focus on the pupil and how they know how to progress and achieve with goals set by both them and the teacher. I think it used to be that we focussed upon the end of term result than the whole school from p1-7 progression you know, we as teachers would get the result that we wanted from them and just share it with their parents whereas now it is more

of a collective dialogue of between me and that child as well as teachers and parents as a whole. I think this is a more effective way of learning how to learn for them.

Here, these agreed goals are shared in a whole school collective dialogical approach amongst all contributors of the child's development. This teacher's reflection on her past experiences in the 5-14 curriculum reveals the way in which agency is formed out of temporal engagement within specifically configured environments. The teacher here emphasises the significance of context when combined with time, revealing that agency does not simply depend on an individual's life course. Here, as Emirebayer and Mische (1998) argue the educational contexts are primarily social contexts in which agency is 'always a dialogical process by and through which actors immersed in temporal passage engage with others within collectively organized contexts of action' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 974)

The teacher below expresses the importance of AifL in the enhancement of her own professional judgement.

S4T2: ...and its important for me and the pupils to just get really focused and it enables me to see where their difficulties are, where I need to move them onto next and I have to say you are doing that all the time as a teacher so assessment for learning is happening all the time.

Here, the teacher reveals the importance of her iterative views, values and beliefs that Assessment for learning is 'happening all of the time'. This exemplifies the critical importance of assessment as a continuous dynamic, reflexive process informing professional judgment. This contrasts sharply with the snapshot of a national test and raises the question of how national tests are integrated within this process. Her view of assessment as a journey reveals the importance of this reflexive approach.

## **6.2.2 T2: School Leadership**

### **1. Testing Dualities: Head teachers as Mediators and Challengers**

The strongest responses arose particularly from Head teachers with regards to new assessment policies and the issues surrounding implementation of these policies. Here, Head teacher participants had increasingly taken on the dual role as 1. Mediators and 2. Challengers within the implementation of The National Improvement Framework. The analysis of the responses of head teachers to the implementation of the National Improvement Framework is integral to the theme of Assessment and Achievement (Theme 1, see diagram above). These are the central

components of the policy strategy proposed by Education Scotland and The Scottish Government:

As the quote below reveals head teachers have challenged the plausibility of effectively operationising the National Improvement Framework within the ‘present circumstances’ faced by schools in Scotland. In particular as the head teacher below argues reductions in staffing resources and financial budgets available severely hamper the effective implementation of the Nif whilst also creating a ‘burden’ for the classroom teacher who is the schools ‘most valuable resource’.

S4H1: The most valuable resource in a school and the education system is the frontline classroom teacher and if you over burden the classroom teacher with lots and lots of bureaucracy and lots and lots of hoops to jump through then that will affect the attainment gap. If you want to close the attainment gap, you have to accelerate the bottom end very fast whilst accelerating the top end reasonably fast. That cannot be done in in the present circumstances. Cannot be done. Its not going to happen.

The head teacher in the quote above argues that the introduction of the NiF undermines the capacity of teachers to deliver effective teaching and learning strategies to close the attainment gap. ‘...if you over burden the classroom teacher with lots and lots of bureaucracy and lots and lots of hoops to jump through then that will affect the attainment gap’ Here the head teacher is speaking on behalf of teachers in challenging the underlying rational and operationalisation of the NIF. Here, also the head teacher uses a projective Teacher Voice to argue that the notion that you can accelerate the bottom end very fast whilst accelerating the top end reasonably fast cannot be done in in the present circumstances. With confidence the head teacher confirms this in the next sentence suggesting that this cannot be done. It’s not going to happen. As explained below, the present circumstances are not conducive to the introduction of the National Improvement Framework. In particular lack of staff resources are identified as a real issue for the role of the head teacher as Mediator within the current context.

S4H1: You take a PSA [Parent Support Advisor] away from a classroom and you end up with the class teacher doing a lot more. You either value what the PSA’s do or you don’t value what they do. If you value what they do and you move it, then you can move the resource in the classroom. If you don’t value what the do there will be very little difference. So the current cuts that they are talking about is never going to help close the attainment gap. Not possible. What will happen is, the children in most need in your class will tend to be those who are the poorer children, they will accelerate through to the best of their ability, the top end will not be accelerated, they will stagnate, so they will close the gap but not in a positive way; they are closing it by holding back the high fliers.

The crucial role of the child's socio-economic context is also related in several interviews with head teachers. In the extract below the head teacher argues that the combination of socio-economic deprivation and individuals with additional special needs creates a context in which teacher's feel they are 'fighting a losing battle'. Here as a mediator this head teacher is giving voice to the barriers that teachers face within the current economic and social context.

**Researcher: You may have just answered this but what do you think are the main factors contributing to the Attainment Gap in Scotland.**

S1H1: Yeah so there's the whole Social Work issue and the whole nursery not being compulsory, the non-compliance of parents and then we're supposed to have a corporate parenting role over that so that's really difficult. If you know that a child needs speech and language therapy and needs referred to another agency and the parents won't comply, you're already fighting a losing battle then you're supposed to teach them. You know, parents are being arrested every other week or you know there's drug or alcohol abuse in the house or whatever and a lot of these kids just get themselves to school because they will feel safer here.

The severity and extent of issues facing children and their families is underlined in the following extract.

S1H1: You don't think this will happen here but it's happening on our doorstep you know I've got a lot of families because of the changing welfare system to Universal Credit that are relying on Foodbanks and if you, you know, our school in particular is viewed as "the snobs on the hill". They think we don't have that problem here but yeah, we do because it's across the board because there are parents that have a mortgage that are on a food bank you know through no fault of their own so I think it's a losing battle; change to the welfare, change to the health visitor non-compliance to the parents and it's not going to improve the attainment gap. Even worse a policy that I don't understand is that another increase in nursery hours so my nursery children will essentially be in longer than my Primary 1's and I have to feed them. When they're not at home with their parents; they are not bonding with their parents. We are just childcare. So you know yet responsible for that and their early development. We offer parenting groups but the ones that you want to come, don't come. So there's loads of things out there to try and address those major issues like the Universal credit or you know, how to help develop...

Critically, as the extract below a quiet defiance emerges when she is invited to elaborate her thoughts on the National Improvement Framework.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the National Improvement Framework or National Testing?

S2H1: I just think they need to listen to teachers more on the ground before they make policies and think about how they are going to implement them because if somebody has a magic formula why not give it to all the schools. But they don't. They just re-write something depending on who's in government in some form or other.

Here, the head teacher articulates the overwhelming need to ‘listen to teachers on the ground’ before designing and operationalising policies. Her use of the phrase ‘magic formula’ underlines her sense of disbelief at this lack of consultation with teachers. Her view that the Nib is a largely politically driven top down initiative is also underlined by ‘they just re-write something depending on who’s in government in some form or other’.

Head teachers were keen to share perceptions of their position under the component of assessment; particularly with regards to standardised testing. Their role as challengers and mediators of change has intensified as issues such as socio-economic background and context are critical concerns under the assessment changes. They questioned whether the changes from NIF are applicable and worth implementing under the Assessment is for Learning in place given the current financial, economic, and organisational and governance context in Scotland. This revealed questions regarding the congruency between curriculum ethos and the relevance of standardised assessments implemented as part of the National Improvement Framework.

Head teachers’ role as ‘mediators’ include the negotiations between themselves as head teachers and the teachers at the micro level of policy implementation in schools. This can take different forms. Head teachers may be perceived as mediators between school and various income streams, needing to use summative testing as evidenced below.

S4T1: But so, there’s standardized testing; there’s testing that we will give head teachers. You know, it gives them the bigger picture of performance within the school. You know, *is there numeracy weaknesses or mental agility; is that an area we need to work on? And what can we do to bridge that gap?* You know that kind of thing. And we have had issues with that before. (School 4 teacher A)

Here, head teachers act as gate keepers of the broader picture relating to the performance of the school particularly with regard to self-evaluation ‘weaknesses’ in key areas such as literacy and numeracy.

S4T1: We have got our diagnostic assessment. Basically, from Monday we have got the p2s being put onto the system and that’s a slightly different kind of assessment. So, there’s a range of numeracy and literacy type activities that we would ask them to carry out and also, where they are, are they punching above their weight? It’s their ability on the back of. erm.. so, they might come out of the reading at a high level for their age and ability. So, where you would expect them to be at age and stage. So sometimes you get children who are punching above their weight and some of their scores don’t reflect in the literacy and the language side of it.

Testing is being seen here as an important diagnostic tool as well as a means of highlighting strategic areas for improvement. Critically however, as the quote below reveals when acting as

mediators head teachers are responsible for presenting the data in such a way that ‘brings in you know your PEF funding as well’ (S2T3). These reveals concerns relating to the relationship between NiF data and funding allocation. Here, head teachers present ‘lovely bars and charts’ that they can ‘tweak’ in order to ensure the data meets the requirements of standardised testing (see S4T3). This reveals, the limitations inherent in this process of data representation, centre upon the lack of sensitivity to flaws in the computerised assessment,

T2S3: with that there are other reasons why they are underachieving. When they are little you know, there may be other reasons, they just tend to press one button and another button and it might not get the correct results. Or they just click finish even when they haven’t you know.

As this teacher reveals, head teachers are placed in a difficult position in acting as mediators for their school because they are concerned with gaining adequate resources for the school through PEF funding whilst also being responsible for ensuring that teaching, learning and assessment processes are child centred and truly reflective of the stage at which children are learning. As this headteacher below demonstrates how the practicalities and lack of resources can hinder this assessment and judgement process:

S3H1: So a lot depends on the school hardware and broadband and all those sort of things so that needs to be right in schools. I think in rural areas that can be quite difficult; so theres the sort of practicalities. Also if you’ve got a class full of 30 primary 1’s, you know, who is going to actually administer the tests to the children when you haven’t got as many additional needs assistants or classroom assistants.

The presentation of results to the local authority becomes an overwhelming priority and it may be argued, this could distract head teachers from the key driver of the AifL which is to ensure a genuine, progressive and formative relationship between teaching, learning and assessment. Underlining this tension, findings indicated that head teachers were particularly concerned with how children would be assessed, evaluated and tracked, why the NIF has been introduced (as for what purpose), and issues of inequality and the relevance of National Testing within socio-economic contexts characterised by poverty and deprivation (Mowat, 2018). Here, the current research provides insight into the way in which situational constraints experienced by children living in poverty impacts significantly on learning and assessment.

S4T3: So, from the INCAS, the head teachers will get all these lovely bars and charts that they can tweak all the data for every child and then if there’s sort of glaringly obvious ones that aren’t achieving were asking why they aren’t achieving and that kind of brings in you know your PEF funding as well. With that there are other reasons why they are underachieving. When they are little you know, there may be other reasons, they just tend to press one button and another button and it might not get the correct results. Or they just click finish even when they haven’t,



you know..... when I think Primary 2 is the one they actually test with the INCAS. P1, P4, and P7 are doing a slightly newer test that is coming in...I don't know anything about that testing yet. So I'm just sort of clinging on to what I already know. But I imagine it would be quite similar. I think it's a longer test; I think it lasts forty minutes from what I heard. But I haven't seen it so I'm not sure.

These tensions are also underlined by evidence from the EIS Response to Education and Culture Committee Consultation on Proposed Stage 2 Amendment to the Education Bill of the National Improvement Framework:

Early iterations of the NIF, and discussion around standardised tests, seemed to suggest that Scottish Government believed that annual testing of children in P1, P4, P7 and S3, and within a given period of time in the school calendar (effectively mirroring the SQA exam diet), was the best means by which to gather the requisite data from which to induce attainment improvements – though no evidence was provided to show how this approach would address the attainment gap. The EIS view is that this would be an ill-judged and disproportionate approach to statistical data-gathering- unnecessary and undesirable in terms of methodology, scheduling and scale; at variance with international research evidence on best practice; and counter to the interests of Scottish education as it continues its progressive journey with Curriculum for Excellence.

(EIS Response to Education and Culture Committee Consultation on Proposed Stage 2 Amendment to the Education Bill of the National Improvement Framework, p 5)

Here the admission articulates a central dilemma for head teachers in their role as mediators. The presentation of data relating to the attainment gap within their schools becomes motivated by an overriding concern to ensure that adequate resources are gained to reduce that gap however flaws in the assessment process itself particularly with regard to younger age groups and more fundamental issues related to pedagogic approaches become secondary within this process. As the EIS note this can become an,

an ill-judged and disproportionate approach to statistical data-gathering- unnecessary and undesirable in terms of methodology, scheduling and scale; at variance with international research evidence on best practice; and counter to the interests of Scottish education as it continues its progressive journey with Curriculum for Excellence'.

(EIS Response to Education and Culture Committee Consultation on Proposed Stage 2 Amendment to the Education Bill of the National Improvement Framework, p 5)

The European Commission have also related a key concern that head teachers are not driven by national and local priorities (EU Commission, 2018 p. 35):

'Societal and governmental expectations are demanding. They may reflect priorities, such as economic imperatives, that diverge from notions of a love of learning that teachers themselves might view as paramount.

There may, too, be an awkward tension between the autonomy vested in teachers and school leaders, and the accountability that might be reasonably expected of them.’

Significantly, the head teacher role in this research has demonstrated a shift in the dynamics of leadership through the development of the Curriculum for Excellence and the assessment changes over the last 10 years.

S1H3: The other major thing that’s come in that has influenced Assessment is for Learning is *Curricular Pathways*. So, the development and progression through the curriculum; development and progression through a level *within* a curriculum whether things are revisited. You know whether its knowledge and understanding or skills, and how that relates to the world of work so there’s a massive amount of paper work that comes in that you have to question what impact it has on teaching and learning.

Here, the head teacher regrets the levels of bureaucracy involved in Assessment is for Learning and related initiatives. In particular she emphasises the pressures upon head teachers and teachers, particularly with regard to workload and time taken from what’s important in a classroom. Moreover, in the quote below, a head teacher challenges what she regards as a disconnect between practitioners and policy makers with regard the introduction of new policies such as the NIF:

S2H1: I think there’s an awful lot of people producing bits of paper that are not practitioners; that are not erm, I think it’s all driven by strategies, policies and politics and none of them have been teachers so I think they have lost sight of what’s important in a classroom which is Assessment is for Learning

This reflection reinforces and reaffirms comments made by teachers in the section on AiFL and its enhancement for Teaching and Learning. Here, she expresses her frustration over the undermining of professionals and their effective use of Assessment is for Learning overlooked by the Scottish government and its political aims. Her frustrations are mirrored by teachers themselves, as seen in previous interviews. Here, her Voice speaks *for* teachers, acting as both mediator and challenger of policies introduced by the Scottish Government.

Analysis of the interview data demonstrates the significance of professional roles under two central components of the education system in Scotland; school context and assessment. This is with regards to school context, the central concern in the operationalization of the school under new system policies such as the NIF, Assessment is for Learning, Standards, Benchmarks and Pupil Equity funding (Education Scotland, 2018; The Scottish Government 2018). Here, the findings revealed how head teachers played a pivotal role in implementing these changes in assessment. Tensions within this process were revealed by the perceptions of head teachers with

regard to the shifting dynamics of their leadership role. This is exemplified below by a head teacher who related feelings of lack of autonomy and power within this role. Here, the paperwork ‘dictates the school improvement plan’ and she feels ‘squeezed by national priorities and local priorities’. These pressures are compounded by feelings of lack of autonomy and control within the implementation process particularly with regards to the self-evaluation of the school. Here, the head teacher emphasises the importance of her own need for professional autonomy and control:

S2H1: They [teachers] are overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork that comes out and the timing of it. It then dictates the school improvement plan because I am being squeezed by national priorities and local priorities and not strictly self-evaluation of the school- where I think we should go, where I think the strengths are... so time has to be built in for staff to look at benchmarks.

Although she expresses her feelings of powerlessness, she uses her Teacher Voice to raise concerns over the practical demands and expectations made by national and local agent, and then suggests the need for change: ‘time has to be built in for staff to look at benchmarks’. This significantly highlights not only the demand for more time for teachers, but for benchmarks to be made an inclusively decided and enacted by teachers and head teachers to make professional judgement themselves. This is contrasted with the proposals for national standardised testing to be undertaken in Scottish schools in order to provide robust data that informs professionals on how

In the quote below, a head teacher questions what she regards as a disconnect between practitioners and policy makers:

S3H1: They have to know what they are going to do at the end to find out what they have done so they need to be planning for assessment at the start of a block of teaching and not at the end. But then things will come in like the national assessments and as yet I have seen them, but the staff haven’t seen them but they know they are coming... but then again there is ambiguity on how they will be used, when they will be used, will there be a window or not?... there’s still staff training to undergo.

The issues raised by head teachers have also been illuminated in previous research. For example, in the report ‘Teachers and school leaders in schools as learning organisations’, the EU emphasises the need to ensure that the Leadership of head teachers is not undermined by national priorities (European Commission 2018).

Evidently, there were contested views relating to the strategic priorities of head teachers. Exemplifying this, one head teacher alluded to the critical importance of the quality of the

teaching and learning process and distributional leadership as being integral to the assessment framework.

S1H1: My strategic priority would be to work with teachers at all levels so with teachers right through to senior leaders and system leaders on improving the quality of teaching and learning and that's... and that has the most impact, you know if you look at the research things like class sizes and stuff is down there but it's quality of teachers that comes above all else...

Here leadership plays a pivotal role in school community engagement or disengagement from policy shifts and changes (Sanders, SCEL 2016). Head teacher 1 from school 1 highlights the need to concentrate on the essential school community purposes of teaching and learning. Critically rhetoric/discourse that the Scottish Government uses is the power of democracy within any system of the state, particularly within education, whereby all stakeholders including teaching professionals have the power to use their voice in matters of policy changes such as the introduction of the NIF. However, the findings contradicted the rhetoric of the Scottish Government as head teacher 1 (school 2) laments the lack of understanding of school communities and contexts as well as teaching and learning by policy makers:

S2H2: I just think they need to listen to teachers more on the ground before they make policies and think about how they are going to implement them because if somebody has a magic formula why not give it to all the schools. But they don't. they just re-write something depending on who's in government in some form or other.

Head teacher 1 from school 2 highlights the political expediency behind yet more new developments that occur without any real engagement with teachers.

In arguing for a focus on distributional or networking forms of leadership this head teacher conveys her view that dialogical approaches to policy making are critical particularly when changing educational policies and governance frameworks. Her concern that 'they don't just re-write something depending on who's in government in some form or other' underlines the concern that top down forms of governance are prescriptive and fail to consider the implementation process fully.

### **6.2.3 T4: Teacher Voice and Accountability (The Projective Dimension)**

The findings in this section are mostly related to the future of assessment and curriculum from the perception of the teachers with regard to their future trajectories of agency. Here, teachers focus upon was in which new assessment frameworks (particularly AiFL and NiF) are

‘creatively reconfigure in relation to their personal hopes, fears and desires for the future’ (Emirbayer and Mische, p. 972).

Teacher voice is intrinsically related to notions of accountability within professional teaching practice (Elliott, 1994; Drew, 2016; Berry, 2012).

S4T2: The summative stuff is kind of yeah very useful in many ways but at the same time you go with your professional judgement you have been doing along the journey. The summative I have many philosophical problems with but I keep that to myself.

Here this teacher goes on to relate her practical evaluative dimension of her professional view of assessment as a long term process. The iterational lense of AiFL described throughout these interviews has shown that the the habits, routines and practices with positive values and beliefs allows AiFL to continue to develop and improve comprehensibly over time.

Professional as well as personal knowledge and understandings of these components were related during interviews with head teachers in contrast to the interviews with teachers themselves. Here, views, feelings and thoughts of system and policy changes were more openly expressed amongst head teachers than teachers. This was expected, as previous research has revealed that head teachers are generally gatekeepers of all policy changes developed by local and national authorities (Torrance, 2013). However, teachers spoke of their own specific journeys with policies such as AiFL. This interaction has also been evidenced by studies on AiFL within other national contexts, for example in Norway (Moller, 2005; OECD 2007).

The rationale of the Scottish government and the National Improvement Framework is to enable them to identify schools which require more resources. Here, however, teachers understanding of the rationale is one working towards accountability measures on professional and school level. “to be inspector ready” suggests that teachers are concerned with the expectations of local and national authorities. Accountability is a common theme throughout the data with regards to perceptions and experiences of teachers as well as head teachers. Teachers are aware that the NIF has been introduced in order to strengthen “professional development” and increase “self-evaluation of the school”. Here the teacher creatively reconfigures the received information of the NIF as she is not sure about the underlying rational for received structures of thought.

S3T3: I know that it has that testing element added in but I’m certain that it won’t completely replace our other assessment that we have in place. We are already working really hard and it would not be fair to just wipe out all that hard work with some test that wouldn’t give us a clear view of our schools. I looked at all the bits and

thought “oh that, that, that, yeah I know about all of those, I just didn’t know that we were doing it” We do it we just don’t call it that. What I know is that it’s about the pupils, the self-evaluation of the school, professional development and all that stuff. It’s basically helping us to be inspector ready external accountability rather than child and teacher dialogue? (School C, Teacher 3)

As if their focus and understanding is centred around their own efficacy within the school rather than local or national policy rationales and priorities. Similarly, for example their perception of new national standardised testing being introduced.

S3T1: But I think it is important to be sensitive with these tests because on any given day you could have a child who has come to school feeling either unwell or upset about something that has happened at home and you have to be careful if you want to sit them in front of a test in isolation for a long time. The result won’t be fair. So, I don’t know what this will really entail.

The quote above provides an insight into the concerns of the teacher. Here it may suggested that the teacher feels that the tests could be used as a blunt instrument for clumsy assessment unless the teacher is able to be sensitive to individual development needs and circumstances and classroom contexts.

However, as the extract below reveals the understanding of some teachers in relation to the use of the data from summative assessment was limited. Here, responsibility and the roles of teachers with regard to assessment and learning are largely confined to the classroom and its practices. This demonstrates how accountability operates within the internal tripod of assessment (Chapter 3, Figure 2).

S4T1: So, you have got your formative assessment which is going on all the time and you’re summative which will give lots of data, not just for the head teacher but for the council I would imagine but yeah.

AiFL is seen as the province of the professional but the summative tests at this stage are seen as evidence for ‘others’ to use in some way.

I suppose what I really want as a teacher and professional is that the tests and their results inform us personally on what we need to do in order to move forward and close our own attainment gap. We know ourselves what is needed. (School C, Teacher 1)

This demonstrates the personal and professional desires of teaching professionals as this teacher expresses how they can use their own practical evaluative and projective agency to close their own attainment gap. This reiterates the importance of the use of data and also using diagnostic testing to inform professional judgement.

S3T3: We don't know exactly what it would look like and I think promoted staff do. We don't know what information we are going to get from it. I'm not totally convinced that it suddenly pushes us into teaching any different because we all work very hard using different assessment strategies on a day to day basis, on an hour by hour basis, and we adjust; we have become very good at adjusting our input, output and our delivery.

The teacher above sees new testing as providing something new but uncertain what that might be. Thus she acknowledges that she is sceptical about the information that might be gained as she suggests that the ongoing assessment and teacher response are already well developed.

Here, it is evident that this teacher is aware of the attainment gap as reported by the media and government in Scotland and the rationale behind introducing tests in order to inform them personally as those with professional responsibility for closing this attainment gap within their own classroom and school. She also emphasises existing professional expertise where "we know ourselves what is needed" highlights the importance of this professional knowledge and ownership. This creates a slight conflict between class teachers and the policies or policy makers from above or national priorities. Here it may be suggested that teachers should be encouraged to become challengers themselves in order to gain greater agency over their position or role within the system, particularly within the implementation of policy changes. This is reinforced by the views a head teacher previously mentioned regarding the overall self-evaluation of the school (Headteacher 1, School 1).

Interviews revealed that experiences, perceptions, and feelings related to the recent imposition of the NIF highlighted the implementation as a hierarchical, one-way top down process which left little room for negotiation or consultation for teachers themselves. Here, notions of distributive leadership are constrained by the imperative of ensuring key drivers of improvement in attainment are implemented by the head teacher. This underlines that this was a policy imposed without consideration for existing expertise and practice in relation to previous assessment developments (e.g. AiFL).

S4T2: I will be honest with you, I actually googled it. I was talking to another teacher last night about it and it's not a new initiative, it's a process that we have been doing for many many years and it cascades down from the authorities from the government and to the head teacher to us.

As previous studies have shown, notions of top-down accountability have always been present (O'Neill, O. 2013; Priestly et al. 2011). Importantly however individual local authorities have the power to demand that a certain percentage of children in the school should have achieved

specific levels by a target date. This percentage will have been decided based on school circumstances and measures of deprivation. (Priestly et al. 2011)

The extract below reveals some of the interviewees felt that they were passive recipients of new policies rather than being active agents.

Interviewer: Tell me what you know about the NIF.

S4T2: I know that it's called "NIF" \*laughs\* and now that you said earlier that it was to do with the tests that were coming up; I know that it's to do with that but I have never ever looked at it, used it, nothing. I am totally passive in it, not gone out and looked at it at all. If somebody gave me something from it I would read it but not a lot sorry. I think we tend to get stuff which is emailed to us and I teach a class with P2, 3, 4, 5 so I have got kids that are working at early first and second level. So, if they send something out that is 30 pages long, I'm not going to read it. I haven't got time.

Although the NIF is fairly new, (first framework publication in January 2016) and the findings show that little information and training has been provided to teachers across the authorities in Scotland that have been covered in this research. However, teachers were asked what they knew about the NIF -with the assistance of interview prompts- and responded by recalling that this systematic change is nothing new in what way nothing new as it is a framework of acronyms and drivers which teachers have always been practicing and accounting for, for many years throughout the Curriculum for Excellence:

S3T2: Not a lot. I mean I think it is just another name for what we have already been doing for years and years.

Teacher's understandings centred upon the notion that the NIF framework has been in place since the Curriculum for Excellence was implemented, however written in a different format. Similarly the NIF framework has labelled what teachers have always been practicing:

S3T3: I looked at all the bits and thought "oh that, that, that, yeah I know about all of those, I just didn't know that we were doing it" We do it we just don't call it that. What I know is that it's about the pupils, the self-evaluation of the school, professional development and all that stuff. It's basically helping us to be inspector ready.

However, another teacher describes this as «another policy»:

S1H1: Yeah. I mean.... It's another policy. It's not anything specifically new, it's just written in a different format. You know, the drivers are there and they're you know, assessment of child's progress- we are



doing that all the time, that's not different. Teachers professionalism- we've already got GTC standards; they've got their professional update, you know, we've got the ethos of shared classroom practice.

Here it seems as though the Scottish Government is attempting to reorganise and re-format these original strategies and practices in a new bureaucratic way. There are assumptions being made that this new policy recognises and knowingly builds on existing professional expertise and policies or simply renames existing practice.

It was apparent from the data and policy documentation that improvements over lack of clarity and structure have been made in terms of implementing frameworks such as AiFL.

However, practitioners noted that less of their time is invested in reading such documents, and only compulsory documents were read.

S2T1: So if they send something out that is 30 pages long, im not going to read it. I haven't got time

Having the autonomy and freedom in their own practices due to the nature of AiFL policies has allowed teachers to collaborate with other practitioners within the school to work towards improving outcomes. The interview data demonstrated that there is no uncertainty that schools are driven to reduce the attainment gap and raise standards. Some schools have adjusted and adapted to the given benchmarks for literacy and numeracy produced by Education Scotland. Most schools, noted by teachers, are using benchmarks produced by their local authority. One school community is adapting its own benchmarks to the numeracy and literacy benchmarks used in the National Curriculum in England. Indeed, it is clear that the curriculum has sustained teacher and school autonomy under its system (Moller 2002). The drivers behind the NIF have come from international league tables and political necessity.

Teachers tend to share their general professional insights in classroom practices, particularly with regards to AiFL where knowledge and positive experiences arose more frequently from their data. However, practicality as a theme was commonly criticised by practitioners with regards to *how* standardized tests will be carried out. In some rural schools, teachers stressed how resources for assessment were lacking (i.e. only 7 laptops in one school of 300 pupils).

S2T2: We already do a series of testing. We don't do it on computers because our computers are terrible. Awful. There are the most rubbish contracts we have had through the council. Its unbelievable how under resourced we are. We have to have a mouse and a keyboard with every single laptop because they are broken; it's ridiculous.

Issues in relation to how standardized tests are carried out were also expressed by the teacher below. Here, the teacher uses their practical evaluative judgement to reveal a concern regarding the validity of the computerised tests given the unique developmental needs of each individual child.

S3T3: The problem with that is, how do you measure that if the tests are going to be multiple choice? You do sometime see children who are a bit out of sync and it can be as simple as when in the day were they assessed? Because it's a long time sitting that assessment. It can be that they didn't sleep well the night before and they are not going to be so good.

Trust in terms of the full and open exchange of information between head teachers, teachers and government actors and policy makers at regional and national level under the school and assessment system became a common theme whilst interviewing all head teachers and some teachers in what ways. Here as the quotes below reveal teachers did not have confidence in the policy making process. Here, notions of precariousness regarding the future of evaluation and external contextual issues such as the impact of cuts to state welfare in Scotland were the main concerns with regard to assessment changes. In particular, head teachers conveyed a concern that policy makers did not fully comprehend the multi-dimensional effect of poverty and inequality on the educational development of children: As one head teacher explains

S2H1: Well if we are talking about the poverty related attainment gap that has a huge number of causes. I mean where do you start? There's families that have generations of unemployment, there's families with mental health issues that are a big cause. There's cost of living, poor housing, poor health and provision in some areas, overcrowding... you know all of these things that have to be addressed along with education.

The following quote re-iterates the projective dimension and teacher voice by questioning the legitimacy of the discourse of 'Closing the Attainment Gap'.

S1H1: I think the actual term *Closing the Attainment Gap* is wrong. I think we have to talk about interrupting the cycle of poverty because one term of any Scottish government isn't going to close the attainment gap but I think we can do things that sort of interrupt that cycle and it's about sort of working together to do that. But I mean this whole NIF and testing thing... this analogy is used a lot; *you don't fatten a pig by weighing it* so you know testing a child isn't going to make them learn any better it's about quality teaching and learning and that comes through quality professional learning for teachers and quality leadership at all levels. Making teachers consider themselves as leaders so giving that opportunity so yeah.

Another headteacher underlines this contestation by arguing that some government social policies do not align with the principles underpinning 'Closing the Attainment Gap'. Moreover,

the headteacher below argues that in relation to poverty, the burden is shifted from broader social policies on to schools where 'I have to feed them' becomes one cause for concern:

S3H1: ...change to the welfare, change to the health visitor non-compliance to the parents and it's not going to improve the attainment gap. Even worse a policy that I don't understand is that another increase in nursery hours so my nursery children will essentially be in longer than my Primary 1's and I have to feed them. When they're not at home with their parents; they are not bonding with their parents. We are just childcare. So, you know you are responsible for that and their early development.

The above quote provides insight into the headteachers values and beliefs as well as how her agency and beliefs play a role in the increasing demands placed upon her.

S2H1: I mean John Swinney has absolutely categorically said that this data will not be used in that way and it's to be used for teachers to better know their children. But once it's out there... so I don't know. I mean teachers and head teachers are accountable for the progress of their children in their schools. That's their job, they have to be. But not just by one little score. You wouldn't say, "this little kid got 3/10 on this test, oh my god, you are doing a terrible job" you know it has to be a holistic view of a child's progress and how a teacher is teaching. So, they're just a tiny part of the puzzle.

This indicates a lack of trust between government actors and policy makers, head teachers and teachers. Here, head teachers questioned how data will be collated as it will replace local and school-based evaluations such as PIPS and INCAS. The majority of the teachers were in favour of standardised testing only under the condition that they should be sensitive to children in context, and that the data under no circumstances was to be published.

S3T2: But I think it is important to be sensitive with these tests because on any given day you could have a child who has come to school feeling either unwell or upset about something that has happened at home and you have to be careful if you want to sit them in front of a test in isolation for a long time .

The following quote reveals head teachers were aware that the data were to be diagnostic in terms of attainment, but questioned the measurability and validity of the tests in terms of contextual issues.

S2T2: Sometimes we have had electronic testing and it comes back with just this vast mass of data you know like: these are the questions that are ones in context and therefore they can't do this and this. And it's just what am I going to actually do with that information. So, what are they really want to test and what do they want to know and measure and if it is too detailed, what's the point?

# 7 Discussion

This chapter will further discuss the key themes and issues raised within the findings. As previously mentioned, the thesis is organized into two parts, where policy is the focus in Part 1 and Part 2 locates situated activity. The thematic diagram (Figure 1) highlighted categories and themes from the initial findings as well as systematically organizing it to co-integrate with the Analytical framework. Here, the research questions raised in the introduction to this thesis will be addressed. The comparative dimension has been presented throughout the findings where documents past and present supported interviews of which included iterative (past), practical evaluative (present) and projective (future) perspectives by professionals within the study. The first research question relates to the policy making process and focuses on how the national education system and professionals in Scotland have received and translated internationally recommended assessment designs over time/ The second research question relates to situated activity. Here the study focuses on the perceptions and professional experiences of teachers in relation to assessment systems in Scotland. Key sub-themes explored include; Professional judgment, autonomy and accountability; Re-shaping of models of assessment over time; Curriculum development within the 5-14 and Curriculum for Excellence Framework and Practical and contextual issues.

## 7.1 Professional judgement, autonomy and accountability

As the critical analysis of education policy and forms of assessment in the literature review of Finland revealed intelligent accountability is at the heart of the education system (Sahlberg, 2011). Here, formative forms of assessment are embedded within curriculum development over time. The learning and teaching process is located at the core of curriculum development over time and child centred assessment is driven by the *internal* needs and dynamics of the school community. The national government in Finland has adhered to these principles despite international pressure to conform to national standardised testing adopted by most countries within the OECD. Finland socio-ethical approach based on trust at school, community and national level. A central rationale for this lies in issues which may arise from the results of high stakes external tests being used in evaluating teaching practice. It is argued that this may lead to teachers redesigning their teaching to meet the needs of tests. Here students may be

encouraged to focus on certain subjects such as maths, science and reading to ensure positive PISA survey results.

### **7.1.1 Intelligent accountability and consequential accountability**

From the findings, teachers consistently expressed their understanding of effective and meaningful assessment as being related to intelligent accountability. Here, collegiate forms of working and trust in professional judgement were regarded as central to formative assessment within the teaching and learning process. Importantly the integration of assessment within the curriculum were perceived as being facilitated by The Curriculum for Excellence which specifies the importance of

‘engaging regularly in ongoing professional dialogue and collegiate working including by participating in local and national networking activities. Ongoing professional dialogue is a key component for coherent planning, checking, sampling, reviewing and providing feedback for improvement.’ (Extract Fourteen, CfE)

In contrast, some of the teachers and headteachers expressed concern that the data generated by the Nif may be used in a way that was not beneficial to the teaching and learning process. This may be regarded as consequential accountability as data may be used for external rather than internal purposes (see figure 1). One of the underlying methodological tools for *assessment literacy* is highlighted by practitioners here as being driven by concerns over ‘measurement of quality’ and ‘the impact of assessment over learning outcomes’ (Mansell and James, 2009). Moreover it may be argued that the National Improvement Framework is closely aligned to consequential accountability and several studies have revealed that teachers have expressed concerns relating to the implementation of the NIF particularly with regard to a perceived lack of trust (Priestley, 2018a; Hardy, 2018). Teachers have used their *projective* voices to highlight the concerns for the future, in addition it seems as though there is a tension between external and internal forms of accountability and monitoring where a lack of control over methodologies of assessment increases as external control also increases over time (Scriven, 1967; O’Niell, 2013; Hutchinson, 2017; Hutchinson and Young, 2011).

### **7.1.2 Re-shaping autonomy over time**

Professional judgement requires autonomy or “freedom to act” as Engelstad (2003) suggested. However, coercion from above or external actors may impeded upon this freedom creating a lack of trust between stakeholders. The findings discovered that freedom to act on the policy

level increased after 5-14, as the curriculum for excellence became less prescriptive allowing AiFL to integrate effectively. Here, at situated activity on the ground, patterns of autonomy and accountability have re-shaped over time. For example, within 5-14 autonomy was shaped by national testing and Aifl, whereas in CfE autonomy has been shaped by internal formative testing and AiFL. This signified that autonomy or ‘freedom to act’ for teachers may also shift under future assessment frameworks such as national standardized testing under the NIF, this may be the cause of the sense of underlying precariousness found amongst the interviews by mostly headteachers. In essence, their voices have expressed mostly *concern for the future* of the data collected and the use of this under the *projective* dimension and most importantly *reiteration* of what they do best, under the practical evaluative dimension. This was represented particularly by one headteacher as she expressed her concern for being ‘squeezed national and local priorities’, considering ‘what to do next’. Here, as modern educational policies are increasingly being received from the top (OECD and National level) (Hedge and Mackenzie, 2016). Autonomy by coercion or negative freedom may take shape, as although under the Curriculum for excellence teachers hold the freedom to interpret, enact and use their own methodological assessment approaches, certain targets drawn out by the NIF may impede upon their positive freedom (Engelstad, 2003).

## **7.2 ‘Homeostasis’: Re-shaping assessment over time**

A dominant and significant factor in the continuation and coherence of the assessment framework through time seems to be by the teachers and their commitment within AiFL. As my study and Hutchinson and Haywards (2005) literature regarding the development of AiFL demonstrates that teachers have become pivotal in its success. Teachers referred back to 5-14 and even under a curriculum with more targets and national testing, with AiFL being successfully integrated into everyday practice. Here, ownership over the curriculum and the assessment framework by all stakeholders becomes important as teachers emphasised their hard work and how it would be unfair to wipe it out with “some test” that wouldn’t give a clear view of *their* schools (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001).

Reinforcing this, the literature suggested that if professionals were to be handed ownership of the curriculum and its assessment framework, of which included the use of effective collaboration, cooperation, engagement and support from above, then the quality and coherence

of the curriculum would improve over time (Black and Wiliam, 2004; Garet et al. 1999; Wenger, 2010; Hayward and Hutchinson, 2005; Hayward, 2007; Hayward et al., 2014; Priestley, 2010). Homeostasis within the field of biology, refers to the stability, balance and equilibrium within a cell or a body. This metaphorical analogy I argue, best describes the Curriculum for Excellence working with AiFL and its challenge to constantly maintain a conducive environment, whilst it has been threatened externally by the NIF (Hayward and Hutchinson, 2013; Priestly, 2018b). The evidence suggested that teachers will always use their *iterative* and professional experiences to refer back to previous frameworks such as the 5-14 benchmarks. Here, as the curriculum moves forward into national standardized testing, more experienced teachers may use their iteration of both present Assessment is For Learning and 5-14 benchmarks, creating confusion and uncertainty of how to assess and what to assess against in the future (see Aasen, 2012). The support from local teacher learning communities and the emphasis on Distributive Leadership is effective in creating equilibrium in content and benchmarks between teachers within the community (Fusarelli and Kowalski, 2011; Woods, 2005; Wenger 2010).

### **7.3 Practical and Contextual Issues**

Headteachers were identified as both mediators and challengers of policy implementation within this study due to interview evidence which indicated the acknowledgement of the NIF and issues concerning the level of inequality within their school and across Scotland. However, this dual role may be seen as illusory as teachers did not *actively challenge* these policies, but however acknowledged the concerns surrounding contextual issues. Actively challenging policy development involves the full ownership of the introduction or process of or within a curriculum (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001; Young, 1988; Smith and Bell, 2011; Coburn, 2001; Lingard et al., 2000; Giroux, 1994). Additionally, this may depend upon the role of beliefs in agency where temporally constructed engagements have built up perceptions of assessment and what it means to assess over time (Biesta et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, teachers and mostly headteachers challenged or questioned the rationale and application of the introduction of standardized national testing with regards to ‘closing the attainment gap’. Whilst both headteachers and teachers acknowledge the importance of this, they challenged the use of the NIF in isolation from a wider range of social and economic policies. In particular, at local level, both headteachers and teachers identified the deeply entrenched inequalities and levels of poverty which acted at a situational constraint on individual children (See S1H1 and S2H1).

Importantly, the use of the term Closing the Attainment Gap was questioned by one headteacher who argued that it was more important to interrupt the cycle of poverty as a long term strategy “because one term of any Scottish government isn’t going to close the attainment gap” (school 1 headteacher 1). Stiggins (1992) supports this finding, by arguing that the teachers role should be to utilize ‘trickle up’ testing systems by gathering data at classroom level which is then aggregated upward to inform decision making at national level. This, he argues would enable a more well-rounded understanding of the ‘complex reality of the individual child, attending to what is unique and changeful’ (p.1). Thus, both socio-economic context and personalisation of assessment is captured within internal dimension of the assessment framework. This is also confirmed by a number of teachers within this study with regards to the long-standing commitment to AiFL and its implementation over previous years (Hayward and Hutchinson, 2013). As one teacher argued, the NIF is simply a rhetoric or ‘just another name for *what we have already been doing* for year and years’ (school 3, teacher B). Within this, teachers identified the importance of practical evaluative and iterative skills were brought into sharp relief. A number of theorists have also evidenced the value of trickle-up approaches (Muijs and Harris, 2003; Lingard and McDonald, 2013; Short, 1994; Stiggins 1992). Here, it is argued that it is more important to focus on quality teaching and learning through professional development and leadership at all levels (Muijs and Harris, 2003). Further, it is argued that this requires an integrated approach, involving a range of economic and social policies. This view was echoed by a number of teachers particularly in relation to the importance of dialogic and collective approaches at school and community level where ownership of the curriculum is central. The principles underpinning the CfE (Document three) also articulate this holistic approach. Previous studies support this argument (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001; Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001; Bowls and Troen, 1994; Hayward et al. 2014).

## **7.4 Informing or Confirming Judgement?**

The use of discourse or rhetoric regarding the use of data from national testing became a key component to the overall research and the analysis of policy documents. For example, the 5-14 framework for National Tests stated how National Tests ‘Tests are intended to confirm the teacher’s judgement about an individual pupil’s attainment of the Levels set out in the guidelines as attainment targets’ (Extract Seventeen, p.23). However, the rhetoric surrounding the National improvement framework suggests that ‘data will be gathered to support individual



children's' progress and to identify where improvement is needed. The data will be used to close the gap in attainment between children from the least and most deprived communities in Scotland (Extract Thirty-Nine, p.2). Here, two distinctive features regarding the goals and values of the curriculums have been identified. Firstly, the National Improvement Framework includes testing to attend to the broader contextual issues that extend beyond the pupil in his or her individual static attainment. In contrast, the discourse used in the 5-14 assessment guidelines suggest that national tests are prescriptive and static in nature and do not extend to the wider contextual and social issues of the child. Here, both assessment discourses are contingent alongside their original curricula ethos and values. However, they both use language that may be argued as not taking full cognizance of the professional capacities and expertise of teachers as this agency is developed over time. Definitions of confirming and informing judgement lead back to *telling teachers what they already know* as a result of working on the ground in the school community and through their intuition as reflexive practitioners.

## 7.5 Policy Reception and Translation

This section critically discusses how the national education system and education professionals in Scotland have received and translated internationally recommended assessment designs over time. As the research findings reveal, the analysis of the process of the reception of International reviews and guidance on assessment policies and evaluation frameworks in Scotland reveals an a largely uncritical acceptance of OECD recommendations. Exemplifying this, the influence and unquestioned reception of the OECD on the design and development of The National improvement Framework for Scottish Education introduced in 2015 is clearly stated by the Scottish Government.

The development of the National Improvement Framework is based on the best practice which exists internationally on the use of data and intelligence to improve education at national, local, school and individual child level. This includes the OECD publications Synergies for Better Learning and Education Policy Outlook

(Scottish Government, 2015, p.6)

In terms of constellations of power within the national education system in Scotland The National Improvement Framework [NIF] also advocates the use of trickle-down standardised information to inform teaching and leadership within schools. (Stiggins,1992) Here it may be argued that this diverges away from the formative trickle up approaches such as in AifL and

the current assessment systems in Scotland which advocate *intelligent accountability* through collaborative professional responsibility (Sahberg. 2007). Moreover, the focus on trickle down governance within the National Improvement Framework is illustrated by the unquestioning acceptance of the OECD emphasis on an outcome orientated approach generated from the results of national standardised testing. The Scottish Government also emphasises the importance attached to influence of the OECD in the design of the National Improvement Framework by directly quoting the OECD document *Improving Schools in Scotland*; Here it is argued that

... an important step (in developing the National Improvement Framework) will be to identify key principles ... that would provide transparency throughout the system and criteria for subsequent evaluation of the system itself.

*Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective.* OECD (2015)

Further, the National Improvement Framework document also directly attributes key drivers of improvement to recommendations in the 2015 OECD Review (ibid). These drivers are regarded as ensuring that the '*right*' type of evidence contributes to *our priorities* to minimise *unintended consequences*. Whilst the framework is thus designed to provide a robust evidence base to enhance the Curriculum for Excellence the document also endorses the call in the OECD review document for the '*prioritisation of School leadership and teacher professionalism* as the central focus on accountability of headteachers and teachers in driving improvement within the Scottish Education System. It may be argued that the focus on this trickle-down *drivers* has created a more bureaucratic system which does not take account of the current system in place. This current system has been built by professionals themselves by their own freely developed agency and knowledge transformed through transitions or reforms of curriculums over time (Priestley et al., 2012).

It may be argued that the research suggests that the Scottish Government is replicating forms of crucial governance exerted by the OECD within the National Improvement Framework design and implementation process. This is evidence by the narratives of teachers and head teachers who express feelings of precariousness in relation to how the data derived from the NiF will be used to undermine of their professional judgement and autonomy. The narratives also reveal a commitment to collective responsibility, intelligent accountability and shared leadership within school settings.

The pervasive influence of the OECD on the design of the National Improvement Framework is also clearly evidenced by further reference to the OECD Improving Schools in Scotland framework in highlighting that the next step in making ‘bold moves in constructing its assessment frameworks is to lead the world in developing an integrate assessment and evaluation framework’ (Ibid). Clearly revealing the influence of international comparative benchmarks on the Scottish Education system. Here it may be argued that the Scottish Government utilises international standing as a powerful form of political leverage for this top down reform of the assessment and evaluation framework (Ball, 2003). The OECD Synergies for better learning document (2013c, Extract 21), demonstrates the dominant discourse in relation to such evaluation frameworks and how they should lead the way in informing ‘better how well students are learning’. In addition, the extract notes that governments are increasingly focussed upon assessment of students. In contrast the values and premise AiFL is make assessment *for* students with formative and summative assessment tailored to their learning journey. Moreover, previous literature revealed that, large-scale data sets are typically used to evaluate curricula, rather than to inform professionals in making judgement and close attainment gaps (Scriven, 1967).

### **7.5.1 Concluding Remarks and Future Research**

This thesis placed teachers at the centre of research in transformations of assessment frameworks in the field of education. This research has provided insights into the processes through which teachers adapt to these transformations and adjustments over time in Scotland. In particular the analysis of selected policy documents discovered parallel ideologies and values between international guidance and national policy documents over time. Moreover, policy reforms relating to assessment and achievement were legitimated through the use of evaluative reviews conducted by the OECD. Here it was argued that the Scottish Government was replicating ‘crucial governance’ operationalised by the OECD to implement the reform of the assessment framework. This was also found to be the case in Australia and Norway. Whilst there was some soft resistance from practitioners Australia and Norway there was evidence of strong resistance from practitioners in Finland and policies were found to be less responsive to OECD recommendations at national level. It may be argued that whilst there is also evidence of soft resistance in Scotland from teachers, the Scottish Government is determined to carry through OECD recommendations (EIS, 2018).

The use of the analytical framework focussing on theorisations developed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) enabled reflections from in-depth interviews to take the findings back in time to the 5-14 curricula with AiFL and national testing. The findings revealed that there were some issues regarding the content and benchmarking where teachers used previous guidance to inform judgement in the current curriculum by referring back to prescript level ability in the 5-14 framework.

Active challenge and mediation varied throughout results. Headteachers were autonomous only to the extent of coercion, this limited their agency and ability to *actively* challenge the NIF. Some Headteachers held distributional (network) leadership as a way of ensuring collective responsibility, intelligent accountability and to ensure that individual teachers did not feel that they were being held responsible for issues that extended beyond the classroom. In particular issues relating to situational constraints created by poverty and social exclusion were related to by headteachers and most teachers. Additionally, although the NIF Document highly regards the role of individual teachers and headteachers and raising their professional capacity, school improvement research including the support and culture of the system in which they practise as well as collective responsibility and such structures are equally important (Priestley et al, 2015). Here, the NIF has omitted considerations of the structures and cultures that frame professional action and capacity. The considerations should include the way in which assessment systems impede upon professional autonomy and practice.

Future research developments for this thesis may include; extending the sample size across Scotland, cross-national comparatives, looking at leadership in further depth in relation to assessment and policy changes, curriculum development and its relationship with assessment, looking at teachers and their *temporally instructed engagement* in further depth and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and assessment.

## 8 References

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Information and Consent Letter

### Request for participation in research project

***This letter serves as an information letter and consent form for all participants interviewed in the research study carried out by Fiona Ellison***

How teaching professionals *receive, perceive* and *enact* assessment reforms in relation to curriculum changes, influenced by the OECD.

*An instrumental case study of teachers and headteachers in four Scottish Primary schools*

#### **Background and Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to understand how teachers perceive assessment policy changes implemented in Scotland. Its central focus looks at the experiences of teachers and their perceptions of AiFL and the National Improvement Framework.

**You have been selected for this study as your professional knowledge and understanding would be regarded as central for the purpose of this research.**

#### **What does participation in the project imply?**

Your participation in this study involves a one-to-one interview. The questions of the interview will be semi-structured in nature, meaning that the interview questions will be used as a general guidance. Questions will audio-recorded and will typically concern your past experiences and perceptions of the AiFL framework and its place in the curriculum.

#### **What will happen to the information about you?**

This study has had ethical clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services Organisation [NSD]. Your identification and transcriptions of audio recordings will be kept in a secure folder which will have restricted access with a protected password. These data will only be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor(s) of the project and will be treated with strict confidentiality. Lastly, all data will be deleted 12 months after the end of the project, including identification, transcriptions and audio recordings

Your participation will **not** be identifiable in the thesis publication as your names and the schools will be anonymous.

The project is scheduled for completion by June, 2017

## Appendix 2 – Interview Guide for Teachers and Headteachers

### **Purpose of the study**

The core purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of teachers and headteachers of changing national assessment models in primary schools in Scotland. Focusing upon Assessment is for Learning and the National Improvement Framework with regards to curriculum development. This set within the context of OECD influence and guidance upon national policy making.

**Topics:** National assessment, accountability, autonomy, teacher's role and perceptions

### **Ethical Notice**

Ethical clearance from the NSD. Refer to the consent form. Explain the topic and research questions.

### **Research questions (Part 2- Situated Activity)**

- a. What are teachers' perceptions and professional experiences of assessment systems in Scotland with regards to;
  - a. Professional judgment, autonomy and accountability
  - b. Re-shaping of models of assessment over time
  - c. Curriculum development within the 5-14 and Curriculum for Excellence Framework
  - d. Practical and contextual issues

### **Interview guide**

1. How long have you been/were you teaching for?
2. How do you feel evaluation/assessment of pupil progress has changed over time?
3. Describe your experience with Assessment is for learning.
  - Positive experience or negative?
  - How important is it for you and your pupils?
  - How would you describe the dialogue between yourself and your pupils?
  - Have you received any information or guidelines on this?
  - Have you had meetings regarding the implementation of this?
4. In your opinion, how important has Assessment is for Learning been in supporting students in their learning?
  - How do you think this has contributed to improving attainment and outcomes?
5. How important is dialogue between you, your pupils and other teachers with regards to assessment?

- 6.** How important is your autonomy in assessing pupils with regards to professional judgement?
- 7.** Tell me what you know about the National Improvement Framework.
- 8.** How do you see this new change influencing the way you see your accountability for your pupils to reach particular standards?
  - Accountability in during your time in Assessment for Learning and now with NIF being introduced?
- 9.** Describe an ideal form of assessment and evaluation for your class.
- 10.** What do you think are the main factors contributing to the attainment gap in Scotland (Headteacher and teacher)?
- 11.** If you were in a position to implement education policies to close the attainment gap what would be your strategic priority? (Headteacher)