

**An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL  
adult students in  
New Zealand**

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## **Abstract**

Assessment methods for adult English language learners (ELL) are integral parts of the learning cycle. For assessment to promote learning and inform teaching, better understanding the students' perspectives of effective assessment methods is critical. When ELL students have access to quality teaching, curriculum and assessment, they are more likely to become motivated to improve English language learning, and reach their full potential. Adopting contextually relevant formative assessment approaches in adult ELL education can enhance learning the English in authentic situations. However, some types of assessment related issues may hinder learning and cause students frustration.

This qualitative study explores adult ELL students' perceptions of formative assessment strategies that support their learning. It aims to identify effective formative assessment practices in adult ELL classrooms. Data was collected using several observations of two ELL classrooms, two semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire with a range of adult ELL students. The two interviews were conducted with a group of fourteen adult ELL students who came from different backgrounds and ethnicities.

The study uncovered some effective strategies that could be implemented to enhance English language learning when using formative assessment. These include maintaining a positive atmosphere, using a variety of formative assessments, along with acknowledging individual and cultural differences. These were identified by the adult students as major factors that can affect their English language learning. Results also indicated that using formative assessment is a valued means to enhance ELL adult students' English language learning. However, some students stressed the importance of practising summative assessment as well as formative assessment. The effectiveness of formative assessment, according to students' perceptions, is associated with enhancing a positive atmosphere and being motivated and valued as individuals.

Additionally, my research findings suggest the need for professional development in the use of

contextually related formative assessment practices as a means of ongoing assessment for adult English language learners.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

Assessment plays a vital role in the education of second language learners as it can have a great impact on their language attainment (Baker, 2011; Ellis, 2008; Looney 2008; Poehner, 2008). English Language Learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing group of learners in New Zealand and also in other international contexts (LeClair, 2009; MOE, 2010). According to LeClair et al. (2009) these students are classified as those growing up in a non-English environment and who do not have the necessary skills to learn where English is the dominant language both in education and society. Teacher assessment assists to raise students' attainment and identify the next learning steps (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006). Assessment has often been used as a means to measure attainment of what was taught. However, assessment should also provide information to support teaching and learning and inform the criteria of the intended outcomes (Gibbs, 1994) and Poehner (2008). Assessment for learning can help in engaging and motivating students as they take responsibility for their achievement, and become aware of their weaknesses and what they need to do next (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006).

Traditional classrooms have tended to favour summative assessments. It was often believed that competitive forms of assessment that increased anxiety and comparison could improve attainment. However, this in many cases led to creating unsuccessful and frustrated learners (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002). In contrast, assessment can be a means of improving teaching and learning rather than merely measuring learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 2006). To improve learning, ELL students need to be involved in their learning regularly and be motivated by their achievements rather than anxious about their potential. By being involved, students are able to use the assessment information to understand how they learn, what they have achieved in regards to the learning criteria and set new goals of achievement (Poehner, 2008). Effective assessment provides valuable feedback to students and teachers, by showing whether the



instructions were successful and how teachers can improve delivery. (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Crooks, 2006; Poehner, 2008).

### 1.1 The study's questions:

The study was an exploration of adult ELL students' perceptions of using formative assessment to improve their language learning. The study focused on investigating the following questions:

1. What are adult English language learners' perceptions of ways that formative assessment practices can support their learning of English?
2. What are the most effective formative assessment strategies, as perceived by ELL adult students?
3. What are adult English language learners' perceptions of ways teachers can develop a learning environment that enhances English learning for adult ESOL students within New Zealand?

Assessment plays a significant role in students' education and has an integral part in the learning cycle as it enhances learning and promotes teaching, (Gipps, 1994; Black & Wiliam, 2006). Assessment should not be seen as separate domain, but as a part of teaching and learning. Assessment gives the teacher an insight of the learners' understanding and therefore provides feedback to improve learning and teaching (Poehner, 2008). A focus on formative assessment and how it improves learning and informs teaching for adult ELL learners is of particular interest to me. To be able to assist ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) teachers in improving assessment, there is a need to understand second language learners' perspectives of their own learning experiences in learning English (Nielsen, 1990; Poehner, 2008). Understanding students' perspectives of formative assessment may improve their learning and teacher's choices of formative assessment tools (Cowie, 2005).

## **1.2 The study's background:**

In New Zealand, the tertiary education system has been reformed to create a coherent system that is based on balancing the needs of the individual and the economic and social development needs of the country (The Tertiary Education Commission, 2008). It also aims at improving the quality of teaching and learning to enhance productivity, health and safety. Low productivity of employees in New Zealand has been attributed to low literacy and numeracy levels. Approximately 1.1 million adults between the age of 16 and 65 have low literacy skills according to 2006 Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2010a; The Tertiary Education Commission, 2008).

The Tertiary Education Commission (2008) identified the importance of improving literacy and numeracy skills of adults to improve their well-being, achieve environmental goals and build highly skilled and productive employees and employers. ELL students, in New Zealand, are learning English as a second language mainly for employment reasons, improving their education, social and economic situation, or to use it in their homeland (Dolan, 2010; Ministry of Education [MOE], 2001, 2003). However, The Skills New Zealand Tripartite Forum, the Industry Training Federation and Education providers found that improving adult literacy skills was a challenge as students came from diverse nationalities and backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2010a). To face the challenge, the New Zealand government developed some programmes such as the Skills Action Plan 2008, which reinforced the importance of establishing effective literacy and numeracy learning opportunities. It was emphasised that students need literacy and numeracy skills to be able to meet modern society's needs and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Dolan, 2010; Looney, 2008; Meyer, 2009 ;Ministry of Education, 2010a; The Tertiary Education Commission, 2008).

In New Zealand, ELL students learn English from different providers such as language schools and polytechnic (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). These students include variety of ethnicities and backgrounds (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002). New Zealand schools' demography is

changing. Recent years have been characterised by an increase in different nationalities and it is expected in five years that about half of the students at schools will be non-European (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2010b). New Zealand's demography is also changing because of the great increase in the number of immigrants, refugees and international students (Ho, Holmes & Cooper, 2004). New Zealand's educational establishments now have students from diverse cultural backgrounds and languages. According to the 2001 Census, of the 50,700 adults who do not speak English well enough to carry on a basic conversation, approximately 8% were born in New Zealand (MOE, 2002).

Recent surveys showed that about 33% of New Zealand's current immigrants are from Ireland and England while the rest are from Asia, South Africa, Pacific, the rest of Europe and other countries. Most of the recent immigrants reported that their English is good. However, 41% of business people reported their English is poor and that they need support to improve their language (Statistics New Zealand 2013).

To absorb the rapid increase of ESOL adult students and cater for their needs, New Zealand, similar to many other many western countries, has invested in adult students' second language learning. Previous researches (see, for example, Ho et al., 2004; Looney, 2008; Weston 1992) have revealed that using formative assessment encourages more successful learning and can provide an appropriate balance between instructions and evaluations. This suggests a need to promote effective formative assessment practices in adult ELL education to improve learning (Looney, 2008).

A study, completed by Davidson and Mackenzie (2009) at Victoria University, showed the importance of assessment for learning. The study was a three year project of investigation with a number of ELL students in New Zealand universities including Victoria and Massey. According to the investigation, summative assessment of learning refers to how much students have learned compared to a set of achievement objects, while formative assessment for learning

refers to using evidence and effective feedback to identify the current level of learning and the next step. The result shows that the primary aim of classroom based assessments should focus on helping students identify their current knowledge and future needs. However, unfortunately some assessments were often chosen based on the fact that they were easy to mark and prepare, rather than to measure actual learning. Some of them proved to be unethical as well as they did not measure the actual learning, and they compared students regardless of cultural differences and language needs. The study reinforced the importance of valid and reliable assessment for learning which resulted in a greater emphasis on internal formative assessments rather than summative assessments to improve learning. It also recommended the consideration of cultural differences in preparing assessments, giving immediate feedback to improve learning, and considering ELL language needs and the international assessment policy (Davidson & Mackenzie, 2009).

Davidson and Mackenzie (2009) demonstrated that for assessments to be effective and culturally responsive, they need to be receptive to different cultures and needs, and include various types of rigorous class-room based formative activities such as self and peer- assessments (Davidson and Mackenzie, 2009). However, in the study, the diversity of ELL assessment and measurement methods raised a number of concerns about the common means of measuring progress through ELL programmes. Firstly, there was no standard policy for assessing the learners' current level of English and progress. Secondly, there was a wide range of adult ELL suppliers providing various programmes and as a result it was usually difficult to have consistent measures of progress and achievement in improving English language competency across the diverse ELL pupils. Finally, achievement in ELL courses is not very transferable between institutions resulting in duplication of effort and expense (Davidson & Mackenzie, 2009). As a result, more consistency in the measurement of learners' progress is needed and using varied formative assessment practices could be integral to this process.

### **1.3 The Author's position:**

In my experience, when adult ELL students have access to quality teaching, curriculum and valid assessment, they become more motivated and keen to improve their language learning. As an ELL teacher, while working with variety of second language learners for twenty five years overseas and eight years in New Zealand, I faced some obstacles that proved English language teaching and learning can be challenging. I noticed that some students, regardless of effective teaching methods, were unmotivated and had unsuccessful experiences that caused frustration, lack of confidence and a refusal to collaborate in new learning experiences. Students' unsuccessful experiences were a cause of assessment failure that had negative effects on them, both psychologically and mentally (Banerjee & Wall, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Poehner, 2008). This inspired me to learn more about the means of overcoming such challenges and motivated me to explore students' understanding of formative assessment in an attempt to improve their attainment. It also encouraged me to investigate methods that can help improve formative assessment in order to enhance learning the language and provide more effective learning opportunities. My research is an exploration of formative assessment that can support adult (ELL) students' English language learning in New Zealand. Hoping that by being informed about students' perspectives of formative assessments, assessment practices can be improved to enhance adult ELL students' learning.

### **1.4 What does the current research indicate?**

Assessment is an integral part of ELL education, as it informs teaching and learning. It has developed throughout years to measure the level of education and recently to enhance learning and improve teaching. Assessment indicates the current level of learning, as well as helping to identify specific features of progress. This can have an influence on the learner's progress and inform instructions (Black & William, 2002; Clarke, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton 2001; Looney 2008). Therefore, teachers need to understand cultural differences, know their students' needs and the teaching material, to provide authentic meaningful assessment opportunities (Black & William, 2002) and (Gunderson, 2009).

Similarly, Jiang (2001) argued that students value education differently and teachers' lack of understanding of these differences is considered a barrier to improve learning. As a result, it is necessary to understand cultural differences, values, beliefs and know the learners, thus providing authentic meaningful assessment opportunities (Davidson, & Mackenzie, 2009). Assessment should not be seen as a separate domain, but as a part of teaching and learning. Poehner (2008) alluded to Vygotsky's theory of human mental functioning, where it is argued that learning grows through external and internal interactions. Therefore, teachers need to provide opportunities for learners to interact in authentic situations to develop cognitively. These interactive opportunities, if assessed, provide feedback to help in understanding the learners' position and improve their learning (Poehner, 2008). For this to occur, ELL students need assessment measures that are socially and culturally informed and take into account individual differences (Ariza, 2006; Rhodes, Ocha & Ortiz, 2005; Poehner, 2008).

#### 1.5 Definitions of terms:

ELL: refers to English language learners. They are students who were not brought up in an English speaking background and unable to communicate well or learn in an English setting (LeClair et al., 2009).

ESOL: refers English for speakers of other languages.

Formative assessment: refers to any assessment that can promote students' learning. It provides information that can be used to modify teaching and enhance learning, such as giving feedback, by teachers and students, in self-assessment, peer assessment and questions. An assessment becomes formative when the evidence is used to adjust teaching in a way that can improve learning (Black & William 2002; Cowie, 2005).

Summative assessment: refers to assessment of learning as opposed to assessment for learning. It is assessment that measures students' learning for grading and evaluating progress and the curriculum (Black, & William, 2006; Crooks, 1988)

Literacy: It is the written and oral language skills that people need to communicate well in society and at work. It includes speaking, listening, reading and writing (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008).

# Chapter Two

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Assessing adults in ELL programmes for immigrants and refugees can be challenging as students come from diverse nationalities, age groups, backgrounds, life experiences and education. They also have a range of economical, physical, social and emotional circumstances according to Looney (2008) who explored the data from a range of national and international adult literacy programmes and reports that were conducted to identify students' specific needs to promote teaching and learning. These reports were drawn from various settings, including community centres, work-based programmes, prison-based programmes, and initiatives aimed at non-traditional learners in further or higher education. The reports regarding challenges and policy responses of adult foundation skills learners were carried out in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, England, Norway, New Zealand, Scotland, Spain and the United States.

Findings from these investigations indicated that across countries, adults with low literacy and numeracy skills came from groups such as minority ethnic groups, second language immigrants, older learners, people of low education levels, the unemployed, low income people, the prison population and some rural people. Such diverse students have different personal goals and abilities and therefore they need to be actively involved in their learning and self determination to improve their learning (Davidson & Mackenzie, 2009; Looney, 2008; MOE,2010; Poehner, 2008; Tertiary Education Commision,2008). In addition, Looney (2008) discovered studies showed that teaching approaches such formative assessment, techniques of questioning, setting learning goals, self and peer-assessment, and teacher's feedback can help enhance learning and teaching (Looney, 2008; Davidson & Mackenzie, 2009). Improving learning outcomes of adult students will in turn help to improve their chances of economic, health and social well-being (Looney, 2008; Davidson & Mackenzie, 2009; MOE, 2010).



## **2.2 Cultural background:**

### **2.2.1 The dominance of English language learning**

Economic, social, and political changes can have a great impact on language survival. For example, English is one of most dominant world languages. The power of the English language is a result of the dominance of English worldwide in education, mass media and in financial sectors. Furthermore, the high international prestige of the English language with the popularity of Anglo-American culture and the spread of the Internet necessitated the use of English worldwide (Baker, 2011; Wiley & Lee 2009). All these factors have led to the spread of the English language as a global language to communicate, in a range of areas such as science, tourism, commerce, entertainment, sport and news. Consequently, this situation created a necessity to consider learning English as a second language in different countries. This can facilitate cultural integration and communication within the country and communities (Baker, 2011).

Migrants can lose their first language when they move to a community where a different language from their own is used in their new country. For instance, most of the United States immigrants have encountered a shift from their language by the first generation of immigrants. These early immigrants tended to learn English language while maintaining their first language at home as a means of communication. Second generation immigrants tend to use English as a means of communication in their community while using their first language with parents and grandparents. The third generations are usually monolingual as they do not tend to use their grandparents first language. However, the shift from using their first language to the dominant language can sometimes take more than three generations, depending on the individuals' value of the dominant language and culture. Another fact that can affect the importance of using English is when there are insufficient people to speak the native language or it is considered as a low prestige language, such as the Gaelic, in Scotland, compared to English which is considered a high prestige language (Wiley & Lee, 2009).

Another reason for the necessity for migrants to learn the English language, is the assimilation ideology which is the belief that immigrants are expected to give up their first language and heritage to enable them to assimilate more effectively in the dominant hosting country. This can happen rapidly through the political and economic dominance of the host country, voluntarily or gradually through generations. It was expected that immigrants to the US, Canada, UK, Germany and Australia would give up their heritage, culture and language for better economical, social and political situations. Although complete assimilation did not always succeed as migrants' culture has persisted or even been rejuvenated, most immigrants to UK and US learned the English language and did not find its dominance as a threat. This was because learning the English language was seen as a resource for improved cultural and economic benefit (Baker, 2011; Wiley & Lee, 2009).

Wiley and Lee (2009) confirmed Baker's contention of the importance of learning the main language to integrate in the main society. For instance, the original English speakers immigrated to the United States as colonizers, seekers of better living conditions or as refugees. They mainly came from countries such as England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Canada where English was the dominant language (Wiley & Lee, 2009). The rise of the Americanisation movement, before the American involvement in World War 1, eliminated the growth of any other minority language. For example, Germans, who immigrated to the US, maintained a degree of bilingualism during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early twentieth century. However, they started to feel, especially after World War 1, that their bilingualism was not appreciated and as a result they assimilated into society forming one of the largest communities, in the US (Wiley & Lee, 2009). Moreover, by the end of World War 1, many states in America, such as that in Nebraska, generated laws prohibiting any foreign language use or education until late primary school years. Nevertheless, this law was repealed in 1923 by the United States Supreme court, saying that using a foreign language would not form any threat to the nation, during peace time. Examples of the foreign minority languages were Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Some language rights activists such as Skutnabb-Kangas advocated language rights of

people by arguing that every child should have the right to be identified by their first language, but also should have the right to learn the English language. Despite the fact that English was the dominant language, during the US Civil rights movement, the Bilingual Education Act, 1968, acknowledged the linguistic needs of minority groups, besides their rights to learn the English language (Faltis & Coulter, 2007). This initiated the need to develop some English as a Second language (ESL) programmes.

Moreover, the growth in the number of English language learners has lead to increase expenditure for English language learning. Consequently, the growth in language investment training has been rapid, and strong market forces within the educational community have encouraged learning the English language. The more immigrants are proficient in the dominant language, the more successful they can be in the country's labour market. In addition, the proficient second language learners can have better economic opportunities as enhanced language skills can help them benefit from cheaper and better available services. Finally, Australia, New Zealand, Canada have skilled based immigration policies that support the importance of having proficient English language skills. The necessity of learning English language to acquire citizenship has empowered learning the language, internationally, politically and economically (Wiley & Lee, 2009).

In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act came into effect in the United States. Bilingual education referred to teaching students in their first language while helping them to improve their English language and be able to join English only classrooms. Although the Act granted financial assistance to support programmes for second language learners, financial assistance was only granted to programmes that supported low income students. As a result, the Equal Opportunity Act came into effect in 1974, requiring all schools to support all learners of English as a second language to improve their English language learning (Faltis & Coulter, 2007). In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, has necessitated a quality provision of all students. However,

this act was criticised for its emphasis on assessment and the high stake tests for measuring and interpreting achievements (Wiley & Lee, 2009).

Nowadays, around 375 million people speak English worldwide and around 80% of information of the Internet is in English language. In short, the spread of the development of communication, the global economy, Internet, feasibility of travelling and the necessity to improve socially and economically has an impact on the spread of the English language (Baker, 2011; Wiley & Lee, 2009).

### 2.2.2 English as a second language in New Zealand

In New Zealand, the ELL students are not restricted to migrants or refugees. For example, the 2001 Census indicated of the nearly 25,000 school children currently funded for provision of ELL services in school, nearly 40% were born in this country (MOE, 2002). Moreover, a study by May (2011) acknowledged that Pasifika students are one of the key English as a second language groups, in New Zealand, who need support in their language learning. The schooling that Pasifika students experience might be a key contributory factor to their educational underachievement. Bilingual/immersion education options for other than English language speakers, are insignificant and restricted to only a small number of individual schools. Pasifika is the term presently used to describe Pacific Island migrants to New Zealand from the principle islands of Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji and Tuvalu (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi & Taleni, 2006).

At the time of the last census (2006), Pasifika peoples comprised 6.9% (265,974) of the total New Zealand population. They share particular culture and beliefs that need to be acknowledged as it can affect students' learning. It is only in recent years that there has been a shift in focus to acknowledge that the schooling Pasifika students experience might be a key contributory factor to their educational failure (May, 2011). However, a team of researchers from the Ministry of Education successfully argued that enhancing Pasifika students' culture made good pedagogical

sense to the students and improved their learning (May, 2011). New Zealand schools and other educational establishments have a number of students from diverse cultural backgrounds who have changed classroom demographics because the European population is aging, whereas the Pasifika and Asian populations are younger and increasing (MOE, 2002; 2010b; Tertiary Education Commission, 2008). Furthermore, in New Zealand, since late 1990s, there has been a rapid increase in the international student numbers which is considered as a means of improving the economy. Therefore, providing effective programmes and assessment practices for national and international ESOL students are essential (MOE, 2002; Tertiary Education Commission, 2008; MOE, 2010b).

Gass and Selinker (2008) suggested that learners need to accept the second language society and culture to succeed in learning. Learning a second language is less likely to take place if the learners created a psychological or a social distance from the second language community. On the other hand, Jiang (2001) and Ariza (2006) argued that ELL teachers are advised to value different students' cultures, tailor teaching and use practices that enhance and support learning. They need to provide meaningful activities that suit different needs and styles. Appreciation of the differences, understanding the learners and assigning authentic assessment practices can engage students in learning, enhance their self-esteem and support them to set future goals and succeed. One of the most efficient practices is using appropriate assessment for learning methods (Ariza, 2006; Jiang, 2001; Poehner, 2008).

## **2.3 Assessment**

### **2.3.1 Diagnosis of ELL students' needs**

In classrooms, measuring attainment and language levels can be very challenging within culturally and linguistically diverse students (Looney 2008; Rhodes et al., 2005). The old traditional methods prove to be inadequate as they can demotivate students. New authentic measures are essential (Weston, 1992). Agreeing with this, Herrera, Murry and Cabral (2007)

contended that assessment should be reliable and valid to be authentic. Reliability is the ability of an assessment to measure students' attainment regardless of the place, time or examiners, while validity is the ability of an assessment to measure what it is designed to measure (Bloxham and Boyd 2007; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007). However, Ho et al. (2004) and Witte, Sequeira, & Fonteyne, (2003) suggested that students' understanding of differing teaching pedagogies and criteria can be challenging to ELL students who often used to the structured and teacher-centred methods. To these students who have been in these traditional teacher-centred classrooms, assessment should only assess what had been in studied books.

Several researchers, (see, for example, Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Ecclestone, Davies, Derrick, & Gawn, 2010; Looney, 2008) contended diagnostic assessments assist in identifying the learners' abilities, learning barriers and needs. They emphasised that this helps in preparing appropriate courses, teaching and learning situations. Looney (2008) presented some examples of diagnostic assessment used in the western world. For instance, some of the programmes that preferred informal diagnosis to get supportive and adequate information about the learners were conducted in the Centre for Adult Education (Centro de Educacion de Personas Adultas) in Central Spain. The findings suggested that teachers should develop better ways to gain helpful and useful information about their learners, by asking questions about their emotions and learning experiences. Also, they found that students were sometimes asked to self assess their literacy and numeracy development from 1-10. While, other programmes required more formal diagnostic entry tests as a formal records of assessment, such as those required by the Ministry of Education (Looney, 2008). For example, the Mobile Trailer Teaching Unit in Denmark used an entry level test to measure the learners' abilities according to the course objectives, which in turn helped in developing appropriate programmes. On the other hand, other ELL programmes preferred informal diagnostic assessment methods. For example, the Workshops for Foundation Skill Learners, in France, instigated informal interviews to get a fair image about the learners as they believed that diagnostic tests could be unfriendly and unsuccessful. They supported the idea by building an ongoing informal observation and dialogue to constantly diagnose students'

needs and set goals (Looney, 2008).

In addition to diagnostic assessments, developing a learning contract or an “Individual Learning Plan” (ILP) is an important technique used at the start of the course to identify goals, motivation levels, strengths and weaknesses. It helps in tailoring teaching and focusing on students’ needs. ILPs are usually measured against the workplace or the curriculum’s objectives and provide quality time to help in measuring learning, providing feedback on progress and setting future goals (Ecclestone et al., 2010). However, (Looney, 2008) argued that alignment of the learners’ goals with the curriculum can be a challenge. Ecclestone et al., (2010) added that providing enough time and finding ways to assist formative assessment approaches to satisfy the learners’ and the curriculum goals can be another challenge. Looney (2008) presented examples of some case studies from New Zealand’s Tertiary Education and the Continuing Education and the Training Services in England that used Individual Learning Plans to assess and record attainment (Looney, 2008; MOE, 2010).

### 2.3.2 Assessment methods of ELL students

Derrick, and Ecclestone (2006), emphasised that although there is an abundance of work on the theoretical and experimental techniques and activities that teachers can use in schools, there is very little evidence relating to adult learners. There appears to be limited literature in contexts of formative assessment in ELL adult education, which is very different from school aged children. Agreeing with this, Looney (2008) contended there is limited knowledge of the impact of assessments on adult English language learning that should be explored. However, Bloxham and Boyd (2007) identified methods for using formative assessments effectively in adult education. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003b) and Crooks (1988) contended that summative assessment emphasises the ranking of students while formative assessment is a more tangible method that helps in improving learning. Likewise, Looney, (2008), confirmed Derrick and Ecclestone’s (2006) argument that various researches showed guidelines on how to use formative assessments in education and their effectiveness (see, for example, Absolum,

2006; Black & William, 2006; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and William., 2003a; Black & William, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Herrera, Murry and Cabral, 2007, but there is a dearth of research on formative assessment of ELL adult education.

Looney (2008) contended that adult education mainly relied on summative assessment methods to measure achievements and she and Bloxton and Boyd (2007) argued the importance of using formative and summative assessment to improve learning. However, Poehner (2008) argued that for formative assessment to be successful, teachers need to recognize individual differences and learning methods to provide suitable approaches and methods. They also need to understand how the learners develop to help them succeed.

Broadfoot (2007) argued that assessment plays an integral role in students' learning, as it can empower students intellectually and emotionally. She added formative assessment instructs teaching and supports learning. However, she defined summative assessment as mainly used to report attainment based on key factors, including time of assessment, being connected to a public criterion, possibility of combining and comparing results of the same criteria and ability to test different learning goals and evaluate the curriculum. However, she concluded that using formative assessment that supports and enhances learning is more powerful.

## 2.4 Formative assessment

Black & William (2002) contended that formative assessment does not have one specific definition because it refers to any activity completed by the students which can provide quality feedback to improve and adjust teaching and learning. Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority is in its design with the objective of serving the purpose of promoting students' learning (Absolum, 2006). Therefore, it differs from summative assessment, which is designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, ranking, or certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers, and by their students. In assessing themselves and each other,



students can modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative' when the evidence is actually used to instruct the teaching work to meet learning need. Formative assessment helps in enhancing understanding and learning to learn rather than learning to be tested (Absolum, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Clarke, 2005; Cowie, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Sadler 1989, 1998).

Agreeing with this, Black et al. (2003b) argued that formative assessment is any activity that informs teaching or promotes learning. It can include observation, discussions, questions, writing and analysing work of students. This information helps in altering teaching to meet students' needs, while enabling teachers to provide feedback on students' progress and what needs to be done next (Black & William 2002). Similarly, Ecclestone et al., (2010) added that formative assessment informs instruction to improve learning, facilitate teaching and uncover the needed pedagogy. This can help low achievers and enhance self-evaluation and self-esteem. Feedback given needs to be constructive to motivate students and enhance their self-esteem. Feedback should help students to reflect on their attainment and be able to self-assess their own learning. However, although Bloxham and Boyd (2007) agreed that formative assessments are important tools, they argued that feedback from self and peer-assessment can be an imprecise evaluation if students do not understand the criteria. Moreover, several researchers (see, for example, Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006; Black et al. 2003b; Broadfoot, 2007; Clarke, 2005; Cowie, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Sadler 1998) contended that peer-assessment helps in using the language to interact in an authentic context and gives a chance to evaluate a student's strengths and weaknesses by another student. It helps in developing students' learning through authentic classroom activities and teachers' interactions to help students to be more aware of their achievements to improve learning. However, Ho et al. (2004), cautioned that understanding students' educational and cultural background to improve learning and assessment is crucial.

Black and Wiliam (2006) posited that setting clear goals, making sure that students understand what is required, choosing appropriate activities that work to the goals by providing evidence to

both the teacher and students are central to formative assessment. Furthermore, using effective teaching approaches, giving realistic feedback to students to improve learning, involving students in their learning through self and peer-assessment can ensure learning. Agreeing with this, Wiliam (2011) argued that an effective formative assessment strategy consists of the teacher knowing their students' level of achievement by questioning and daily activities, giving constructive feedback, and understanding what they are working to achieve. It also consists of using peer-assessment to support and manage interactions and utilizing self assessment to build a sense of lifelong learning.

According to the Assessment Reform Group, 2002, as cited in (Black et al., 2003b), assessment for learning is part of efficient planning and should focus on what and how students learn. It helps in reinforcing test taking strategies, higher thinking and engaging learners actively in their learning. It facilitates giving constructive feedback, promoting goals and motivating students to improve attainment (Crooks, 2006). However, Black et al. (2003b) cautioned that there are areas that need further study and analysis for formative assessment to be effective. This includes the confusion between summative and formative purposes and defining formative as summative assessment with predefined goals. In assessment for learning, dialogue between teachers and learners should be structured carefully. Teaching plans should include open ended questions and chances to explore what and how people learn, opportunities to solve problems and giving enough thinking time and chances to reflect on learning. Teachers should be able to analyse, evaluate and develop communication, with and among students. Another suggestion is to avoid giving grades, but provide feedback to distinguish between the quality of students' work and ability (Black and Wiliam 1998; Black et al. 2003b; Bloxham and Boyd 2007).

It is also necessary to share ideas with colleagues to improve questioning techniques and activities. Agreeing with these views, Clarke (2005) identified four key elements of effective formative assessments, including sharing learning goals, asking valuable questions, having chances for self and peer evaluations, giving effective feedback and empowering students to be responsible for their learning. Clarke, (2005) added that teachers should use questioning

techniques that help students to move from presenters to facilitators and value students' experiences to motivate them. Teachers should reduce leading or closed questions, which look for specific correct or memorised answers and double questions as they discourage students from evaluating their attainment and may confuse their learning.

Another strategy is to develop understanding of formative and summative assessments and using summative assessment formatively to learn more about the learners' needs, styles and motivation and improve planning. Using summative assessment formatively can encourage students to understand and evaluate their work, possibly by reflecting on tested knowledge, building dialogues with colleagues and teachers and constructing group model answers (Clarke, 2005; Black et al., 2003b). However, (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Tett, Hamilton & Hillier, 2006) reinforced the importance of using diversity of assessments in higher education to improve lifelong learners and assess different skills. Bloxham and Boyd (2007) added that to measure learning not only summative assessment can be used formatively, but also formative assessments can be used summatively. Both summative and formative assessments can measure different skills, quality knowledge, lifelong skills and how to invest these skills in a real context. Thus, in assessment, it is more accurate to use evidence from a range of sources in order to form a complete image of learning.

In addition, Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins & Reid (2009) suggested that the Directions for Assessment in New Zealand (DANZ) vision reinforce the importance of an environment which values all of its participants. Effective assessment depends on quality communications and positive relations in class. However, Tett et al. (2006) contended that ELL students often like to express themselves clearly only in front of other ELL students. Bloxham and Boyd (2007) confirmed this saying that mismatch in communication between Western and ELL students can affect the relationships. ELL students can be seen as passive and local students may avoid building discussions with them.

Black and Wiliam (1998, 2006) connected successful assessment to six main elements. They are; efficient feedback, pupils' active interactions, goal orientation, liability, motivation of the

students and ability to access these elements. Motivating students to learn is an essential element in reinforce learning. Supporting these views, Crooks (2006) based effective formative assessment on eight principles of validity and reliability. These principles include; motivation, agreement of learning goals, building trust, reinforcing conversation rather than lecturing, effective guidance to assist focusing on the purpose of the activity, timing and payoff when students are actively engaged; having an insight and deep knowledge of the subject and students' difficulties, encouragement and focusing on students' needs and evaluation of feedback and the environment.

These eight principles create effective assessment for learning for several reasons. Firstly, to assess formatively, teachers need to give immediate and meaningful feedback to students to show current learning and how to improve. Setting agreed goals helps in keeping students focused, allows a sense of ownership and facilitates learning. Building effective interactions with students helps them to respond positively to guidance and motivates them to learn. In addition, balancing between satisfying the curriculum requirements and meeting students' needs, can help in improving learning while maintaining the curriculum (Baker, 2011; Ellis, 2008). Finally, the best teaching practice relies on understanding the learners, their interests, what influences their behaviour, current state of development, needs, motivation, attitudes, constant evaluation and acting accordingly (Crooks, 2006; Poehner, 2008). To improve students' learning, teachers need to find a balance between developing their strength while working on their weaknesses. Also, to establish a well balanced education, it is important to establish an effective supportive learning environment and community that values students' enthusiasm and beliefs, market their needs, enhance problem-solving and discover opportunities (Ariza, 2006; Black & Wiliam 1998, 2006; Crooks, 2006; Fletcher & Wiliams, 2008; Ho et al., 2004; Jiang, 2001; Wiliam 2011).

To sum up, formative assessment refers to any activity completed by the students which can provide quality feedback to improve learning and teaching. Formative assessment is based on core strategies that include; sharing achievement objectives, questions techniques, feedback, self-assessment, peer- assessment and motivation (Black et al., 2003b; Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006; Clarke2005; Crooks, 2006; Sadler 1989, 1998). Assessment is a powerful tool as daily teacher assessments help in promoting students' attainment and identifying future goals.

Using information from the ongoing formative assessment and feedback about students' work can assist determining the next step for the students. Although feedback is the main element of formative assessment, unfortunately this process is not used enough at some schools to improve standard, but more often it is used to measure it (Black & Wiliam, 1999). Furthermore, assessment, which is formative and improves learning is an essential part of instruction and learning. (Black & Wiliam, 1999).

Enhancing lifelong learning entails involving students in their learning, knowing their strengths and weaknesses and reviewing their work constructively to improve learning (Black and William, 1998, 2006; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Gipps1994; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Gass & Sleinker, 2008; Sadler, 1989). This is achieved through giving students feedback, listening to their comments, asking them to answer open ended questions, setting activities to use the learned material or skills in role plays, drawings, concept mapping, problem- solving, using vocabulary, writing and speaking. Bloxham & Boyd (2007) argued that to create lifelong learners, students need to be able to judge and assess work to improve it and transfer knowledge to a real world situation.

Summative assessment can have a negative effect on both teachers and students. To improve the effects of summative assessment, it is essential to be able to use its information formatively by reviewing students' answers, checking mistakes and class tasks, generating questions and answers and setting new goals (Black et al. (2003b). However, Bloxham & Boyd (2007), argued the importance of using both summative and formative assessment to evaluate different

knowledge and skills and ensure authenticity. Agreeing with this, Lorrie (2005) added that more research is needed on how to use formative and summative assessments as essential evaluative tools.

Although according to Ecclestone et al. (2010), there is no clear definition for formative assessment except that it is ‘assessment *for* learning’, and that it is different to ‘assessment *of* learning’ or summative assessment. It refers to any assessment strategy that can provides information to promote students’ learning and modify teaching. In other words, assessment becomes formative when the evidence is used to adjust teaching in a way that can improve learning (Black & Wiliam 1999) and (Ecclestone et al., 2010).

Finally, Ecclestone et al. (2010), argued that formative assessment, if used by experienced teachers who believe that teachers should enable students to construct their knowledge from peer and self-assessment, can help build knowledge, reinforce problem-solving and higher order thinking, setting future goals and motivating students to improve current learning. Ecclestone et al. (2010) emphasised the importance of using a student-centred approach, formative assessment activities, motivating and developing students’ enthusiasm to study, and encouraging the asking of questions collectively to explore or express lack of understanding. These approaches can enhance students’ lifelong learning. Engaging students in building a quality criterion and allowing them to compose it in their own words can help in understanding the criterion and assessing performance accordingly (Ecclestone et al., 2010).

## **2.5 Classroom activities:**

Classroom activities are important steps in students’ learning. Activities that improve learning should be varied and motivating, fit into the chosen achievement goals, offer reasonable challenges and focus on meaningful learning aspects (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Wiliam, 2011). However, the term “meaningful activities” can have different implications and it is important to use activities that are built on students’ needs. As a result, analysing activities,

while incorporating formative assessment, by using previously learned knowledge in a new way or a new situation, can help in giving meaning to the activity. Black and Wiliam (1999) contended to improve learning activities need to be built on five formative factors. These factors are involving students in their own learning, providing effective feedback, enabling students to assess themselves and use the information, considering assessment's effects on students' motivation and self-esteem and modifying teaching as a result of the assessment activities.

Moreover, for formative activities to be implemented effectively, teachers need to maintain a safe and positive atmosphere where students feel secure and reveal their understanding. By taking risks students can then reveal lack of understanding; therefore it is important for teachers to set a good example in asking and responding to questions. This could be accomplished by arranging efficient peer and group discussions and giving constructive feedback (Absolum et al. 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003b; Broadfoot, 2007; Clarke, 2005; Crooks, 2006).

## **2.6 Formative Assessment techniques**

### **2.6.1 Questioning technique**

Black et al. (2003b) suggested that questioning can be used to confirm, challenge and keep learners engaged, which then encourages an interactive approach and motivates students to work together and discuss ideas. Also, questions can help in developing and showing understanding of learned material. Wiliam (2011) contended that questions are effective tools to help teachers know their students current level and their future needs. Black et al. (2003b) and (Clarke, 2005) added that teachers need to maintain a safe and supportive environment to encourage dialogue and interactions. Although it is essential to reduce questions which recall memorised facts, a more useful approach is to brainstorm ideas in pairs, negotiate, recall previous experiences and knowledge to improve learning and encourage deeper critical thinking. It is necessary to give enough time to think and answer productively and provide

follow up activities (Black et al., 2003b). It is also effective practice to provide opportunities for capable students to ask questions in pairs or groups to encourage a student-centred classroom, rather than teacher-centred. Encouraging students to interact and be able to question and ask for explanations are important in furthering deeper understanding. Giving instant realistic feedback on students' answers can encourage students to improve learning and challenge themselves. Providing effective opportunities to extend pupil's thinking by using open-ended questions and creating meaningful follow up activities can develop understanding (Black et al., 2003b; Clarke 2005).

Black and Wiliam (2006) argued that encouraging inquiry based learning and critical thinking can promote learning. Training students to generate questions, find answers, practice asking questions in pairs, and share ideas improves learning as it enhances higher order thinking, a good work attitude, a sense of responsibility. Another approach involves asking questions that consolidate prior knowledge by relating it to a new situation. A third suggestion is built on giving tasks that are related to answering questions to advance learning and knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 2006). Furthermore, asking questions collectively to explore more or express lack of understanding, can improve lifelong learning. Finally, engaging students in building the quality criterion, allowing them to question the criterion and writing them in their own words helps in understanding the criterion and assessing their own performance accordingly (Ecclestone et al., 2010). However, Ho et al. (2004) contested this by arguing that students with teacher-centred learning background might find it difficult to ask questions and negotiate a criterion. The implication here is that teachers need to cater for all students' needs and understand their culture and perspectives. Culture can have a great impact on students' interactions and intercultural understanding between students themselves and teachers is very important. Agreeing with this, Jiang (2001) and Witte, Sequeira, and Fonteyne (2003) assured the effects of cultural mismatch between culturally diverse students and the importance of understanding all students' perspectives to improve learning.



### 2.6.2 Self and peer-assessments

According to many researchers (see, for example, Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Broadfoot, 2007; Clarke, 2005; Cowie, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Sadler 1989), self and peer-assessments are intrinsic parts of students' learning steps. They encourage students to be honest about their learning, take more responsibility and be able to evaluate their own learning achievements to become independent learners. To be able to self-assess and improve learning, students need to understand the learning goals, assessment criteria and be able to work to achieve it. Self-assessment engaged students in their own learning and teaches one another to achieve the success criteria (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006; Broadfoot, 2007; Clarke, 2005; Cowie, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Sadler 1989). Bloxham & Boyd (2007) added self-assessment helps students to be actively involved in their learning to improve it. Self-assessment assists students to evaluate the quality and standard of their work and improve future learning. However, Black and Wiliam (2006) argued that to develop understanding of the process and improve their evaluative skills, students need modelling steps. Black & Wiliam (2006) concluded that self-assessment is rarely used in some classrooms. This could be due to the fact that student self-evaluation is not widely taught in some professional training courses (Black & Wiliam, 2006).

Likewise, peer-assessment helps in developing self-assessment and looking at work more objectively through others eyes. Peer discussions and peer-assessments teach students to improve dialogue skills and accept criticism (Black et al., 2003a, 2003b; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Sadler 1989). Nevertheless, Ho et al. (2004) argued that local students can be sometimes impatient with ELL students who need time to process their understanding and provide an opinion. Therefore, grouping students and classroom organization are important aspects of learning too (Broadfoot, 2007). Huang, Cunningham and Finn (2010) added that ELL students' accents and wrong pronunciation can sometimes discourage students from participating in discussions and hinder communication.

Furthermore, attainment of students, who are trained to evaluate themselves, was considerably better than those who are not. Self-assessment and peer-assessment should be central of all learning situations and students should be encouraged to evaluate their learning and the assessments from the teacher to understand decisions and improve their education (Derrick & Ecclestone, 2006; Sadler 1998; Bloxton & Boyd, 2007).

It is essential to build positive dynamic classroom relationships and dialogues between students to build a positive learning environment, and get students engaged in their learning. Enhancing a safe environment that focuses on personal improvement rather than competition is essential (Black et al., 2003b; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Ho et al., 2004; Huang, Cunningham, & Finn, 2010; Looney, 2008). Interactions in peer-assessment help in exchanging learning experiences, asking for explanations and improving learning. Building rapport between students in a safe environment encourages students to disclose what they really understand and provide an effective environment to use the language naturally (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Looney, 2008). Agreeing with this view, Sadler, (1998) added that students tend to accept criticism of their work from their peers than their teacher. It promotes teaching and learning as it helps in identifying needs and tailoring teaching. Peer and self assessment develop the selfevaluative skills and learning to learn. However, teachers need to be aware of students' differences and challenges in addition to an ability of being able to align students' needs, instructions and the curriculum's (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Huang, Cunningham, & Finn, 2010; Looney, 2008; Pehner, 2008). Finally, Wiliam (2011) added that working in peer or a group build collaborative learning and individual accountability, mutual respect and greater engagement. It helps in improving the individual's metacognitive ability. Working with o thers especially in a group situation can maximize learning. It involves thinking at a higher level, being aware of time and goals, having an insight into their own learning and using their brains in a best way to manage the work. It helps students in checking their understanding, seeking help, working collaborately, building a sense of responsibility and harness ability to respond well (Wiliam, 2011). On the other hand, other researchers (see, for example, Huang,

Cunningham, & Finn 2010; Ho et al., 2004) argued that group work can be frustrating to international and ELL students as they need more time to think of the language and content and therefore can be very challenging.

### 2.6.3 Feedback

Giving positive, specific and constructive feedback helps in improving learning and extending knowledge. It should include comments on strengths and weaknesses and provide opportunities to follow up and give guidance on how to improve. Exchanging ideas between teachers on giving feedback helps in enriching comments and experiences. Feedback should encourage students to reflect on their work, improve learning and motivate students (Black et al., 2003b). Wiliam (2011) confirmed two types of feedback, ego feedback that position the students and task feedback that involves analysing the task and setting future goals. Though giving positive feedback in praising is important, yet focused feedback on learning is more important as it promotes thinking, looking for sources to improve learning and protects well-being. Ego feedback may have a positive effect only on confident students while can disengage the less confident. In addition, feedback has been associated with motivation. Feedback can improve motivation and learning by focusing on the quality of the students' work, how to improve it and by comparing achievement to an earlier work of the same student (Clarke, 2005).

Both Clarke (2005) and Crooks (2006) agreed with (Black & Wiliam, 2006) views that feedback should include information on the actual learning achievement, the required achievement and how to close the gap between them to improve learning. This can be achieved by, firstly, developing students' abilities to assess themselves, collaborating in assessing others, recognising and evaluating the need, planning for needed remedial works and transforming information. Secondly, it can enhance motivation and tailor the planned activities. Combining these two approaches of providing information on current learning and relating it to the criteria are commonly used by teachers, when using formative assessment to improve learning (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Crooks, 2006; Sadler, 1989). However, ELL students are often

unable to express themselves and convey the meaning they wanted. As a result, relating feedback to a criteria or a subject is necessary to be understood (Huang, Cunningham, & Finn; 2010; Sadler 1989; Black et al., 2003b).

However, Black and Wiliam (2006) argued that feedback that evaluates self-image can affect work attitude negatively. It can prevent them from seeking help, if needed, and can affect their self-esteem. It is evidenced that achievement is affected by the learners' beliefs about their learning. Moreover, Crooks (2006), contented feedback on learning should be related to the objectives as the positive and rewarding feedback can demotivate students if it is not related to the objectives. In addition to linking feedback to learning objectives, feedback should be private and show that mistakes are elements of learning, which is dependent on teacher's views of learning. On the other hand, evaluation of some studies showed that giving grades, even if accompanied by comments, can demotivate students and lower their achievement. Agreeing with this, Black et al. (2003b) explained this saying that students usually ignore comments and take notice of marks only. Finally, self-esteem and performance are affected by the individual's interpretation of feedback, the classroom environment and the way of conveying formative feedback to students. To improve students' learning in classrooms, careful consideration needs to be given to these elements (Black & Wiliam, 1989b; Clarke, 2006).

Similarly, Absolum et al. (2009) suggested that it is important for students to be able to self- assess and receive feedback from themselves as well as from the teacher and other students in class. This helps students to be actively involved in their learning and setting their own personal goals. Supporting students and giving them opportunities, including guidance and modelling to analyse, be evaluative and monitor themselves can improve learning.

Understanding the task and the selected procedure are essential elements of efficient assessment information. This assists in showing understanding, weaknesses and strengths. Giving students a chance to discuss their results and look for methods to overcome difficulties and provide extra

learning opportunities can improve attainment and results (Clarke (2005; Boxham & Boyd, 2006; Black et al., 2003b). Moreover, Wiliam (2011) contended that building self-efficacy can improve self-esteem. Self-efficacy refers to having self-satisfaction about their own achievements and feeling what they can achieve supports what needs to be achieved. Selfefficacy enhances self-esteem as it helps students focus on their achievements and future goals. Finally, Clarke (2005) argued that feedback can help developing goal setting which is essential in formative assessments as it keeps students involved in the process.

## **2.7 Effects of Summative/Formative Assessments on Students**

Summative assessment can have a negative effect on low achievers; including lowering their self-esteem and their ability to learn and succeed. Ranking students can affect teaching by narrowing the content and teaching to the tests (Black et al., 2003b). Summative assessment discourages deep and rich learning as students can learn to the test (Crooks, 2006). High-stakes summative assessments prove to have a negative impact on low achievers (Black et al., 2003b). They demotivate them, lower their self-esteem and do not improve their learning as have been proved by the UK Assessment Reform Group (2002). High-stakes writing tests may be invalid for ELL students because they can be unaccountable and sometimes meaningless. They can have a negative impact on students' learning and education as they do not always assess writing in authentic contexts (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Black & William, 2006). For example, asking students to write about an unknown topic in a limited time is invalid and unnecessary in ELL teaching. The questions of summative assessment may not be as productive if used on a daily basis, the content can be mainly taken from previous tests or text-books and more research is needed on how to use summative assessments as assessment for learning (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Black et al., 2003b; Black & William, 2006). Clark (2009) contended that assessment and evaluation should be woven to learning and teaching.

Consequently, to build effective criteria, educators need to be aware of background knowledge and students' needs. She argued that there must be a link between thinking, learning and

criteria. Encouraging learners how to think and learn is part of teaching approach. To produce deep knowledge and understanding students should be engaged in learning, have enough time to organise and process thinking and learning and use it in a new situation. For example, to support students' formal speaking, students need to explicitly understand all needed skills for the activity including; volume, tone, body language, pacing and the purpose of the sent message. Modelling such activity and engaging students, both emotionally and cognitively can improve language use. It assists establishing deeper understanding of formal speaking skills and an ability to compare and judge each skill. Clark (2009) also developed a thinking chart that enhances deeper thinking. The thinking chart shows physical, behavioural, environmental characteristics, strengths and weaknesses to engage learners deeply in learning. The chart also encourages personal reflections and provides modifying opportunities. Clark (2009), suggested that the thinking strategy can include, immersing learners emotionally and cognitively in the content, process and skills, brainstorming what they know and need to know, planning future goals, transferring new learning in another situation and evaluate learning.

However, pressure from school leaders and parents to look at scores often obliges teachers to use summative assessment (Clark, 2009). Nevertheless, (Black et al., 2003b; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007) questioned this, arguing that using summative and formative assessments as evaluative tools is essential to enhance learning. Bell and Cowie (2001) and Black et al. (2003b) suggested using multiple purposes of assessment and summative assessment in a more formative manner. For example, traffic lighting students' understanding of information from summative tests can reinforce specific learning needs. Summative assessment can be seen as an effective part of learning by preparing students to reflect on their work. This could include involving the students in the process by asking them to discuss questions and mark with peers or groups. This can help in obtaining specific evidence and evaluating the results collaboratively (Bell & Cowie, 2001; Black et al. 2003b). However, using marks in summative assessment can affect a student's ego, especially low achievers. This may restrict their learning (Black et al., 2003b; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007).

On the other hand, some teachers and students are confused between summative and formative differences. Usher and Earl, (2010) surveyed a group of students and teachers and found that the more experienced teachers are, the less confused they are about the difference between summative and formative's uses. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education has emphasised the importance of monitoring progress and achievement and reinforced the purpose of achievement and assessment for policy decisions, teaching practices, reporting and comparing the individual achievements to measure learning (Usher & Earl, 2010). However, the MOE did not specify assessment whether the assessment should be summative or formative. This is because assessment in classrooms and schools are used for different purposes although the emphasis is on using evidence to inform teaching and learning rather than for summative purposes (Usher & Earl, 2010).

Though, assessment evidence can be used for summative and formative purposes, (Absolum et al., 2009; Usher & Earl, 2010), agreed that successful assessments should be reliable, valid and manageable. Using evidence for formative or summative purposes will not affect its reliability or validity. However, using data for a different purpose can affect its manageability. The more efficient use of evidence is only associated with the intended purpose and not for another suggested one. However, as mentioned earlier beginning teachers can be confused about assessment practices although New Zealand teachers are aware that the emphasis should be on using evidence to improve teaching and learning. In New Zealand, teachers and schools use evidence from different assessment tools, types and strategies. The tools include teacher-made, national, standardised and international activities. The different types include tests, role plays and performances. The strategies include individual, peer, group or whole class activities. In general, it is not the tool, type or strategy that matters; it is the use of information from valid and reliable assessment to improve teaching or learning. These assessments could be used formatively or summatively as long as it fits for the purpose (Usher & Earl, 2010).

## 2.8 Motivation and engagement

Motivation is essential for successful learning and the encouragement of the learners to attend and work hard in order to achieve their goals and succeed (Black & Wiliam 1999; Black et al. 2003b; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Crooks, 2006; Looney, 2008). Fletcher and Williams (2008) examined factors that motivate adult literacy learners from a range of backgrounds and at the barriers and enablers in literacy adult education. One of the barriers is being ashamed to show their poor literacy abilities. Another barrier is overestimating literacy abilities which might demotivate students to learn and improve abilities. However, motivating learners who believe that they need to improve their literacy levels can be difficult and a barrier. A further barrier is attracting unemployed members, such as females, to join programmes and improve literacy skills. Another barrier is course content and the ability to connect it to everyday life and experiences to make sense to learners.

On the other hand, some of the benefits of improving language environments and attainments are improving employment opportunities, enhancing self-esteem, improving economic situations and the literacy skills and achievements of the next generation. As a result, New Zealand has implemented a new literacy strategy called “More than words” and funded family literacy programmes to improve learning environments, language learning and the country’s economy. Thus, motivating adult learners to join literacy programmes is essential (Walker et al., 2001) and (The Ministry of Education, 2001).

Moreover, Absolum et al. (2009) argued that self-efficiency has a great effect on motivation and achievements and that enhancing the abilities of people around students such as teachers and school leaders can enhance the abilities of students themselves. He also added that to improve attainment and motivation, students should be involved in their learning and set goals. Goals improve self-judgement and performance by improving self-regulation and focusing on the personal success and by improving motivation. Setting goals improves motivation because it encourages students to self-evaluate themselves to achieve their next goal (Absolum et al.,



2009). Finally, (Clarke, 2005) has linked feedback to motivation saying that feedback should improve motivation which enhances learning (Black & Wiliams, 1998, 2006; Clarke, 2005). However, Broadfoot (2007) argued that students' personal learning experiences, understanding and feelings about learning are the most important causes of motivation and learning to happen.

## 2.9 Promoting learners' education

Improving adult literacy helps in improving, confidence, motivation, independence, productivity and citizenship. Engaging adults in their learning and assessments can enhance motivation, self-esteem and confidence greatly (Derrick & Ecclestone, 2006). Absolum et al. Reid (2009) and Bloxham and Boyd (2007) added that it is essential to develop students' ability to reflect on their learning regularly to be able to progress. This can be done by modeling assessment criteria and schemes, focussing on the learners' needs, their abilities to plan, develop, evaluate and evaluate their learning and others. Engaging students in goal setting, assessment and judgment making can enhance the individual's learning as they develop evaluative skills which are essential for lifelong learning (Absolum et al., 2009; Baker, 2011; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). Absolum et al. (2009) added that engaging students in goal setting, assessment and judgment making can enhance the individual's learning as the validity of evaluating students as individuals is very important.

Finally, enhancing abilities and self-efficiency through meaningful activities can improve learning because it shows a student's ability to extend and challenge themselves. Feedback from activities assists in understanding the ELL learners and using the information to set goals, scaffold student's learning and plan future teaching and learning (Poehner, 2008) and (Black & Wiliam, 2006). Moreover, Derrick & Ecclestone (2006) added that self-efficiency would help in determining choices, achievements, setting strategies and ability to face challenges in the future.

## 2.10 Students' understanding of formative and summative assessment:

Black and Wiliam, (2006), Usher and Earl (2010) and Wang (2008) contended there is a lack of understanding of formative assessments by some students or even teachers where summative assessment has been used as the main assessment method. Also, a large number of students and teachers do not have sufficient time for formative assessment. However, Black and Wiliam (2006) have argued that involving students in formative assessment can face some drawbacks, including students' beliefs about the achievement goals and about their responses, perception of required work and abilities to achieve these goals. Students' fear of failure can de-motivate them to work harder, it can affect their self-esteem. The effect of cultural background can affect interpreting feedback, negatively. Students might not accept extra advice or guidance from others if they associate it with low achievement. The unsuccessful experiences of the learners, caused by failing different types of tests or making mistakes, can hinder learning and cause a refusal to collaborate in the new learning experience regardless of teaching input as the student starts to distrust his personal trial and collaboration attempts. It can also have a tremendous negative effect on the learning acquisition, cause anxiety and uncertainty which can hinder learning (Black et al., 2003b; Broadfoot, 1999; Debrow & Collins, 1975). Many researchers declared that improving learning through formative assessment is associated with positive attitude to learning (Black et al., 2003a; Broadfoot, 2007; Wang, 2008).

On the other hand, summative assessment is used to find out students' levels to evaluate the curriculum and rank the students or for a future step (Black et al., 2003a). Furthermore, Crooks, (2006) reviewed teacher's practices of formative assessment and found that misusing them by teachers can encourage superficial learning rather than real learning. This is caused by lack of reflecting on assessment questions and reviewing them with other teachers. Misusing formative assessment is also caused by encouraging competition between students which can de-motivate less able students (Absolum et al., 2009; Crooks 2006; Usher & Earl, 2009).

## 2.11 Further Research

There is evidence that using formative assessment in adult literacy and numeracy programmes can improve adult's learning. However, further research is needed to explore meaning, purpose, effects and types of formative assessment that can develop adult learning, skills and knowledge (Bloxtton, Boyd, 2007; Davidson, & Mackenzie, 2009; Looney, 2008). Also further research is needed on the effects of summative assessment on adults in adult literacy, numeracy and language programmes. Lastly, more research is needed on how the teachers develop formative assessment practices especially within casual or part time work (Looney, 2008).

In short, formative assessment's drawback is more a personal and social problem rather than a technical problem. In addition, the dominance of summative assessment limits formative assessment use and makes it challenging. However, its efficiency outweighs its drawbacks (Absolum et al., 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Crooks, 2006).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodological approaches and theories**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology used for the study and the rationale behind its use. The first section of this chapter describes the theoretical orientation of the study and justification for the selection of a qualitative approach, including using observations, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire, and the limitations of these, as data gathering tools. The second section explains issues surrounding the reliability and validity of the data.

#### **3.2 Section One**

##### **3.2. 1 Theoretical Orientation**

The purpose of the study is to explore ELL adult students' perspectives of formative assessment that may support their English language learning. The research design is influenced by the researcher's view of the world, background experience and understanding, along with a personal preference which also affected the choice of an approach. Understanding the research process and having an in-depth understanding of the research context assists in making an appropriate decision to implement research. Research is important to update knowledge or to give credibility to existing practice and to support or hold an idea in order to improve practice (Mutch, 2005). Researchers often study a topic based on their personal world view. Taking a positivist paradigm and the social constructivism that is based on a phenomenological perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Mutch, 2005), this study is designed to unlock and gain a better understanding of ELL students' experiences of formative assessment. To constructivist researchers, reality is gained and created from social interactions and the meaning that people bring to a situation (Mutch, 2005). Researchers who prefer a phenomenological approach try to understand the meaning that ordinary people give to a particular situation through understanding

their interactions and subjective behaviour as “reality is socially constructed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

By recognising students’ perspectives, it may be possible to try and explore ways of improving the implementation of formative assessment in an effort to bridge the gap between the students’ and teachers’ understanding. Phenomenology is a way of exploring experiences of people who have actually undergone them (Litchman, 2006). Agreeing with this, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argued that a phenomenological approach helps in understanding the meanings and interactions of people in a particular situation. They emphasised the subjective thinking that can influence how people see the world and believe that qualitative research supports the understanding of a situation. However that does not mean this is always the truth, rather that its accuracy can be always evaluated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Qualitative research is usually interested in understanding the meaning that people give to phenomena in a realistic situation. Agreeing with this, both Litchman (2010) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) added that a qualitative research study usually involves rich data collection and authentic quotations derived from an authentic context. Researchers using phenomenological approaches are interested in understanding the meanings, actions and relations of a particular group in a particular situation.

Cowie (2005) argued that there is a need to find out more about students’ understandings of formative assessment as there is very little research about their perception of it. For these reasons, I selected a phenomenological approach and a qualitative case study for this investigation. This qualitative case study provides a detailed examination of a specific group in a complex situation, and during a specific period of time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **3.2. 2 Qualitative Methods**

In education, qualitative methodology is an approach that is increasingly common to researchers. A qualitative methodology focuses in-depth on complex phenomena in the process of teaching or learning (Bogdan and Biklen 2007; Patton, 1990; Wilson, 2009). It provides an opportunity to study the phenomenological aspects of an educational experience, in a naturalistic way. As described earlier, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) contended that this approach is an attempt to understand the meaning that particular people bring to a particular situation. Qualitative research, in general, is naturalistic and involves rich literature and detailed analysis. It is naturalistic because the researcher visits places where the events naturally happen. They enter the world of the people that they are studying and keep an accurate detailed record of what they hear and see (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Moreover, qualitative research has a rich literature review to support the different stages of the research. It is important that interviews are conducted with extreme care to successfully represent a real situation, as they have different personalised definitions (Walford, 2001). Qualitative research is flexible, as the research questions and data collection can be adjusted to suit the needs of the research. Also, qualitative research is concerned with the process rather than the product. No statistical method is necessarily needed for data analysis, rather it is inductively analysed. Analysing data inductively refers to analysing the rich data using logical, thematic coding techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Mutch, 2005). Unlike deductive approaches, the themes are driven from the meaning that people bring to things (Tolich & Davidson, 1999).

In a qualitative research, researchers do not search for evidence to prove or disprove an assumption that underpins the study, rather their ideas are built by grouping and analysing the gathered data. Qualitative researchers believe that situations are complex, so they attempt to categorise data into codes to create themes by examining, comparing and contextualising them. Furthermore, the process usually includes coding the material once and then recoding the same material again, after a period of time, to determine whether the first and second coding agree, which strengthens the reliability of the coding technique (Bogdan & Biklen 2007).

In qualitative studies, building trustworthiness and credibility are essential. It is achieved by ensuring transparency, by opening the research to others to review and understand. This is supported by being methodical and following research procedures and ethical guidelines, and allowing regular checking and reflection by others to avoid prejudice (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2010). Agreeing with this, (Burns, 2000) added that sharing themes with participants ensures greater validity and trustworthiness.

### 3.2.3 Strengths of qualitative research

The strength of a qualitative research study lies in being naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with the process, being flexible, inductive and meaningful (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002). Qualitative data is rich and assists in presenting a realistic complete image of the situation. Reliable qualitative research is naturalistic because the researcher visits places where the events naturally happen. They enter the world of the people that they are studying and endeavour to keep an accurate detailed record of what they hear and see. Qualitative research is flexible as the main question and data collection and data analysis can be adjusted to serve the needs of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research is inductive and the researchers analyse their data using a logical basis and commonly found themes. Their ideas are built as the data they gather are grouped and analysed. Qualitative researchers are more like instruments that study a situation in-depth. They are interested in the process and how the people gain meaning by interaction and relations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Such strengths indicate that qualitative methodology is the most appropriate approach for my study.

### 3.2.4 Limitations of qualitative research

In spite of the strengths of qualitative research, it has some drawbacks. For instance, it is very hard to generalise an idea based on a qualitative case study as it is usually based on a small number of participants (Lichtman, 2006). Another drawback is the possibility of participants'

providing dishonest views by being untruthful to please the researcher, or the wish to present an excellent image (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Also, the fact that qualitative research is inductive as opposed to deductive can be perceived as a limitation to quantitative researchers. This is because, unlike qualitative research, a quantitative research starts with hypothesis and tests to prove or disprove its accuracy (Tolich and Davidson, 1999).

### 3.2.5 Phenomenological approach

My study is strengthened by a phenomenological approach that helps in constructing meaning in an authentic situation. It provides an in-depth understanding of a real human experience in a particular situation through interactions and behaviours, as reality is usually socially constructed (Patton, 1990, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Researchers attempt to grasp the subjective aspect of people's behaviour by understanding the meaning that people bring to a situation, through observations, interviewing and description of a situation in a contextual setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Agreeing with this, Lichtman (2010, 2011) argued that qualitative research is built on some essential elements. They include being descriptive, rich, dynamic and nonlinear, having inductive thinking, studying a holistic and in-depth situation in a natural way and presenting in-depth interpretation (Lichtman, 2006, 2010).

### 3.2.6 Case study

Case studies are commonly used when investigating a particular educational issue or situation. A case study was defined by Lamnek (2005) as cited in Wilson (2009) as “a research approach, situated between concrete data taking techniques and methodological paradigms.” (p.204). A case study examines a complex phenomenon in an authentic context, and also involves collecting profound and detailed data of the studied topic to examine a situation as accurately as possible and build tentative hypothesis for more research and explorations in the future (Burns, 2000). Different types of case studies presented in Wilson (2009); included “Snapshot”, “Longitudinal”, “Pre-post”, “Patchwork” and “Comparative”, (p.206). A Snapshot case study is



of interest to me as it includes an in-depth objective study at a specific time and then comparing themes and patterns to gain meanings.

To conduct a case study successfully, Wilson (2009), presented certain guidelines, including defining the research question, selecting a focused case to be studied and defining data collection and analysis techniques. Collecting data in the field and analysing them to present the report is an essential guideline. Agreeing with this view, Burns (2000) recommended using multiple data collection sources to reinforce and strengthen the study as they improve reliability and validity and allow triangulation. A case study allows the reader to trace a chain of evidence from the start of the research to the end. It involves on site recording details of the nature of the setting, the people, the tasks, what is said and the researcher's reactions and feelings.

The main methods used in case studies are observation, interviews and data analysis, in addition to some other methods of data collection such as using personal and official documents and questionnaires. It is mainly used to answer, 'what', 'why', 'how' and 'who' questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Burns, 2000). To sustain reliability in a case study, it is necessary to maintain triangulation, record any personal bias by the researcher, and describe the steps and procedures of collecting and analysing data (Burns, 2000). There are four main parts of a case study. Firstly, by having a question that needs to be answered, and secondly, looking for specific evidence to answer the question. The next step involves defining the actual case study to establish its main components and avoid confusion. The fourth component is connecting data in the analysis of the data. Thus, it is "limiting data to propositions and criteria for interpreting findings" (Burns, 2000, p. 465). In sampling, a case study usually depends on a purposeful meaning. This means that the selected sample of informants can serve and help in understanding the situation. Patton (1990) ensured that sample size is not restricted as the purpose of the research is more important than the size of the sample.

### **3.2.7 Strengths of case studies**

Numerous strengths make a qualitative case study an effective choice. It provides in- depth and rich descriptive data of the studied topic and a situational analysis of a chosen data collection source. Sampling is usually effective in helping to discover the meaning of a topic or a situation. A case study's data analysis usually depends on a coding system that requires higher order thinking and analysis ability (Burns, 2000). In my study, it provided an opportunity to study certain aspects of ELL students' experiences of formative assessment as an attempt to understand the meaning that particular people bring to it. A case study is preferred when the researcher has little control over a situation or when studying a complex contemporary situation (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002). This helps in offering anecdotal evidence that can illustrate a general finding, by extending, confirming or challenging it. Researchers using a case study approach need to have special skills such as being able to formulate precise questions, and being attentive to all cues and information. It also allows flexibility to afford any change in the situation (Burns, 2000; Wilson, 2009). As a result, a qualitative case study is relevant for my question as it provides a detailed examination of a specific group in a complex situation and during specific period of time.

### **3.2.8 Limitations of case studies**

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Burns, 2000; Wilson, 2009) stated some limitations of case studies including; firstly, the fact that it is challenging to draw a generalisation from studying a single case study as all situations, settings and participants are different. Also, most qualitative researchers believe that categories do not have the same meaning and vary according to the participant's assumptions and perspectives which might challenge the researchers. A second limitation is time span when conducting the research, as outcomes are usually different from the start to the end of the day or even the year. Length of time can have a great impact on determining the amount of data collected and getting a feeling of either having sufficient data or not (Burns, 2000). Thus the consumed time in a case study can be a challenge, as a researcher might estimate a time limit to collect and analyse data and realise that they have underestimated the

required time. To solve this challenge researchers either extend or limit their timeline, or narrow their focus in a case study.

Burns (2000) also argued that personalising the finding creates a subjective bias possibility. Wilson (2009) agreed with his views and suggested some possible solutions. Using multiple sources, developing a chain of evidences, matching similar patterns and allowing the informants to review the report draft can help in eliminating subjectivity and enhance its validity. To allow reliability, Burns, (2002) advised maintaining triangulation, reporting any possible bias, developing a trail or examination and providing a clear rich explanation of the used steps and procedures (Burns, 2002).

### **3.3 Data Gathering procedures**

#### **3.3.1 Observation**

Observation is a common technique in qualitative research as it allows the studying of groups in their own environment and recording the required themes in an authentic situation. In qualitative research, the researcher observes the studied group, responding to the asked question and providing realistic image of the participants, activities and discussions. To present rich data, it is essential to establish a study focus and record any possible data in the first observation session and describe it in details (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2010; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Tolich & Davidson (1999) identified three types of field notes; ‘jotted field notes’, ‘mental field notes’ and ‘expanded field notes’. In ‘jotted notes’, the researcher, records in a shorthand style everything done by the students and the teacher, including action and feelings. Sometimes taking notes can cause embarrassment to informants and in this case the researcher keeps ‘mental notes’ and records them later. ‘Expanded field notes’ are written or typed records of observations using full sentences. It is important to be introduced to students and wait to be accepted before interacting with them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, it is sometimes difficult to balance between being warm, interactive, and reflective. For example, it can be

sometimes challenging for novice researchers to interact well with informants as they might feel unwelcome to interact (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### 3.3.2 Limitations of observations

Observation can have a few drawbacks according to some researchers. One limitation is deciding on the most suitable group to study to fulfil the purpose of the research. It can be a challenge firstly, because it is difficult to choose the right group of people from other teachers' students (Lichtman, 2010). Selecting the researcher's appropriate role can be another limitation. Sometimes the observing researcher chooses to be a silent observer and other times they need to interact and help if they can (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich, 2001; Lichtman, 2010; Tolich & Davidson 1999).

### 3.3.3 Interviews

This research question aims to explore adult ELL students' understanding of formative assessments that can help improving their language learning. Interviews are one of the most common elements of data collection in a qualitative research and help in getting realistic data from the participants. They can be in-depth, structured, semi-structured or unstructured. I decided to use a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews help in gathering information of what the participants want to say about a topic area in a flexible manner (Lichtman, 2010; Norman & Yvonna, 2005). However, researchers are challenged with their choice of suitable language and context which help participants to reveal honest opinions and express their points of view. Tolich and Davidson (1999) suggested choosing the right open- ended question from the start and avoiding closed ended questions. They suggested asking questions about people's experience and interest to stimulate them. They also encouraged recording some prompt questions to encourage interviewees to explore more. Mutch (2005) and Thomson (2009) added that avoiding self-refinement, allowing participants to be self-reflective can help in getting more honest data. A researcher also needs to be cautious not to be biased in

an interview (Mutch, 2005). To avoid being biased, I followed the ethical interview methods of keeping a records of the interview, encouraging students to share their ideas and encouraging them by nodding my head, smiling and summarising what they said during the interviews and allowing them to self-reflect on their opinions, bearing in mind the research question and data collection ethics (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich, 2001; Lichtman, 2010; Norman & Yvonna, 2005; Tolich & Davidson 1999).

#### 3.3.4 Semi-structured interview:

A semi-structured interview encourages informants to present their understanding freely in a natural language of a dialogue. A semi-structured interview helps in capturing the informant's understanding of a specific studied subject (Burns, 2000; Norman & Yvonna, 2005). Moreover, semi-structured interviews require building a rapport, using open ended questions, a recording device, maintaining eye contact, being an unobtrusive researcher and allowing participants to reveal their stories rather than depending on their own ability to interpret ideas (Lichtman, 2010; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Semi- structured group interviews can provide richer data and saves interviewing time compared to individual interviews (Litchman, 2006; Norman & Yvonna, 2005). A researcher can interview a number of people in a shorter period of time, usually it is for an hour, compared to individual interviews where the researcher might need around ten hours to interview ten people (Litchman, 2006).

However, deciding on the number of the participants can be a challenge. For example an ideal group number of participants are between six and twelve, to obtain rich data and compensate for the absence of some of them. Less than six people would limit the data and more than twelve requires a great deal of time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, Patton (1990) contended that the number of informants is not what matters, rather using the available resources to explore the research topic. Mauthner et al. (2002) emphasised that maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is an essential strategic method of sampling. When deciding on the group type, it is essential to choose participants who have some experience of the studied topic so they meet the

criteria. However, they do not have to represent any gender, ethnicity or educational level as the purpose is not to generalise (Lichtman, 2006). The researcher, in a semi-structured group, usually has a planned set of questions to direct discussions. The semi-structured interviews help in collecting the main ideas of the research in a naturalistic flexible and collaborative manner (Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Norman & Yvonna, 2005). However, sometimes choosing appropriate questions while using a less structured approach and finding a successful recording device can be a challenge, as the researcher cannot rely on their memory. Also, Wilson (2009) added building trust and confidence are essential before even conducting the interview by reassuring interviewee that their opinion is important to the researcher. However, interviewing the researcher's own students can be problematic as they can be affected by the relationship that has been built and the power of the relationship that exists between them (Lichtman, 2006; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Therefore, the sampling method needs to be considered well.

### 3.3.5 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a survey method of collecting data. Its advantage is that it is associated with its anonymity, freedom, comfort and confidentiality (Mutch, 2005; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Wilson, 2009). It helps in reaching a large number of individuals and generating credible data. In constructing a questionnaire, it is important to provide clear instructions, write a definition or provide clear background information. It is also important to choose the right questions and provide appropriate response categories. However, developing the right questions can be a challenge. Therefore, it is important to use simple language, avoid ambiguous terms and lengthy questions and peer review them with a colleague. Trialling the questionnaire on a smaller group to check their appropriateness is also ideal. Thus the effectiveness of the questionnaire is determined by the question quality, having equal space between questions, yet the participants may not always report the truth (Burns, 2007; Cohen et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009).

Questionnaires and interviews collect information directly from participants and show participants' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and values. Nevertheless, the drawbacks are the reluctance of participants in disclosing opinions, and saying what they think the researchers want to hear to present a favourable impression. Also the questionnaire and the interview validity can be affected by the questions used and the extent they may influence the respondents to show their opinions honestly and reveal information (Cohen et al., 2007; Tuckman & Harper, 2012; Wilson, 2009).

When selecting questions, a researcher needs to consider a suitable format and decide what information they are looking for. For example, direct questions might show people's opinion, while indirect questions might show what people think and the researcher needs to ask a number of questions to gain sufficient information. Also, specific questions explore specific information, while non-specific questions explore general aspects and the researcher needs to determine whether they are looking for facts, opinion or a statement. A commonly used format of questionnaires is the scaled responses that measure the degree or frequency of agreement or occurrence (Cohen et al., 2007; Burns, 2000; Cox & Cox, 2008; Tuckman & Harper, 2012).

### **3.4 Reliability and Validity**

#### **3.4.1 Reliability**

Reliability is associated with the research findings trustworthiness and rigour (Burns, 2000). It also refers to internal and external reliability. A research can be considered externally reliable if the same study is done by another person, unknown to the researcher, and obtains the same results. On the other hand internal reliability refers to the possibility of generalizing the outcome. However, these perceptions ignore the effects of the external experiences that have influenced the collected data and carrying out the same research with the same people is unlikely to give the same results as people and their learning and experiences change constantly. Thus, reliability of a study is related to the strength of hypothesis and the strategies and

procedures that the researcher has used to reach such a hypothesis (Bums, 2000; Wilson, 2009). Therefore, to maintain reliability it is necessary to state the objective of the research and link the rationale behind it to different studies and wider literature. Also it is important to give a descriptive image of the situation the participants and data collection methods and analysis procedure (Wilson, 2009). Therefore, qualitative research methods are open to considerable critique regarding the reliability of the results compared to quantitative approach.

#### 3.4.2 Validity

Validity is fundamental in qualitative research as it refers to the successful ability of the research to investigate what it intended to investigate, thus it is associated with the credibility of the findings (Wilson, 2006). This can occur by having a focused question and designing the research effectively to allow collecting and analysing useful data (Mutch, 2005). Checking the connection between the outcome, the conclusion of the study, the methodology and the procedure used to reach such a conclusion can enable validity in a case study. Wiley and Lee (2009) added that providing a description of the used strategy or method without providing sufficient evidence would affect the study's validity as describing and analysing the evidence and revealing threats and limitations can maintain validity. Finally, to maintain internal validity, it is important to use multiple data collection methods which may include interviews, observations and surveys. Also, it is important to maintain the triangulation methods when analysing data. Triangulation refers to checking the found data and its meaning by the informants (Wiley & Lee 2009).

### 3.5 Data Analysis

In a qualitative research, project data analysis is primarily a constant inductive and ongoing process that starts at the first early stages of the field study and continues till the end of the research. In data analysis, data is organized, divided into smaller units, synthesized and arranged in categories, to find similarities, differences and insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007. p.159;



Burns, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Lichtman, 2010; Mutch, 2005; Cefaratti, 2007). A qualitative analysis is a thematic analysis. Agreeing with this view, Mutch (2005) added that it involves browsing and considering particular aspects that emerge, reading again and highlighting anything of interest such as a recurrent theme and coding which is the first step of categorizing. The next step involves looking at any emerging patterns from coding such as similarities and group them together, developing the groups into bigger themes and categories and checking the resources for “resonance” (p.131) by using experience and common sense to check the original documents’ validity and if they agree or resonate with other research in the same field. Mutch (2005) added that once comfortable with the selected themes, a researcher can re-read to select quotations and examples to explain reasons behind the choices. At the end a researcher can report findings by summarizing the most important and significant themes, presenting suitable examples, “suggesting a possible theoretical explanation, highlighting implications and suggesting a possible research.” (Mutch, 2005, P.132).

## **Chapter Four**

### **My Research design**

#### **4.1 Methods and Procedures**

The focus of my study was to investigate how formative assessment is viewed by adult ELL students. This can help in developing new knowledge and justifying it to support ELL's English. The data collection procedures and analysis of data gathered from observation, semistructured interviews and questionnaires are reported in this chapter.

#### **4.2 Participants**

A range of adult ELL students coming from different cultural backgrounds have participated in the study. Fourteen adult ELL students, from the same college, were interviewed. They formed a mixture of refugees, immigrants and international students. They were part of the two classes that were observed, but were chosen on their ability to describe their experiences in more details. Forty students from different ELL programmes and colleges participated in the questionnaire. They were a mixture of males and females from various backgrounds and nationalities. However, most of the participants were females (see Figure 2). The participants' biggest group was from China and Japan. The second largest groups were from Taiwan and Somalia, the next were from Korea and Afghanistan, Egypt and Libya. The smallest group was from Brazil, Turkistan, Russia and countries of the Middle East such as Iraq, Palestine and Jordan. This range of nationalities represents the typical demography of some ELL classrooms. The nationalities of participants are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Nationalities of students in the research study

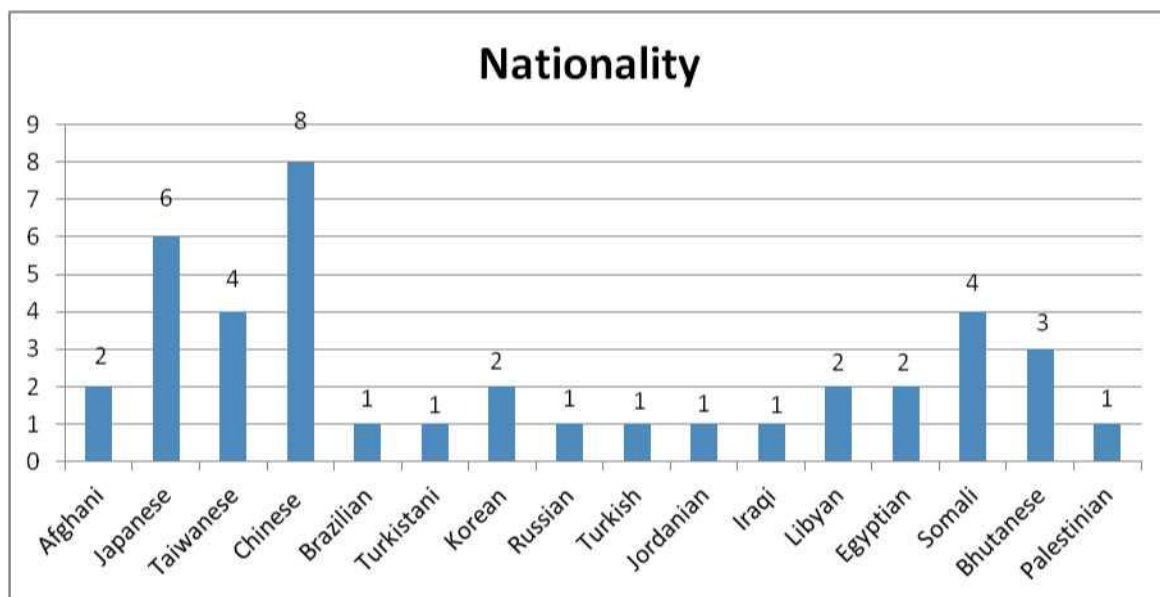
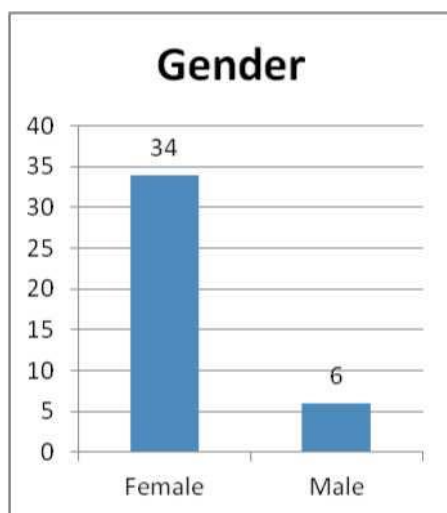


Figure 2

Gender of students in the research study



#### 4.3 Data Collections

For data collection, I used observation, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. The following section outlines the methodology.

#### **4.3.1 Observation**

Before conducting the study, it was important for me to clear any ethical issues by providing the information sheets and consent forms to the school principal, head/teacher and students (See Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). My main focus was to understand students' perspectives of formative assessment and how it could help their learning. I tried to enable the students to feel more comfortable while I was in class by, helping them, talking to them and sharing ideas to give them more confidence when interacting during observation sessions. I also visited the class several times before conducting the study to help students get used to my presence in class. This was supported by the teacher who made me feel very welcome in her class. Also, to minimise being biased I followed the ethical observation method of keeping systematic records of all classroom practices as much as possible, establishing a rapport with students in a collaborative manner during all observations and bearing in mind the research question and data collection approaches (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich, 2001; Lichtman, 2010; Tolich & Davidson 1999). I used Tolich & Davidson (1999) 'jotted notes', and recorded in a shorthand style everything done by the students and the teacher, including action and feelings. I also rotated between being a silent observer sometimes and other times I interacted and helped to build positive relationship (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich, 2001; Lichtman, 2010; Tolich & Davidson 1999).

#### **4.3.2 Semi-structured interview:**

In my study, I used a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed the participants to express their perception of formative assessment in a flexible and collaborative manner. In my study, the participants were selected based on their language efficiency to be able to share their voices well. I was cautious to conduct the interviews until I had built a good relationship after several observations. The questions were asked to all participants equally, to help in understanding their perspectives (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Norman & Yvonna, 2005). I used semi-structured interviews with two small groups to gain the

participants' perspectives in an authentic manner. Interviews of a group of seven for around an

hour allowed the participants to interact and respond to questions well plus give their points of views collaborately as advised by Bogdan & Biklen (2007). Fifteen interview open-ended questions (see appendix 7) were given to students. The list of questions was presented to the participants before the interview to provide a hard copy that can help ELL students check their listening while I am asking the questions and to facilitate understanding. The questions were also given to students to familiarise them with the questions and provide some thinking time to check understanding and use of language. Questions were asked to all participants without a certain order to allow them reveal their understandings and allow more responses.

Participants' responses were used to explore their understanding and experiences of formative assessment strategies. At the end of the interview, participants were given the chance to add any comment they wished to discuss further or draw conclusions. The interview was conducted after several classroom visits and observations were completed to help students feel more comfortable and confident in sharing their voices. During the interview, I encouraged students to share their ideas by smiling, nodding, repeating or summarising what they said. I also encouraged them to reflect on their opinions and showed interest in what they said. The interview was recorded to facilitate interpreting and rechecking of students' responses. This helped in ensuring accuracy and eliminating biased interpretation that I was aware of.

Interview questions were designed to help in investigating students' perspectives of formative assessment strategies, in more details. The interview questions were built around the core elements of formative assessment strategies according to (Black & Wiliam, 1999; Clarke, 2008; Ecclestone et al., 2010):

- 1- Learning objective awareness
- 2- Effects of self and peer assessment
- 3- Questions techniques
- 4- Feedback
- 5- Motivation

## 6- Classroom's positive relationship's effects

Examples of the interview open ended questions are;

- Describe the activities used in class which can help you to improve your language.
- How can sharing the learning objectives help you improve your work and learning?
- Do you know what formative assessment is? Can you give an example of formative assessment?

### 4.3.3 Questionnaire:

To examine students' perceptions and experiences of formative assessment, I developed a questionnaire (see appendix 8). I have chosen a four point scaled response questionnaire (Likert scale) as according to Tuckman and Harper (2012), it is a structured scale that collects information directly to show extent of agreement. I coded the data to analyse it and gain the students' opinion. Agreeing with this, Cohen et al. (2007) added that a 'Likert scale' is a rating scale that is powerful, widely used in research and very useful to researchers as it shows the degree of response intensity and allows freedom to the informant and researcher. Cohen et al. (2007) emphasised that the scale should measure one thing at a time and the importance of adding a section that allows informants to state if they have no opinion. Efficient 'Likert scales' show ranges of the informants' possible responses.

However, they argued that as 'likert scales' are limited in their range of responses, the concern is the intensity of respondent responses and that there is no assurance of equality (Cohen et al., 2007). The honesty of the informant can be another drawback and the possibility of having another opinion. Also having numerical data requires robust analysis. Rating scale data should be treated as ordinal data, related to its position. However, using a pilot study to categorise and define categories can facilitate data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007).

My questionnaire was designed to identify students' opinions about the effectiveness of formative assessment strategies as clarified by researchers in formative assessment field (see, for example, Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006; Broadfoot, 2007; Clarke, 2005; Cowie, 2005; Crooks, 2006). I asked another teacher to trial the first version of the questionnaire where I used the word formative in most of the questions. The feedback helped in checking the workability of the questionnaire including the suitability of the language and appropriateness of the questions. The feedback showed that the students were unaware of 'formative assessment' terminology and therefore, I had to modify the term formative assessment into what it means, (see, for example, Black et al., 2003b; Black & William 2002, 2006; Cowie, 2005; Clarke, 2003; Crooks, 2006; Dixon & Williams, 2001). Thus, instead of using the term formative assessment, I used the meanings and approaches of formative assessment strategies such as self-assessment, peer assessment, group work, feedback from different parties and setting goals.

#### **4.3.4 Journal**

A qualitative researcher is responsible for the designing, collecting, reflecting, analysing constructing and considering the issues (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). This encouraged me to plan ahead and write my expectations in a journal which also included all stages of my research and where I recorded, my reflections and any changes in plans as advised by Walford (2001). I recorded reflections on the methods I used included observation, semi-structured interviews, and data gained from the questionnaire (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Tolich & Davidson, 1999; O'Hanlon, 2003; Wilson, 2009). Observation, semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire gave me an insight of a wider range of students about learning the language while using formative assessment techniques (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). Qualitative researchers use a variety of sustainable, methodological and analytical field notes. (Bogdan and Biklen 2007; Walford 2001) advised recording notes in a journal that include expectations, theories, running account of the researcher's ethnographic record, personal feelings, experiences and reflections, as long as it does not harm the institution (Bogdan & Biklen 2007).

### **4.4 Data Analysis**

#### **4.4.1 Introduction**

This section explains the data analysis and ethical considerations and issues. To analyse data, I listened to tapes, read field notes from observations and modified questions. I considered the issues raised and discussed them with colleagues and supervisors using a triangulation method (Lichtman 2006). To organise the given information, I coded and recoded the data to ensure clarity (Bogdan & Biklen 2007). I used a journal to record key words during interviews, to enable me to write more comprehensive notes afterwards. In addition I used a recording device to record interviews and recorded detailed descriptions after interviews (Walford, 2001).



#### 4.4.2 Data analysis of Interviews

To analyse data, I followed the 'inductive' and 'thematic' methods as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and other experts in the field such as Mutch (2005). The inductive method of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) involves visiting and revisiting data several times looking for common themes among students to find concepts. The thematic method of Mutch (2005) involves a reminder of what the research was intended to find, and then comparing, contrasting ideas before ordering them. Therefore, I examined field notes gained from the observations and questionnaires and generated an initial set of category codes that categorised activities and situations. I also transcribed data by listening to the recorded interviews several times. To transcribe, I listened to the whole conversation, recorded topics of conversation, then listened again and transcribed the parts that were most relevant to my research question. To classify content and identify concepts and meanings accurately (Burns, 2000), I shared the transcribed data and commentaries with informants to read, ascertain their opinions and provide a final comment. After several readings of the collected data and commentaries, I examined some common words, key phrases, items and activities amongst the collected notes of the interviews to form codes and find themes or concepts. Revision of data necessitated changing codes and generating categories as argued by (Biklen and Bogdan, 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Lichtman, 2010; Mutch, 2005). Finally, I looked again at the categorised evidences and combined initial categories into concepts as advised by (Lichtman, 2010). Agreeing with this, Burns (2000), contended coding is categorizing materials into common themes, concerns, ideas, definitions and suggestions (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Burns, 2000; Lichtman, 2010; Tolich & Davidson, 1999).

To develop the concepts, I started coding the data collected from field notes, observations, observer's comments, questionnaire and interviews ((Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Cefaratti, 2007; Lichtman, 2010). I formed coding categories, and then found sub-categories. Next, I combined data coded in each category highlighting them in different colours. I copied the transcript file, in order not to lose any part, and cut and pasted electronically the interview transcribed data. I

combined each section together. I added the participants' responses of the same category, in a table to collate the same data together and establish an authentic understanding of adult ELL students' perspective of formative assessment that can support their language learning (Burns 2000; Ceffaratti, 2007; Mutch, 2005).

Burns (2000) suggested some other coding categories that can help in creating a concept or a complete image. These codes include; specific events or activities codes, situation definition by informants, behaviour and relationship code, strategies code and perception code of a situation. The codes, I expected to include activities, formative assessment perception, goals, strengths, weaknesses, questions, comments, preferred activities, encouragements and time. However, the codes included acknowledging cultural background in a positive learning environment, clarity of understanding achievement goals, adult ELL students' understanding of formative versus summative assessment, feedback, questions and time restrictions, peer assessment, self-assessment, and building relationships and motivation.

Having a focus, organising data from the start and planning for data collections is very important in a qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Burns, 2000; Cefaratti, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Litchman, 2010; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Thus, I decided to have a focus when collecting and analysing observed data which is, related to the research topic. My focus was how formative assessment, as an effective tool, can improve students' language learning. As described earlier, qualitative research focuses on understanding the phenomena by making sense of meanings that people bring to settings, in its real context. Qualitative research also helps in understanding the social aspects of our world; the people in a setting and their beliefs about the world. The provided data from observations, interviews and questionnaire were based on students' experiences and understanding of formative assessment (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Presenting rich, descriptive, honest, fair and balanced data is necessary and this is what I have endeavoured to do constantly. After building trust with participants and collecting data, I gave

the participants a chance to review my data and check the credibility of my analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and (Cefaratti, 2007). My research focused on a discourse of how ELL students make sense of the effectiveness of formative assessment techniques to improve their language learning. Tape recording of interviews eliminated the physical features of body language of a conversation, thus recording notes after interviews were essential. Therefore, there was a need for transcribing the parts that were most relevant to my research question, recording immediate specific features and symbols after interviews or observations and keeping honest rich descriptions. Moreover, though transcribing makes the researcher engage with the data, it was time and energy consuming checking and rechecking records to find the targeted data and compare them with the transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Walford 2001).

#### 4.4.3 Data analysis of questionnaire

After collecting responses of each category of the questionnaire, I combined the results of each question, from all participants in a tally. After that, I added all the numbers together of every question and presented them in a separate table (see Appendix 9), before highlighting the different trends to compare and contrast them. Finally, I analysed the highlighted results and presented them in a table for comparison. I also added data gained from questions regarding students' nationalities, gender, and first and second language firstly in a tally and then combined the data in separate charts to analyse them and build an idea about students' background (see, Figures A, B, C).

#### 4.5 Ethical considerations

Researchers enter the world of the people they gain meanings from. They need to follow certain ethical principles to protect themselves and the people they research. The term “ethics” refers to moral disciplines and principles that govern a group of people and a professional establishment (Mutch, 2005). Ethical adherence is the essential principle in conducting a research, from planning to present the final report, to maintain the protection of the researcher, participants and

the trustworthiness of the research (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Mutch (2005) stated that the power of entering participants' lives obliges adhering to ethical principles that provide protection from the researcher's power and trust. In addition, Mutch (2005) contended ethical considerations include 'informed consent', 'voluntary participation', 'permission to gain access', 'ethic of caring' and 'confidentiality and anonymity' and 'the participants and researcher's safety' (p.79).

"Informed consent" is an official letter sent to participants, clearly identifying the objective of the research, data collection methods and used devices, types of activities, time limit needed in data collection, and permission to access some parts or parties such as caregivers. Also, participation in any research is voluntarily and participants have the right to withdraw at any time. Participants would not be forced to participate in any part (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Mutch 2005; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Agreeing with this, Tolich and Davidson (1999), added 'do no harm' and 'ethic of caring' as called by Mauthner et al. (2002). It is an ethical principle that necessitates the awareness of any direct or indirect harm on the participants and argues the importance of gaining ethical clearance before starting the research. Another ethical issue is research findings dissemination and balancing the rights of the researcher, the university, participants and the organisation (Mauthner et al., 2002). Also to manage a research where the researcher is working at the same organisation is a great ethical dilemma. The researcher needs to be sensible and responsible to the organisation and the users. Researchers need to maintain confidentiality, self-regulation and balance between both roles (Mauthner et al., 2002).

In conducting my study, all ethical issues were considered and adhered to in all stages of the research (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich, 2001; Lichtman, 2010; Norman & Yvonna, 2005; Tolich & Davidson 1999). I followed the ethical principles as recommended by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury. It was important for me, before visiting the site, to clear and contain any ethical issues by providing the information sheets and consent forms to the school principal, head/teacher and students (see

Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). The information sheets and consent forms gave a clear image of the study and informed the school principal, head/teacher and students of the objective of the study which is to explore ELL adult students' perspective of formative assessment. Participants were also informed that their anonymity would be maintained, their participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw at anytime without any consequence. I also informed them that my role should not influence their participation (Mauthner et al., 2002; Mutch, 2005).

While conducting the research, I followed the ethical interview methods of keeping records of the interview, encouraging students to share their ideas to avoid being biased and I also shared the records findings with the students to maintain their interpretations and avoid being biased (Bogdan & Biklen 2007; Burns, 2000; Tolich, 2001; Lichtman, 2010; Norman & Yvonna, 2005; Tolich & Davidson 1999).

#### 4.6 Summary

In summary, this study implemented a qualitative case study method. Observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire were the main data collection methods. The collected data was grouped, examined and analysed carefully and thematically to find the common themes and give an accurate overview of the findings.

All ethical guidelines were followed and ethical issues were cleared before implementing the study and in all stages of the research, as required by (ERHEC); The University of Canterbury's Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. However, the results cannot be generalised as the samples are limited to two educational parties that I had permission to access and the students selected in interviews do not represent all adult ELL students in New Zealand. The students were mainly chosen for their ability to express their ideas about formative assessment. The following chapter presents results and discussions.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the main themes and concepts drawn from the data. The results have been related to relevant literature and the implications of the findings have been explored. After analysing data from the observations, interviews and the open ended question at the end of the questionnaire themes were identified. The main themes included, acknowledging cultural background, clarity of understanding achievement goals, adult ELL students' understanding of formative compared to summative assessment, feedback, questions and time restrictions, peer assessment, self-assessment, and building relationships and motivation. To reinforce the findings from my study, I have included some direct quotes from the participants whose use of English is not always grammatically accurate.

#### **5.2 Classroom Observation**

Classroom observations were conducted to provide further data on the research topic, that of exploring students' perspective of formative assessment and its impact on their language learning. During the observations, I observed and listened to almost every interaction and activity. I kept systematic records of all classroom practices including students' interactions, responses, questions and answers, engagement, collaboration, understanding of achievement objectives, feedback and relationships with others in the group. During the classroom observations, it was noticeable that students were actively engaged and enjoying the atmosphere of the classroom when the teacher was culturally sensitive and respectful of their cultural backgrounds. The students enjoyed practising using English to talk about their cultural experiences and special events.

From data analysis of classroom observations, field notes and observer's comments, the following depict what the students have experienced. It was also evident from these observations that the students benefited from working in pairs and from peer discussions. Peer assessments and discussions helped them to use the language, understand their weaknesses and be more engaged in their learning. Students appeared to appreciate feedback, especially when the teacher gave positive comments and suggestions for the next learning steps. Students were observed talking about working in pairs where they marked on a checklist what their partners had done well. The criteria included understanding instructions, following instructions, speaking clearly and giving eye contact. It seemed that the students appreciated immediate feedback to improve their work. One example was when students were working on a speaking activity in pairs to give feedback. They were given the criteria previously. The activity appeared to be successful when students repeated the activity in an effort to improve it. They took into consideration the feedback that was provided. However, some students asked for the teacher's feedback on their speaking, in addition to their peers. This showed that although giving immediate feedback by peers could improve attainment, some students seemed to trust the teacher's feedback more than their peers, to improve their learning.

From my observations, it was evident that questions, from the teacher that were designed to further learning, still remained an important strategy. Students were advised to engage in active listening and allow enough thinking time to think and share ideas before answering. It seemed that some of the students realised the importance of questions and answers to improve learning. It was also obvious that the students had experienced other formative assessment's strategies as they had several chances to self and peer assess their works and were relating their learning to certain achievement objectives.

To sum up, it was evident that formative strategies were actively implemented in the observed classrooms. Students believed in the importance of responding well to questions and giving and receiving feedback to improve learning. However, mostly teachers were trusted as they were

viewed as the experts who could help students improve attainment. This confirmed what (Black et al., 2003b; Ellis, 2007, 2008; McGee & Fraser, 2001; Banks & Banks, 2005) had contended about the importance of positive classroom atmosphere and relationships to improve learning the language. Learning is a profound emotional activity that is shaped by the learning activities and environment (Baker, 2011; Banks & Banks, 2005; McGee & Fraser, 2001). The students also enjoyed the positive atmosphere and felt that they were valued as learners. These factors helped students to be actively engaged in their learning. The following section now discusses the themes arising from the interviews as outlined in the introduction.

### 5.3 Main Themes

#### 5.3.1 Acknowledging cultural background in a positive learning environment:

From a sociocultural perspective, learners are affected by the learning environment and the quality of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Yang & Kim, 2011; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007). Language learning is a social activity and ELL learners understand the language by interacting in conversation within social contexts. Interactive activities in classroom situations can enhance language learning (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). Agreeing with this, Banks & Banks, (2005) contended that learning is an emotional activity that is affected by the learning environment, relationships and culture.

All students, in my study, confirmed that the class enjoyed a positive and affirming atmosphere and this impacted on their learning. They also attributed their feeling of confidence and enjoyment to their belief of the warmth and promotion of their experiences and ideas. Students confirmed that class interactions and positive relationships were necessary for improving their language learning. For instance, two students said,

*“Ya, we learn English in a very positive atmosphere, friendly atmosphere, very warm. You feel comfortable and very brave to share. ”*

*“We have a good chance to learn English and we have very good relationships. ”*



This encouraging and positive atmosphere appeared to enhance students' self-esteem and self-worth, which proved an important contribution to the improvement of practising and learning the second language. As Yang and Kim (2011) contended, second language learners' beliefs and enjoyment of the learning experiences can have an impact on learning the language. My study showed that students were learning the language in a positive, encouraging and enjoyable atmosphere which appeared to have a great positive impact on their feelings and their language learning. Students reported saying:

*"It affects your attitude, then you are motivated and someone is looking at you "*

*"I would like to add it is important to mix with different people because there is more chance to learn. "*

*"It makes you comfortable and you can enjoy the class. "*

Valuing students' culture and beliefs also enhanced their learning and some students expressed this clearly:

*"You understand the partner's different culture. You learn to listen. In a real world you have to listen, to move forward. "*

*"You understand the partner different culture "*

*"Learning about other's culture help us and we get rid of things that doesn't help us anymore. "*

When teachers modify their language, by using slower speech and gesture, seeking clarifications from the students and checking understanding, language learning improves (Gas& Selinker, 2008; Lightbrown and Spada, 2006; Long, 1983). Some students explained how the use of such strategies supported their learning. The following two students reported:

*"Our teacher knows we are individuals and understand our feeling and treats everyone to their needs"*

*"She explains everything slowly and gives us the choice. She makes us free and she does something we feel confident and learning and comfortable. We like her class. It is an effective class without force and pressure on you. "*

*"Our teacher makes all activities interesting."*

The findings supported the observed students who were well engaged in their activities. They tried to solve problems and use specific aspects related to the English language such as explaining an opinion and asking questions. Vygotsky (1978) stressed that language development is a result of social interactions. Lightbrown and Spada (2006) also reinforced that second language learners learn the language by constant positive interaction, use and reinforcement in an encouraging atmosphere (Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Banks & Banks, 2005; Lightbrown and Spada, 2006; McGee & Fraser, 2001). The implication of these findings is that by valuing students' beliefs and culture, in a positive atmosphere, and using contextual tasks and activities that enhance students' values and experiences, teachers can better support students' language learning.

### 5.3.2 Clarity of understanding achievement goals

Evidence from the observation, field notes, interviews and the questionnaire indicated that students were well aware of the purpose of the lessons and individual activities. It was clear that these helped the students to be more focused in their language learning and practise the material and skills. To illustrate the importance of being aware of the achievement objectives a student said,

*“Learning objectives are important as they help us to know what to work on. We need to know them, they help to notice. Even next lesson learning objectives are important to know too. ”*

Being aware of the achievement objectives and related activities helps engage students in their activities, gives a sense of learning responsibility and enhances learning (Black et al., 2003a, 2003b; Black & William, 2006; 2006; Clarke2005; Crooks, 2006; Looney 2008; Sadler, 1989; Ussher & Earl, 2010).

Having clear goals and structure promotes language learning. Comprehensible input helps in promoting language and elevating interactions. Sharing well-structured and coherent goals helps students to focus on what they are learning and allows them to explore concerns and weaknesses. These statements reflect this finding:

*“Achievement objectives help us to concentrate. ”*

*“If we work in pair makes us understand the objectives and if my friend doesn’t know, I can tell. We can make progress from it. ”*

Agreeing with this (Herrera, Murry & Cabral (2007) and Looney (2008) added that understanding the criteria motivates students to meet the goal whether working alone or with others as it helps them to regulate their time and effort to manage their learning. Black and William (2006) and Clarke (2005) contended that clarity of achievement goals and success criteria are inevitable to help students assess themselves or others and improve achievements. One of the students cautioned that discussing achievement objectives in pairs was needed as they did not always understand their meanings and needed someone else to clarify it. This was explained as:

*“If we work in pair makes us understand the objectives and if my friend doesn’t know, I can tell. We can make progress. ”*

### 5.3.3 ELL students’ understanding of formative assessment and Summative assessments:

When checking students’ understanding of the difference between summative and formative assessment, it was found that students were confused between these two approaches. Although it is useful to clarify the difference between summative and formative assessments, teachers and students can find this difference to be confusing or unclear. Formative assessment procedures are sometimes poorly constructed and inappropriately implemented (Black & William, 2006; Dixon & Williams, 2001; Sadler 1998; Ussher & Earl, 2010). This lack of clarity of formative assessment practices was evident in the following question by one of the students in the interview, *“What’s formative? ”* which proves the misunderstanding of the term.

However, another student commented on that:

*“Formative is what we are studying. Are we progressing in three areas, reading writing and speaking and how much we are grasping in grammar? How we make mistakes and how we can progress which is very important in a second language. ”*

Out of the fourteen interviewed students, only two students were able to identify the fact that

such assessment can reveal their strengths and needs and what to improve on them. One student commented:

*“My teacher gives small tests, keeps her eyes on us and talks about our weaknesses to work on and encourages us to improve ”*

The other one commented:

*“Ongoing assessments show you your improvement”*

Also eight of the forty surveyed students, indicated that they could identify formative assessment practices and one commented, in the additional comments section that:

*“Formative helps to know strengths and weaknesses ”.*

This does not mean that students did not experience formative assessment activities. Students reported they were regularly assessed and one student identified that assessment was on-going. They were unaware of what the term “formative” meant. Nevertheless, they reported that ongoing assessment helped to improve knowledge, the learning of the language and knowing their weaknesses. The following comment reinforced this conclusion:

*“Small tests helped me know my mistakes, have more practice ” rather than one big test. ”*

*“As adults we know our weaknesses and work on them. So we can measure the weak points to improve them ”*

In relation to their preference for formative or summative assessment, five out of the fourteen interviewed students confirmed the importance of both. They preferred on-going and end of unit or term assessments, but not end of year summative assessment as retention of what they have studied over the year proved to be a challenge.

*“Both are important. Unit and term tests are important but not the end of year. ”*

*“Small assessments help me know my mistakes, have more practice rather than one big test.  
”*

*“if we delay our assessment for the end of the year, we might forget some of the things that we learned”*

*“Summative takes some time to study ”*

Many students identified the stressful nature of assessment which is expressed in the following:

*“Assessment is absolutely a test and we want to avoid the stress. ”*

*“Whether it is at the end of the unit or a term, test makes me stressed because sometimes*

*“We are we are tired, but I prefer what my teacher wants because she knows better”*

Data from this research indicated that formative assessment strategies helped ELL learners to improve their language by the identification of their strengths, weaknesses and what to do next. The interviewed students said that on-going assessments helped them to check on their learning, increased understanding and they became more aware of their limitations and strengths. The following depicts this finding:

*“It helps us knowing our strength and weaknesses and to know what’s next. ”*

*“The little tests help you to foster your knowledge. And you are aware of the weak points. As adults we know our weak points and work on them. ”*

*“Daily assessments encourage us to improve our errors and it encourages the good side and your weak points and how you can go forward. ”*

This confirms what Looney (2008) argued as the potential of formative assessment that it has a strong influence on improving adult students’ learning. Others have also confirmed that formative assessments assist students to be aware of their weaknesses and could improve learning (Black et al., 2003a, 2003b; Black & William, 2006; 2006; Boxham & Boyd, 2006; Clarke2005; Crooks, 2006; Gipps1994; Sadler, 1989; Ussher & Earl, 2010).

Although only two students understood the meaning of formative assessment, they all identified classroom activities that involved formative practices, including ongoing assessments, checklists, questions, activities that show their weaknesses and strengths and giving honest feedback. These statements reflect these findings:

*“Small tests to help me know my mistakes have more practice. ”*

*“It is important to do it every time, so you know where is your mistakes ”*

Black & William (1998), argued that formative assessment is related to all activities implemented by the teacher and that the students' responses can inform teaching and learning. Black et al. (2003a), confirmed formative assessment is an ongoing frequent assessment for learning to identify needs and measure progress. It promotes second language learning if implemented consistently. To improve attainment and examine learning, providing ongoing assessment, whether formal or informal, is essential while a test at the end of a unit, term or year is less effective to measure attainment and how to improve (Black & William, 1998, 2006; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Looney, 2008).

In relation to the preference for awarding marks, grades and comments, students mostly preferred either comments or a mark with some comments. They concurred that a mark alone does not help them improve attainment. Some of the students said,

*"Mark is not good"*

*"My teacher always gives a comment, and which is very important to improve. If we have a good idea she encourages and if a weak point, my teacher marks the weakness, your article is not good. It helps "*

*"Mark and feedback, to know why is it wrong and how to improve that"*

*"Comments encourage the students, if it is good then you know why "*

However, one student explained reasons for preferring a mark saying,

*"A mark is good. Comment is too hard. "*

A summative formal assessment grade is not always effective when evaluating diverse students' abilities to identify the level of language use or skill. Summative assessments often lack the potential to demonstrate language proficiency and could be designed only for a special language users' community. Therefore, a combination of ongoing formal and informal language assessments appear to be more effective to assess students' learning in order for any teaching modifications that are needed. Giving a grade only can have a negative effect on students' ego and students tend to ignore comments if mark is included (Black et al., 2003b; Boxham & Boyd, 2006; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Witte, Sequeira & Fonteyne, (2003).

#### 5.3.4 Feedback

Quality feedback is important for the on-going reflection on students' strengths, what they know, their weaknesses and what they need to achieve to improve learning. In this study, students illustrated the importance of giving and having feedback from another student and the teacher. However, they reported preference of the teacher's feedback as he/she is considered the trusted expert. The students illustrated their points of view, regarding feedback, in the next comments:

*"We don't know what's wrong, but teacher knows, we don't know the correct. We all same level "*

*"Positive feedback encourages us. "*

*"Yes, it is very important to have feedback from teacher, whether good or not good. "*

*"We don't know what's wrong, but teacher knows, we don't know the correct. We are all same level. "*

*"It's necessary to have feedback of what you have learned before "*

*"My teacher always gives a comment, and which is very important to improve. If we have a good idea she encourages and if a weak point, my teacher marks the weakness, your article is not good. This helps. "*

Many commentators have argued for the importance of giving feedback to improve learning (Black et al., 2003b; Boxham & Boyd, 2006; Clarke2005; Crooks, 2006; Gipps1994; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Gass & Sleinker, 2008). Agreeing with this, Black and William, (1998) and Sadler (1989) identified the importance of three core aspects of effective feedback. They include;

- Understanding the learning objectives or criteria;
- Having evidence of the present learning
- Understanding what students need to do to close the space between the first and the second points.

Learning is enhanced through active involvement in the learning process. Second language learners' mistakes are signs of learning attempts and giving feedback facilitates learning. In this study many students emphasised the importance of making mistakes and learning from them, by receiving feedback. Some students commented on the importance of learning from their mistakes saying,

*"Mistakes are very important to learn it, it's part of teaching to us and to our teacher. "*

*"Feedback helps to know why it is wrong and how to improve that"*

*"Feedback is important because if I see a mistake in my partner's work, I know I shouldn 't do that.*

Mistakes are part of learning and assist in improving the second language. Errors are natural parts of language learning and motivation helps students to insist on correcting language use (Black & Wiliam, 2006; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Lightbrown & Spada, 2006).

Students went on to elaborate on the importance of feedback gathered from an assessment task. Some of the students commented on the importance of feedback saying;

*"It encourages students, if it is good then you know why "*

*"I like feedback from teacher and partners. We always give or hear positive feedback from partners and feedback from partners "*

*"Sometimes, we don't do well and feedback is important, and sometimes we are sometimes negative tired or shy, she always encourages us and help us from feedback, help us in her way, she makes feedback easy, by smiling and encourage "*

*"Feedback help the other person try to improve my language in feedback, because they are students like me and same expectations and perspective. "*

*"I don't know, I have a story. We are always very polite together, say you are good, but don't say exactly what I need or how to be better. Normally they say everything is good. "*



However, getting feedback from group work was not viewed as favourably. Students indicated that they did not always receive the accurate feedback and therefore some members of the group were less able to inform their learning. Two students explained their opinion saying,

*“We are familiar to one another, we don’t say the truth. ”*

*“Two or three are good but not more. They don’t say what’s wrong. Only if we work with a familiar group, we might be honest”*

The study showed that giving positive feedback had a great impact on students and their learning. It affected their self-esteem and gives them more confidence to continue learning. Some students explained their points of view about the importance of giving positive feedback saying,

*“My teacher always gives positive. Positive feedback from my teacher and tell us you are good but you can improve this. But I have another teacher who always says to me that not good when she sees my writing. That’s not good”*

*“If feedback is good, it gives confident and makes u feel good want to do more. Say something good first then come to points and do more. If always bad, it is not good for self-confidence. If always good are you sure? So we need a balance. ”*

*“Yes feedback is important, make me happy and confident. It shows me they care ”*

*“I say it is better when they say the truth. ”*

*“It helps me to improve, if it is in my writing, I will write again and show it to my teacher to check”*

*“It shows what you need to study or improve. Each time is great. Each time, the teacher fixes our problem and shows you your improvement”*

*“Our teacher knows we are individuals and understand our feeling and treats everyone to their needs. ”*

Giving positive feedback on students’ work and relating it to subject or language learning is an essential element of formative assessment. Positive feedback has a crucial effect on students’ learning especially if it and emphasises the skills. It helps students to promote their knowledge

and motivates them to continue learning (Black & William, 1989b; Black et al., 2003b; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Crooks 2006; Lightbrown & Spada, 2006; Looney 2008; Sadler,1989).

Many researchers argued that a mark is insufficient to improve attainment. Feedback that enhances attainment is a core element of assessment for learning (Black and William, 2006; Black et al., 2003b; Crooks, 2006; Gipps1994). Studies by Black & William (2006) proved that students who were given comments proved to be more competent, while giving numerical marks or grades to students did not improve their attainment. Students may find ways to attain high marks by looking for clues for the right answers and focusing on competition rather than learning. Receiving poor marks can affect students' self-esteem and their learning as well as lowering expectations from the teachers. On the other hand, feedback from formative assessment often helps to uncover strengths, and provide evidence of learning needs that requires attention. When asked whether students preferred a mark or feedback, nearly all students reported preferring feedback, but a small number reported a preference for marks and feedback, as mentioned earlier. This was expressed by two of these students:

*"A mark is good. Comment is too hard"*

*"I like mark and feedback, to know why it is wrong and how to improve that"*

*"Mark and feedback encourage students, if it is good then you know why. "*

Students have individual preferences and what appeals to some may not appeal to everyone. Balancing between students' individual differences, learning needs and teaching can improve learning (Baker, 2011; Lightbrown & Spada, 2006; Witte, Sequeira & Fonteyne, 2003).

#### 5.3.5 Questions and thinking time:

Students appreciated having thinking time before answering questions. Questioning techniques are essential elements in formative assessment. Questions help to monitor students' learning. Time allows students, especially second language learners, to think of what they want to say. Some research has indicated that giving some possible answers for the questions or providing

some time to discuss answers in small groups or pairs is more effective to enhance learning (Black et al., 2003b; Boxham & Boyd, 2007; Looney, 2008). During interviews, students gave their opinion about questions and thinking time saying that thinking time is very important for them especially that they are second language learners and need more time to think of the answers and how to present them. This was confirmed by the students saying,

*"Giving thinking time helps a lot as people might be shy and timid and need thinking time "*

*"We are second language learners. Our brain needs triple time to process information. Our mind is translating in a two ways. "*

This concurs with what Black and William (2002) have suggested are effective questions' techniques. They include, framing questions carefully, spending more time on structuring questions and giving enough thinking time. Ellis (2008) also confirmed this by saying that students can go through a silent period, to communicate their needs in a second language and think out what they want to answer. In teaching a second language, learners need to be encouraged to use the language, and they need enough time to produce appropriate responses and use it (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006) and (Ellis, 2008)

#### 5.3.6 Peer-assessment:

Participants stated that they have experienced and benefited from peer assessment. Language learning is promoted by conversational interactions with other students whether in pairs or groups. Peer assessment facilitates the development of relationships in classrooms where students are engaged in their learning and understand what they are learning. Some students have reported the following to explain their opinion about working with another student and peer-assessment,

*"Peer- assessment saves time, it helps us to check on understanding the language and using the language by talking. Students correct mistakes in pairs. "*

*"Working with another student is helpful for both students. Mixing with different, with wider people helps better as we understand different cultures ". "*

*“It is much better to mix together is very important because the pronunciation. Not all Japanese together, because even if we know the vocabulary, we might not understand them. ”*

Learning is an active social, emotional cognitive activity and providing discussion opportunities can reinforce creating meaning and enhance learning (Baker, 2011; Banks & Banks, 2005; Lantolf & Beckett 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Interaction of two learners is very important in language learning as long as they are participating in a collaborative way. Willingness to interact provides valuable language opportunities. It helps in facilitating second language as students change roles, clarify, assert, reflect and question. Learners share a sense of responsibility and remain actively engaged in their learning to develop a sense of ownership (Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Black et al., 2003b; Sadler, 1989; Lightbrown & Spada, 2006; Looney, 2008.p133; Vygotsky, 1978). (Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007) added that peer assessment provides students with additional chances to compare their performance to others. Building high quality dialogue in peer assessment can consolidate learning, help in using the taught language, provide a model for appropriate language use and facilitate reflecting on not only others’ work, but also their own (Black et al., 2003b). Another advantage of peer- assessment is that it improves communication between the students and their teacher. Peer- assessment also supports the students to learn, understand their needs and convey them to their teacher (Black et al., 2003b).

Participants in the study indicated that they valued and felt comfortable working with a partner and receiving feedback from peer assessment. Nearly all participants have stated that they have experienced peer assessment. They said that peer-assessment helped them to use the language by taking turns, working on their weaknesses and learning to work collaborately. Students who favoured peer assessment commented:

*“Working with another student, everyone has a different opinion and this can help us. We share the ideas. It helps me to work on my weaknesses ”*

*“I like to work with a partner, because sometimes I don’t understand the question and not sure about things. We can share our ideas she can tell me why and I can tell her why and we can make our answers better. ”*

*“Working with another student makes you comfortable and “When you enjoy something, you want to learn more. ”*

It appeared from these findings that formative assessment tools facilitate the development of relationships in classrooms where students are engaged in their learning and clarify understandings by interacting with each other. Dialogue helps to reinforce the learning and explore further what is learned. It helps in building rapport, promote participation, and share meanings along with meeting their specific needs. A student commented that peer assessment has an impact on relationships and willingness to collaborate:

*“We understand the partner different culture. You learn to listen. In a real world have to listen, to move forward. ”*

Dialogue in peer-assessment teaches the importance of acting positively towards their families, communities and others (Black et al., 2003b; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; & Looney, 2008). However, for peer- assessment to succeed, students need to be taught some strategies for working within a group collaboratively, taking turns and having active listening and responding skills. Students improve their knowledge by sharing experiences and negotiating ideas (Black et al., 2003b). Some students explained the importance of working in pairs:

*“Working with another student helps to share your ideas, though teacher can give more information, work with another student is helpful both students. Mixing with different people helps us better as we understand different pronunciation ”.*

*“Working in a group is very important in class, you share ideas, you make a team because in real job you need to work in a group so you have to present as a team improve as a team skill and this is a chance to work on it”.*

According to (Looney 2008), learning is deepened when students work with others from different cultures and experiences. Students, in pairs, exchange knowledge, negotiate parts and learn new ideas. However, learners must be taught how to provide feedback to help peers improve their learning.

Peer-assessment is a valuable formative tool, learners give honest feedback overall and can accept criticism. This concurred with what researchers have concurred (Black et al., 2003b; Black and William, 1998; Sadler, 1989). However, some of the interviewed students indicated that they do not always tell the truth, preferring to be more polite than honest to others. Not surprisingly these students preferred teacher's feedback:

*"We are familiar to one another, we don't say the truth.*

*"They don't say what's wrong. Only if we work with a familiar group, we might be honest. "*

*"We don't know what's wrong, but teacher knows, we don't know the correct. We all same level. "*

*"Working with another student helps to share your ideas, though teacher can give more information. "*

### 5.3.7 Self-assessment

Although two students viewed self-assessment is an effective formative tool as confirmed by Black and Wiliam (1998), most students reported that it was ineffective and preferred to be assessed by another student, but this depends on the activity and their English competency. For example, in writing activities, some students declared that they prefer working alone. Working alone helps students to think well independently, check their answers and mistakes without being affected by others. This was supported by students' comments:

*"It is a case by case, alone especially of writing. In writing, I need to concentrate very well.*  
*"*

*“Yes, sometimes, I want to do by myself, think carefully and deeply, I want to think of it by myself ”*

*“Working with another student helps to share your ideas, though teacher can give more information, work with another student is helpful both students. ”*

However, the majority preferred discussing the topic in pairs and being assessed by others to get others feedback and build positive relationships. To assess themselves effectively, awareness of the learning objectives and some guidance on how to assess themselves appropriately is imperative. This helps them to be more engaged in their learning and helps them to reflect on their learning and thinking. A student said,

*“We don't know the correct. We all same level. ”*

Black and William (1998, 2006) have stated that self-assessment is not a commonly used activity in classes and needs to be reinforced. However, to be able to assess one-self, students need to be responsible for their learning, understanding the subject matter, be able to reflect on their learning effectively and have critical thinking skills (Black and William, 2006). Agreeing with this, Tolich & Davidson (1999) and Boxham & Boyd (2007), argued the importance of practising skills of self reflection is central in order to improve lifelong learning.

#### 5.3.8 Building effective relationship and motivation effects:

The study also revealed that formative assessment practices could develop a positive relationship between students themselves and between teachers and their students. Students work cooperatively and collaboratively to discuss themes, learning objectives, answer questions and give feedback. These cooperative and collaborative attitudes create positive relationships. Some students commented on the importance of relationships saying,

*“People are very encouraging, friendly, they smile. They see your good points, strong points. ”*

*“Relationship affects your attitude, then you are motivated and someone is looking at you. ”*

*“Relationship is very encouraging. I don’t worry about making mistakes. Even if you make mistakes, you don’t worry about them, they ignore them and see your strong points. ”*

Formative assessment helps in developing supportive relationships in classrooms through respecting all students’ cultures and values, and assists to develop effective dialogue. It helps in creating a safe, encouraging and motivating environment where learners and teachers are very supportive. Such an atmosphere encourages students to express their needs and opinion. It enhances self-esteem, improves students’ abilities to learn and improves their abilities to disagree and debate too (Banks & Banks, 2005; Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007; Looney 2008; McGee & Fraser, 2001).

As discussed earlier, students considered that feedback from their teacher and partners is important. However, they preferred feedback from the teacher as the expert in the field. They illustrated their points of view about motivation saying the followings:

*“We always give or hear positive feedback as partners. This encouragement is important as it improves our confidence and improves our relationships. We feel very comfortable. ” “We need encouragement sometimes. ”*

*“I’m shy in front of people, but my teacher encourages me and makes me feel happy and she gives everyone a chance and she let me enjoy the study. In her class she makes me feel more confident to sit and talk to people, then I actually enjoy it”*

A student commented on feedback saying *“It helps to ask the question”* and this is an indication of being involved in learning and taking responsibilities. Students need to be encouraged to ask questions and ask for assistance to promote learning (Black & William, 2006).

Positive attitude and motivation creates a confident contribution to students’ willingness to continue learning. On the other hand, stress, culture shock and anxiety make a negative contribution to language learning. This finding is supported in the following statements:



*“Building relationship will motivate us and help us to improve.*

*“The relationship with your teacher, in class encourages. ”*

*“Motivation makes you comfortable and you can enjoy the class. ”*

*“When you enjoy something, you want to learn more. ”*

*“The relationship with your teacher, in class encourages our language ”*

#### 5.4 Questionnaire

The questionnaire allowed gaining the voices of a varied larger number of students, compared to observation and interview. Fifteen four point scaled response questions were used in the questionnaire. Voices of participants are represented in the table below.

Out of the forty students who participated in the questionnaire, only five students reported that they understood the meaning of formative assessment. These figures suggest that students did not understand ‘formative assessment’s’ terminology. However, they have experienced and responded to questions related to formative assessment activities. This finding was confirmed when one of the students asked in the interview *“what is formative assessment?”* When participants were asked about preference of on-going formative assessment rather than end of unit summative, of the forty participating students, thirty participants chose the on-going assessment to indicate their preference. Receiving feedback, sharing learning objectives, working with another student and checking learning and answering the questions were widely valued and considered as the most supportive formative assessment strategies. Twenty eight students considered written or oral feedback is more effective than a mark or a grade at the end of assessment. Thirty five considered teacher’s feedback as an effective tool to assist them in knowing their mistakes. Thirty two considered being aware of the learning objectives helps in improving the quality of their work. Thirty considered checking their work with another student helps in improving their learning. Thirty students considered giving enough thinking time can support their learning and twenty eight considered the importance of questions in checking their

learning. Moreover, twenty six students reported that giving feedback from assessment motivated them to improve their work.

On the other hand, checking learning alone or self-assessment was not identified as effective as the other four formative assessment strategies. Nineteen students considered checking their work alone can improve their learning and eleven students considered working alone can help in improving their work.

Finally, working with other students was valued by a great number of students and identified as a means to enhance positive relationships. Thirty one students reported that working with other students helps them to develop positive relationships with others. Working with other students helped participants to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

The questionnaire limitation was the possibility of students' misunderstanding some of likertscale's statements which was behind some of their choices in the questionnaire. To sum up, feedback, sharing learning objectives, peer assessment and answering the questions were highly valued by the participants and considered the most supportive formative assessment strategies, while self-assessment was not as highly valued as other strategies of formative assessments. Feedback motivates students to improve their learning and working with other students improves positive relationships.

## 5.5 Summary

To sum up, this chapter has summarised the data gathered from observations, observer's comments, questionnaire and interviews. It is argued that learning a second language is affected by the activities that are conducted in class. The findings showed that the students were unaware of the term formative, but aware of formative assessment strategies importance to improve their English language learning. Students in the study stated that, asking questions, knowing and understanding learning objectives, using peer-assessment, providing and receiving feedback and

other activities conducted in class had an impact on their learning and motivated them to participate in the class. These activities appeared to be effective assessment strategies as they informed teaching and learning. All the informants said that they have experienced peer-assessment and some stated that they have experienced self-assessment, although at this stage it was not viewed positively by most of them. Feedback given by the teacher was highly appreciated and deemed as necessary found success as a language learner.

## Chapter six

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 Main findings

The study was an endeavour to explore students' understandings of how formative assessment can improve their English language learning. Using a qualitative research design, I wanted to explore what students perceive as effective formative assessment activities. Data were collected from the field through observations, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. The findings indicated that although the students were unaware of the term formative, they emphasised the value of formative assessment strategies that assist in improving their English language learning. Feedback and motivation were highly appreciated formative strategies, however, the students stressed the importance of practising summative assessment and using them formatively to promote language learning. The students also showed an understanding of the personal differences and needs of their classroom peers. They valued being in a classroom with a positive and supportive atmosphere, and appreciated that their teacher understood their individual differences and planned learning activities to meet individual and group needs. The effectiveness of formative assessment, according to the perceptions of these adult ELL, was associated with their tutor/teacher establishing a positive learning environment and valuing their cultural knowledge. All of these factors helped motivate and encourage them.

My study found that increased understanding of students' individual needs and differences enhanced learning. Although formative assessment strategies were mostly seen as effective to enhance learning the language, some formative strategies were more favoured than others. This showed that it was essential to consider individual differences when implementing any learning task, including formative assessment activities. Some of the students preferred summative assessment as it helped them achieve their future goals. I suggest that further research exploring how both formative and summative assessment can be used effectively to better support adult English language learners would help more tutors/teachers gain a stronger understanding of

effective teaching and assessment strategies. This knowledge could further enhance effective pedagogies and in so doing, support the acquisition of English by the growing populations of non-English speakers who are seeking to become proficient in their use of English.

Although my study set out to explore adult English language learners' perceptions of ways formative assessment practices can better support their learning of English, what became apparent from my analysis of data was that formative assessment strategies are only one aspect within the wider socio-cultural adult English language learning classroom environment. The teacher/tutor was a pivotal point in the establishment of this environment. The adult students emphasised the importance of a positive and encouraging classroom atmosphere where the wide range of students' cultures and beliefs were valued and acknowledged, not only by the teacher, but by their peers. As Vygotsky (1978) contended language learning is a social interaction. My study found that for adult English language learners within New Zealand, a key aspect of feeling supported was having a teacher/tutor who valued and acknowledged differing cultures. Furthermore, when their teacher/tutor planned and implemented formative assessment strategies which were contextually relevant to these adult students, they became more confident in their learning.

## 6.2 Implications and recommendations for further research

I contend that the findings from my research emphasise the critical importance of using contextually based formative assessment practices. Therefore, on-going professional development for teacher/tutors of adult English language learners within New Zealand should become a key part of the New Zealand Ministry of Education's adult learning strategy.

To develop ELL adult students' language learning, it is essential to engage them in their learning and keep them motivated. This is achieved through choosing appropriate formative activities and assessments that cater for the individual's different needs and styles. I suggest that

more research is needed on choosing appropriate formative assessment strategies while considering individual differences. Students receiving positive feedback helps improve learning as it builds confidence and assists students to concentrate more on their areas that need further development. Adult ELL students have differing cultural experiences and skills that should be appreciated and considered by their teacher/tutor. Adult ELL students should be involved in their learning as responsible members. They need to be aware of the learning objectives, their own strengths and weaknesses and be supported to close the gap between the learning objectives and their level of attainment.

My study adopted a qualitative approach to gain rich and authentic data, however a future study using a mixed method to include a wider sample of participants, including students of different competencies and ELL teachers, could provide important information about formative assessment strategies, the rationale for including them and how to further enhance their use.

### 6.3 Limitation of the study

A number of limitations need to be taken in consideration. The main limitation was the size of the sample which has been mainly selected from two classes. Involving other students from various educational institutions could help give a wider understanding of formative assessment practices that enhance learning for ELL. In my study fourteen students were interviewed from one college. In future research, it would be useful if the participants were chosen from a wider number of language schools.

Another limitation was being a novice researcher. Feeling comfortable in other teacher's classrooms was a challenge for me. I tried hard to make students feel comfortable talking and sharing their opinions with me. I had to visit the class several times before initiating the study to ensure acceptance in their learning environment. The study only focused on students' perspective of formative assessment. A future study might include both the teachers' and their students' perspectives.

Another limitation could be seen as the exclusion of participants with low English competency, from being interviewed. The selection of the students in my study was based on the students' language competency. The rationale was that the participants may not have understood the questions well enough to present accurate responses. Further research on a wider scale that interviewed participants in their first language in addition to English may provide more in-depth data.

#### 6.4 Final words

My study has alerted me both as a previous English second language learner and a teacher of ELLs that using formative assessment can make a difference to our growing population of ELLs. These learners are often struggling to acquire proficient use of English when their tutors mainly have implemented summative assessment procedures. I urge the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission to put in place on-going professional development for adult ELL teachers on how to use formative assessment strategies effectively.

I have appreciated the opportunity in my thesis to delve deeply into an area that will continue to inform my own practice as a teacher of English language learners as they strive to integrate and succeed in the majority language and culture in New Zealand.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Information Letter for the school Principal

Telephone: +643 3492229 +64 211024805

Email: [ghorbisal@hotmail.com](mailto:ghorbisal@hotmail.com)

Date: .....

Dear .....

Project Title: An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL adult students' English language learning, in New Zealand.

Information Letter for the school Principal

My name is Siham Alsalfiti and I am a Masters Student at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. I am conducting a research project that explores ELL students' understanding of formative assessment and find methods that can help in improving formative assessments of ELL adults. This should assist ELL students with their learning of the English language.

I would like to invite some adult ELL students, of the school, to participate in my study. If the students agree to participate in my study, they will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a questionnaire about their understanding of Formative assessment and factors which influence it. This will take approximately 20 minutes.
- Take part in semi-structured interviews which will be recorded to present their voices honestly and they may ask that the recording to be stopped at any time.

I will also observe and take notes of their interactions in class while involved in different classroom activities including formative assessments tasks.

Please note that their participation is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw any time. If they choose to withdraw, I will remove any of the information relating to them from the project,

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for the study. I will also take care to ensure students' anonymity in publications of the findings. All data will be locked in password protected facilities at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed. As required by the University's research policy, settings will be described in general terms, confidentiality will be ensured at all stages, the content of the field notes will not be discussed outside of class.

The result of this research may be used to revise and improve formative assessment of ELL students. The results may be reported internationally in English language teaching journals. All participants will receive a report on the study.

If you would like more information, you can contact me and if you have any queries, concerns or complaints about this research, you can contact my main supervisor, Fay Parkhill ([faye.parkhill@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:faye.parkhill@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree for the students to take part in this study, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to me.

Please retain this information letter.

Thank you for your consideration of this project

Siham Alsalfiti

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

Complaints may be addressed to:

The Chair

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch

Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Appendix 2: Information Letter (Head Teacher/ Teacher)

Telephone: +643 3492229 +64 211024805

Email: [ghorbisai@hotmail.com](mailto:ghorbisai@hotmail.com)

Date: .....

Dear .....

Project Title: An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL adult students' English language learning, in New Zealand.

Information Letter (Head Teacher/ Teacher)

My name is Siham Alsalfiti and I am a Masters Student at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. I am conducting a research project that explores ELL students' understanding of formative assessment and find methods that can help in improving formative assessments of ELL adults. This should assist ELL students with their learning of the English language.

I would like to invite some adult ELL students, of the school, to participate in my study. If the students agree to participate in my study, they will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a questionnaire about their understanding of Formative assessment and factors which influence it. This will take approximately 20 minutes.
- Take part in semi structured focus group interviews which will be recorded to present their voices honestly and they may ask that the recording to be stopped at any time.

I will also observe and take notes of their interactions in class while involved in different classroom activities including formative assessments tasks. Please note that their participation is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw any time. If they choose to withdraw, I will remove any of the information relating to them from the project,

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for the study. I will also take care to ensure students' anonymity in publications of the findings. All data will be locked in password protected facilities at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed. As required by the University's research policy, settings will be described in general terms, confidentiality will be ensured at all stages, the content of the field notes will not be discussed outside of class.

The result of this research may be used to revise and improve formative assessment of ELL students. The results may be reported internationally in English language teaching journals. All participants will receive a report on the study. If you would like more information, you can contact me and if you have any queries, concerns or complaints about this research, you can contact my main supervisor, Fay Parkhill ([faye.parkhill@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:faye.parkhill@canterbury.ac.nz)). If you agree for the students to take part in this study, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to me.

Please retain this information letter.

Thank you for your consideration of this project

Siham Alsalfiti

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Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Appendix 3: Information Letter for the participants (Students)

Telephone: +643 3492229 +64 211024805

Email: [ghorbisal@hotmail.com](mailto:ghorbisal@hotmail.com)

Date: .....

Dear students

Project Title: An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL adult students' English language learning, in New Zealand.

Information Letter for the participants (Students)

My name is Siham Alsalfiti and I am a Masters Student at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. I am conducting a research project that explores ELL students' understanding of formative assessment and find methods that can help in improving formative assessments of ELL adults. This should assist you as an ELL student with your learning of the English language.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a questionnaire about your understanding of Formative assessment and factors which influence it. This will take approximately 20 minutes.

- Take part in semi structured focus group interviews which will be recorded to present your voices honestly and you may ask that the recording to be stopped at any time.

I will also observe and take notes of your interactions in class while involved in different classroom activities including formative assessments tasks. Please note that your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw any time. If you choose to withdraw, I will remove any of the information relating to you from the project,

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for the study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. All data will be kept in locked in password protected facilities at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed. As required by the University's research policy, settings will be described in general terms, confidentiality will be ensured at all stages, the content of the field notes will not be discussed outside of class. The result of this research may be used to revise and improve formative assessment of ELL students. The results may be reported internationally in English language teaching journals. All participants will receive a report on the study.

If you would like more information, you can contact me and if you have any queries, concerns or complaints about this research, you can contact my main supervisor, Fay Parkhill ([faye.parkhill@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:faye.parkhill@canterbury.ac.nz)). If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me by \_\_\_\_\_. Please retain this information letter. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you for your contribution

Siham Alsalfiti

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

Complaints may be addressed to:

The Chair

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch Email:

[human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

#### Appendix 4: School Principal's Consent Form

College of Education

Siham Alsalfiti Telephone: +643 3492229

+64 211024805

Email: [ghorbisal@hotmail.com](mailto:ghorbisal@hotmail.com)

Project Title: An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL adult students' English language learning, in New Zealand.

#### School Principal's Consent Form

I understand the aims and purposes of the research study undertaken by Siham Alsalfiti

- The study has been explained to me and I understand the information that was given to me on the information letter.
- I understood what will be required of me if I agree that the students will take part in the project.
- I understand that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any stage without giving any reason for withdrawing.
- I understood that all information will be kept confidential and treated in strictest confidence.



- I understand that participants will remain anonymous and that no information that could identify me, the college or the students will be given to other researchers or agencies.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect privacy of data transmitted through the internet
- I understand that within these restrictions, the findings may be submitted for publication to national or international journals or presented at educational conferences.
- I understand that if I require further information, I can contact the researcher (Siham Alsalfiti) and if I have any complaints, I can contact Siham's main supervisor (Faye Parkhill).

By signing below, I agree for the students to participate in this research project

Name:

Signed:

Date:

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

Complaints may be addressed to:

The Chair

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

University of Canterbury, Private bag4800, Christchurch Email:

[human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Appendix 5: Consent Form (Head Teacher/ Teacher)

College of Education Telephone: +643 3492229 +64 211024805 Siham Alsalfiti

Email: [ghorbisal@hotmail.com](mailto:ghorbisal@hotmail.com)

Project Title: An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL adult students' English language learning, in New Zealand.

Consent Form (Head Teacher/ Teacher)

I understand the aims and purposes of the research study undertaken by Siham Alsalfiti

- The study has been explained to me and I understand the information that was given to me on the information letter.
- I understood what will be required of me if I agree that the students will take part in the project.
- I understand that their participation is voluntary, so they may withdraw at any stage without giving any reason for withdrawing.

- I understood that all information will be kept confidential and treated in strictest confidence.
- I understand that participants will remain anonymous and that no information that could identify me, the college or the students will be given to other researchers or agencies.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that reasonable precautions have been taken to protect privacy of data transmitted through the internet
- I understand that within these restrictions, the findings may be submitted for publication to national or international journals or presented at educational conferences.
- I understand that if I require further information, I can contact the researcher (Siham Alsalfiti) and if I have any complaints, I can contact Siham's main supervisor (Faye Parkhill).

By signing below, I agree for the students to participate in this research project

Name:

Signed:

Date:

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

Complaints may be addressed to:

The Chair

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

University of Canterbury, Private bag 4800, Christchurch

Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

#### Appendix 6: Student Consent Form

College of Education Telephone: +64 3 3492229 +64

211024805 Siham Alsalfiti

Email: [ghorbisal@hotmail.com](mailto:ghorbisal@hotmail.com)

Project Title: An exploration of formative assessment that can support ELL adult students' English language learning, in New Zealand.

#### Student Consent Form

I understand the aims and purposes of the research study undertaken by Siham Alsalfiti.

please tick each box below

- ☐ • I have read the information letter and understood what would be required of me if I participate in this project.
- ☐ • I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.
- ☐ • I understood that the group discussions will be audio taped.

- ☐ • ☐ • I have read the information letter and understood that all information collected will only be accessed by the researcher and that it will be kept confidential and secure.
- ☐ • I understand that neither I, nor the school, will be identified in any presentations or publications that draw on the research.
- I understand that I can receive a report on the findings of the study. I have written my email
- ☐ • ☐ • below for the report to be sent to.
- I understand that I can get more information about the research from the researcher's supervisor and that I can contact the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee if I have any complaints about the research.
- I have read the consent form and agree to participate in the study.

Full name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address for report \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this consent form to Siham Alsalfiti in the provided envelope.

This study has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

Complaints may be addressed to:

The Chair

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

University of Canterbury, Private bag4800, Christchurch

Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

## **Appendix 7: Semi-structured Interview Questions**

1. How often does your teacher assess your work?
2. Are you always aware of the learning objectives?
3. How can sharing the learning objectives help you improve your work and learning?
4. Do you prefer a mark at the end of an assessment or a mark and feedback on the work? Why?
5. How does giving waiting time before answering a question help you?
6. Do you know what formative assessment is? Can you give an example of formative assessment?
7. What is the difference between summative and formative assessment? Can you give an example of summative assessment?
8. What is your favourite activity in class?
9. Do you prefer to work alone or with other students? Please give reasons?
10. Is feedback helpful? How does feedback help them?
11. What do you do when you know your strengths and weaknesses from feedback?
12. Does peer assessment help your learning, your relationship? How?
13. Do formative assessment activities motivate you to improve your language? How?
14. Is there an activity that you don't like in class? Please give an example?
15. Describe the activities used in class which can help you to improve your language.

Please add any other comments about formative assessment

## Appendix 8: Questionnaire

Formative assessment refers to any activity completed by the students which can provide quality feedback to improve learning and teaching (Black & William, 1998, 2002).

For example, formative assessment includes questioning, sharing learning objectives, self-assessment, peer assessment, group assessment and giving feedback.

A- Please answer the following questions before completing the questionnaire.

- What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are you a male or a female? \_\_\_\_\_
- How long have you been in New Zealand? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is your second language? \_\_\_\_\_
- What language do you speak at home? \_\_\_\_\_

B- Circle your answers to show your opinion.

Key: N= Do not know 1= Not at all 2= A little 3= Very little 4= Very much

1. I understand the meaning of formative assessment.

	N	1	2	3	4
2.	Sharing learning objectives helps me to improve my work.				
	N	1	2	3	4
3.	Giving specific feedback, by the teacher, helps me to know my mistakes.				
	N	1	2	3	4
4.	Knowing my mistakes helps me to set my new goal.				

	N	1	2	3	4	
5.	Providing thinking time after a question is asked helps me to give a better answer.					
	N	1	2	3	4	

6.	Answering questions help me to check my previous learning.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
7.	Working with one student helps me to improve my learning					
	N	1	2	3	4	
8.	Checking my work with one student helps me improve my work.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
9.	Working with a group of students helps me to know my strength and weaknesses.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
10.	Working alone helps me to improve my learning.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
11.	Checking my work alone against the learning objectives helps me to improve my learning.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
12.	It is more helpful to have on-going assessments during a unit rather than a big f a unit. assessment at the end o					
	N	1	2	3	4	
13.	I prefer to have written or oral feedback rather than a mark or grade on my work.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
14.	Working with other students helps me to develop positive relationships with others.					
	N	1	2	3	4	
15.	Feedback from assessment motivates me to improve work.					
	N	1	2	3	4	



Please write here any other comments about formative assessment.

Thank you for your participation.

#### Appendix 9: Collated Data from Questionnaire

##### Collated Data from Questionnaire

Questions	N	1	2	3	4
I understand the meaning of formative assessment.	4	24	4	3	5
Sharing learning objectives helps me to improve my work.	3	1	4	12	20
Giving specific feedback, by the teacher, helps me to know my mistakes.			1	10	27
Knowing my mistakes helps me to set my new goal.			5	10	25
Providing thinking time after a question is asked helps me to give a better answer.		2	8	6	24
Answering questions help me to check my previous learning.	2	2	6	10	18
Working with one student helps me to improve my learning		1	1	7	14
Checking my work with one student helps me improve my work.	2	2	6	8	22
Working with a group of students helps me to know my strength and weaknesses.	1	2	6	10	19
Working alone helps me to improve my learning.	2	4	9	10	15
Checking my work against the learning objectives helps me to improve my learning	1		1	5	16

It is more helpful to have on-going assessments during a unit rather than a big assessment at the end of a unit.	4	2	4	8	22
I prefer to have written or oral feedback rather than a mark or grade on my work.	2	2	6	10	18
Working with other students helps me to develop positive relationships with others.	2	3	4	10	21
Feedback from assessment motivates me to improve work.	2	6	4	10	16

N= Do not know 1= Not at all 2= A little 3 =Very little 4= Very much

Figures: Students' languages Figure A:

Students' Second Languages

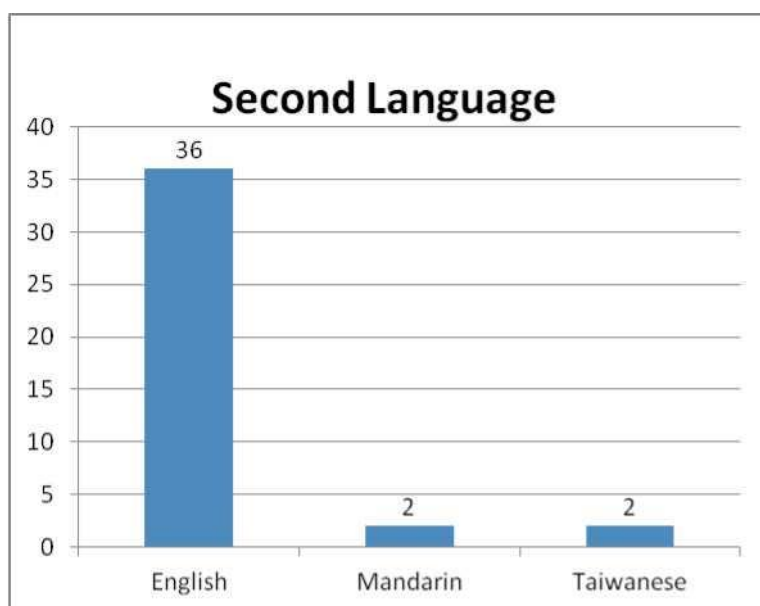


Figure B

Students' First Languages

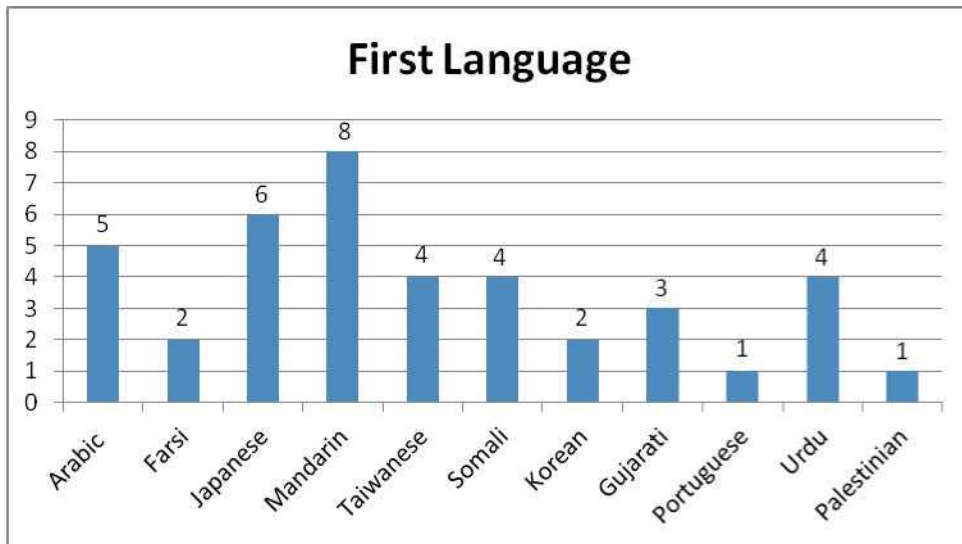


Figure C

Students' Languages Spoken at Home

