# EVALUATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS' LEARNING USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN SELECTED COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN GHANA

**Isaac Eshun**

Environmental/Social Studies Tutor, Enchi College of Education, Ghana

**Anthony Bordoh**

Environmental/Social Studies Tutor, Enchi College of Education, Ghana

**Theophilus Kweku Bassaw**

Environmental/Social Studies Tutor, Komenda College of Education, Ghana

**Michael Franklin Mensah**

Environmental/Social Studies Tutor, Agogo College of Education, Ghana

**ABSTRACT:** *Evaluation of students is an integral part of teaching and learning in Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in Ghana and is beneficial to both students and tutors if use formatively. This could be achieved if, tutors follow the laid down procedures in administering formative assessment in their colleges.This study adopted a case study research design. The study was carried out in three Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana. The data were used together to form one case. Both the Tutors and the Colleges were purposively and conveniently selected for the study. Interviews and classroom observation were used. The semi-structured interview guide and the structured classroom observation setting checklists were administered to nine (9) Social Studies tutors. It was found that evaluation in the classroom motivates tutor-student relationship in formative assessment but it was observed that most of the tutors were not using concrete evaluation feedbacks. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success foster effective classroom discussions and learning tasks in formative assessment. Tutors agreed that the use of Formative Assessment Classroom Techniques (FACTs) is an integral part of teaching and learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** Assessment, Social Studies, Formative assessment, Evaluation, Students. Learning.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh (2013:28) "knowledge is constructed during the learning process and that a student discovers knowledge for him/herself, rather than receiving knowledge, and this inspires the notion of performance-based assessment." It is becoming more and more evident that formative assessment is an integral component of the teaching and learning process (Gipps, 1990; Black & William, 1998). Bordoh, Bassaw and Eshun (2013:9) assert that "formative assessment is used to provide information on the likely performance of students; to describe strength or weakness and feedback given to students, telling them which items they got correct or wrong. Formative assessment enhances the

efficacy of instructional strategies of Social Studies tutors." There is all indication that formative assessment informs the teacher about what students think and about how they think. Formative assessment helps teachers to establish what students already know and what they need to learn. Ampiah, Hart, Nkhata and Nyirend (2003) contend that a teacher need to know what children are able to do or not if he or she is to plan effectively. Also Goodrum, Hackling and Ronnie (2001:2) assert that "an assessment is a key component of teaching and learning process". This means that formative assessment is integral part of teaching and learning; however, little evidence exist that teachers actually use formative assessment to inform planning and teaching, hence, evaluation of Social Studies students' learning using formative assessment would be considered reasonable, given the fact that teachers' knowledge base might influence the way students proceed with learning and the way they are tested. Eshun (2013:17) posits that "teaching Social Studies is stressed to be done in student-centred techniques and strategies. Brainstorming, role-playing, simulation, discussion and debate were the major techniques stressed by both Colleges of Education curriculum and the JHS Social Studies syllabus." The provision of education at the basic, junior and senior high schools, colleges of education and other levels at one time or the other took various forms as a result of experiments, innovations and reforms that have been implemented.

According to Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh (2013:28) "… in formulating formative assessment and scoring, tutors rather laid emphasis on cognitive domain to the neglect of affective and psychomotor domains which are also of paramount importance…  Tutors were not using scoring rubrics, concept mapping, scaffolding and portfolio as tools in formative assessment for teaching and learning of Social Studies in Colleges of Education." Evaluation of Social Studies students' learning using formative assessment practices in Social Studies at the Colleges of Education hardly caught the serious attention of the stakeholders in education. There are thirty-eight public colleges of education in Ghana, all of which turn out about 9000 teachers annually. These teachers are expected to teach various subjects including Social Studies at the basic level of education. Products of the Colleges of Education, thus, have an onerous responsibility of laying a firm and sound foundation in the educational career of the young ones entrusted to their care. This implies that the system of assessment at the colleges of education need not be taken for granted if qualities trained teachers are to be produced from the colleges.

The system of assessment in the colleges has virtually remained the same throughout teacher training reforms. The Institute of Education of the University of Cape Coast has sole responsibility for conducting certification examinations and engages University Teacher Educators to set questions for its examination. Colleges' tutors are also invited to submit questions for consideration by the institute examiners. Colleges tutor involvement is to ensure that institute examiners are familiar with learning outcome expectations as defined in college tutor questions. With time what has tended to happen is that previous examination questions have come to define certification assessment standards leading to a situation where the examinations drive most of curriculum delivery in the colleges (Akyeampong, 1997). This shows that college tutors have the opportunity to improve the link between training and assessment.

Moreover, the trends of assessment in Colleges of Education in Ghana covers quizzes, project work, assignment which take forty percent and external examination conducted by the University of Cape Coast takes sixty percent. The practice of assessment in Colleges of Education is supposed to cover knowledge, skills and attitude of the students. However, as

noted by Bekoe et al., (2013:28-29) "content knowledge of some College of Education Social Studies tutors on formative assessment was found not to be adequate to handle some of the topics in the Social Studies curriculum effectively… As a result of this, they teach with the formative assessment tools they are used to thereby neglecting those that help build and change corrupted attitudes of students. From the foregoing it can be deduced that, tutors scope of assessment at the preserves level is limited to be the academic aspect of learning to the neglect of the other areas of human development.

The inability of some teachers to properly assess all the domains of learning in students, has led to many people doubting the genuineness of internal classroom assessment marks. The perception teachers have on assessment go a long way to explain the quality of assessment in colleges of education (Shepard, 2000). The purpose of this study was to evaluate students' learning using formative assessment in Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana. The research is meant to answer the question: To what extent do tutors use formative assessment to evaluate student learning?

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON EVALUATION OF STUDENTS' LEARNING USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

According to Bordoh, Bassaw and Eshun (2013:9) "Formative assessment is the hands on deck process of information on the students' academic achievements in the classroom. It is the type of assessment which is ongoing or goes on in the course of instructional delivery."  It is in this light that, evaluation of students' learning in Social Studies needs to be taken seriously. Quashigah, Eshun and Mensah (2013:84) assert that "The pedagogical content knowledge of Social Studies teachers do influence the way they assess their lessons." This assertion is supported by Eshun and Bordoh (2013:173) that "the background knowledge of Social Studies teachers is built from their training institutions and this goes to influence the way they teach (i.e. selection of content, unit or topic, formulation of objective(s), mode of teaching, and assessment tool used)." As a result of this, implementers of Social Studies curriculum need to be abreast with how the subject is assessed formatively. This however, Bordoh and Eshun (2013:107) stressed that "due to hasty nature in formulating formative assessment and scoring, tutors laid emphasis on cognitive domain to the neglect of affective and psychomotor domains which are also of paramount importance." With this, much is needed to assist Social Studies teachers to be abreast with the nature and the content of Social Studies in a harmonized subject matter required to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013: 43-44).

Formative assessment is an essential element in the learning process as it provides information on learners' strengths and weakness in relation to their progression. Thus, teachers can use it in planning what to do next in order to enhance learning as well as teaching… As the main purpose of formative assessment is to provide feedback from teachers and students, and to both of them in the learning process, information can be drawn for summative purposes (Black, 1993).

A student needs to know where s/he is and understand not only where s/he wants to be, but also how to "fill the gap" between the current knowledge and the desired level. In order to fill the gap, the teacher and the student should be involved in a process of continual reflection and review about progress (The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, http://www.qca.org.ukl296.html). Thus, formative assessment focuses on dialogue with students, collecting feedback from them and providing feedback to them.  Teachers should

make good use of the data collected to improve the learning activities and to promote the learning of students.

The relationships of teachers and students to the subject discipline affect the nature of the figured world of the subject classroom. The quality of the learning outcome depends on the relevance of questions that the teachers ask, the responses from the students, the teachers in relation to the conceptual structure of the subject matter, and their efficacy in relation to the learning capacities of students. In this way, there are different types of classroom interaction entailed in the learning contexts of different subject matter. Thus, there is a need to analyze the interplay between teachers' view of the nature of the subject matter, selection and articulation of learning goals, and their models of cognition and of learning. It is important to conceptualize the relationship between teachers and the subject matter as a two-way relationship, in that teachers' capacity to explore and re-interpret the subject matter is important for effective pedagogy. Furthermore, there should also be a change in the interaction from identifying a school subject with the subject teacher, to the interaction between students and the subject. Thus, it will enhance the students' capacity to interact directly with the products of their work. Then there will be a gradual withdrawal of the teacher from the role of a mediator.

Also, relationship between teachers and theories of learning cannot be over emphasized in evaluative activities in the classroom. This section is about the teacher's role and the regulation of learning. Perrenoud (1998) explained his concept of 'regulation' by stating that there are 'two levels of management of situations' which favour the interactive regulation of learning processes. The first is the setting up of situations through much larger mechanisms and classroom management. The second refers to the interactive regulation which takes place through didactic situations. Black and William (2001) emphasized that questioning is to be used to promote classroom dialogue and is important for assessment in classrooms. The importance of the formative potential of questions in formative assessment is stressed (Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003). Therefore, teachers should spend more effort in framing questions to explore issues that are critical to students' development of understanding of the subject matter. Sufficient wait time should be provided so that all the students are involved in the learning process. Therefore, in the long run there will be no need for students to raise their hands because all of them are expected to be able to answer at any time. Wrong answers are used to help students explore their understanding. Furthermore, students are given time to explore answers together (Black & William, 2001). In Black and William's study, teachers include good questions in their lesson planning in order to improve formative assessment. They also set up situations for interactive regulation by transferring to students the responsibility for their learning, i.e., a shift from the regulation of activity to the regulation of learning. They equip students with cognitive strategies so as to achieve the transition to acquire the new understandings and skills, which are potentially accessible through the subject matter. Thus, the emphasis is placed on cognitive and meta-cognitive skills and strategies, e.g., shifts in questioning, the skilful use of comment on homework, and the use of tests as part of the learning process. In short, these imply changes in students ' role and in the character of teacher-student relationships.

Moreover, the student-teacher interaction leads to a detailed look at the concept of feedback. The interaction between the teacher and the students in Black and William's model (2001) is a central feature in their study of formative assessment. The main feature of formative assessment is that the learner's task is to close the gap between the present state of

understanding and the learning goal (Sadler, 1989). Therefore, self assessment is essential if the learner is to be able to close the gap, and the teacher's role is to communicate appropriate goals and promote self assessment among the students. Self-assessment is a valuable tool for formative purpose and this can be boosted by peer assessment as it is believed to enable learners to assess one another for formative purposes (Bekoe et al., 2013:28). In this learning process, feedback should operate both from teacher to students, from students to teacher and from students to students. Furthermore, in the group work, peer assessment is a particularly valuable way of implementing formative assessment. Students care more about communicating with peers, work neater, and are less emotionally 'loaded'. They can assess their own learning, as well as the learning and performance of other students in their groups. Black and William's (2001) approach treated the social-individual interaction as a central feature in classroom learning. Thus, feedback to individuals, self-assessment, peer assessment, peer support in learning, and class discussion about their learning are emphasized. Therefore, change in the student's role as a learner is a significant feature in reform of classroom learning.

The mere presence of feedback is insufficient for judging the guidance of learning (Deci & Ryan, 1994). Perrenoud (1988) stressed the complexity of what is involved in 'feedback'. Messages given in feedback are useless, unless students are able to do something with them. Therefore, the teacher needs to understand the way students think and the way they take in new messages, both at the general and the specific level. Perrenoud (1988) argued that in framing and guiding classroom dialogue, judgments have to be grounded in the activity. Focus has to be directed onto knowledge and the learning process. Teachers' intervention to regulate the learning activity has to involve an incursion into the representation and the thought processes of students so as to accelerate a breakthrough in understanding, a new point of view or the shaping of a notion which can be immediately become operative. Not only does the role of teachers change, the role of students in classrooms also changes from being passive recipients to active learners who take responsibility for and manage their own learning.

Evaluation in the classroom motivate teacher - student relationship. Formative assessment has been considered by the general public as a key source of motivation for learning. It is believed that tests show students, teachers and schools the standards to follow and be monitored. Thus, standards can be raised. However, the systematic review of research evidence conducted by Harlen and Deakin (2002) showed the contrary results of formative assessment on students' motivation for learning. The details are as follows: after the introduction of the National Curriculum Tests in England, low-achieving students have lower self-esteem than higher-achieving students; repeated practice tests reinforce the low self-image of the low-achieving students. Furthermore, the review suggested that high-stakes assessment can become the rationale for all that is done in classrooms, and generate a classroom climate where teachers transmit knowledge and provide highly structured knowledge. This favours students whose learning dispositions are to learn in this way, but disadvantages and lowers the self-esteem of students who prefer more active and creative learning experiences. Finally, an education system which emphasizes evaluation produces students with strong extrinsic orientation towards grades and social status. It is trusted that students will improve their performance and achieve more if they are provided with feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.

However, Sadler (1989) remarked, 'even when teachers provide students with valid and reliable judgment about the quality of their work, improvement does not necessarily follow. Students often show little or no development despite regular and accurate feedback. Teacher feedback might have negative as well as positive consequence for learning, despite the best intentions of teachers. This can be explained with respect to how 'reinforcement' is understood and applied. As citied in Torrance & Pryor ( 1998), from the work done by Dweck et al., (1984) illustrated that the 'positive reinforcement' provided by teachers to promote motivation may result in students avoiding intellectual tasks, or approaching them with limited confidence and without persistence because of the difficulties perceived.

Stiggins (2001) remarked that the use of student-involved classroom assessment, record-keeping, and communication help promote motivation in students' study and build their confidence throughout the range of achievement. It is because by bringing students into the assessment development process early in the learning, students are shown a vision of excellence, where they are now in relation to that vision and the path to success.

Implementing formative assessment must go with some good quality characteristics. All assessments are created to serve some purpose, whether to analyze a learning barrier, to identify a student who needs scaffolding, to provide feedback to move student learning forward or to help students monitor, plan and take the next steps in the learning process. Feedback is critical components of formative assessment. To Black et al., (2003) they claimed that assessment is of no value unless it is designed to be purposeful and is seen to be an integral part of the teaching and learning process. In other words, assessment should provide a clear direction to the students on what to do to enhance learning and understanding (Faleye & Dibu-Ojerinde, 2005).

Atkin, Black and Coffey (2001) proposed that for a learning endeavour to be successful, the learner must have answers to basic questions: *Where am I going? Where am I now? and How can I close the gap?* When students better understand their learning goals, recognize their own skill level in relation to the goals, and take responsibility for reaching the goals, they become active partners in improving their learning. In view of such questions, it is requisite to establish principles that will guide assessment implementation designed to promote learning. Towards this end, the Assessment Reform Group (1999:4) proposed that improving learning through assessment depends on five, deceptively simple, key factors, all underpinned by action: providing effective feedback to pupils; actively involving pupils in their learning; adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment; recognizing the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning; and the ability for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

In this situation, the teacher and students are in a delivery and recipient relationship as well as being partners in pursuit of a shared goal (Black et al., 2004). At its heart, formative assessment is a way of informing and involving the students themselves in the process of assessment and learning (Black & William, 1998). As Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) pointed out, when students are involved in assessment, they learn to use assessment information to manage their own learning "so that they understand how they learn best, know exactly where they are in relation to the defined learning targets, and plan and take the next steps in their learning". Student involvement in the learning process is critical. Black and William (1998); Black et al., (2003); (2004) revealed that students will achieve more if they are fully engaged

in their own learning process. They argue that if students know what they need to learn and why, and then actively assess their understanding, gaps in their own knowledge and areas they need to work on, they will achieve more than if they sit passively in a classroom working through exercises with no real comprehension either of the learning intention of the exercise or of why it might be important. Formative assessment that involves students in the assessment process will not only improve learning but can also assist students to become self-regulated learners (Black &William, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment is another key characteristic of implementing formative assessment. Formative assessment plays a significant role in informing the teacher about students' progress as well as about the effectiveness of teachers' classroom instructions, and the effectiveness of the curriculum materials being used in the classroom. Boston (2002) suggested that employing formative assessment methods such as teacher observation, classroom discussions, homework and the analysis of tests, can help the classroom teacher gain an understanding of what the students know or don't know. When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having difficulties, they can use this information to make necessary instructional adjustments, such as re-teaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice.

Moreover, Dixon and William ( 2003) for example indicates that incorporating formative assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process implies a more dynamic, interactive, dialogic and challenging role for teachers as they are charged with the responsibility of being responsive to students' needs, intervening where necessary during the learning process. Recognizing the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning. A classroom is composed of students with diverse needs, background and skills therefore the assessment strategies employed by teachers in the classroom are critical. The type of assessment strategy a teacher employs in his/her classroom can have a huge effect on students' intrinsic interest and attitude to learn (Clarke et al., 2003). Black et al., (2004); and Clarke et al., (2003) assert that students are motivated to learn through success and competence, and that they are more likely to invest time and energy when they feel ownership and have choices in their learning. Motivation and self-esteem play a significant role in learning and assessment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Study by Dweck (1999) showed that, depending on students' belief about learning, students possess qualitatively different motivational frameworks. According to Dweck, these frameworks affect both students' responses to external feedback and self-regulation of learning. As such, frequent high-stakes assessments (where marks or grades are given) have a negative effect on motivation for learning, damaging the self-esteem of low achievers and leading to problems of 'learner helplessness'. Such assessment feedback according to Black and William (1998:4) "teaches low achieving students that they lack 'ability', causing them to come to believe that they cannot learn". Studies (Butler, 1988) also show that when students receive a grade and a comment, they ignore the comment. The type of feedback given to students is critical. "If a learning exercise is seen as a competition, then everyone is aware that there will be losers as well as winners: those who have a track record as losers will see little point in trying" (Black et al., 2004:12). When a classroom culture focuses on rewards, 'gold stars', grades, or class ranking, pupils look for ways to obtain the best marks rather than to improve their learning. They also spend time and energy looking for clues to the 'right answer'. Indeed, students are more likely to become enthusiastic and lifelong

learners if they are provided with an engaging curriculum, a safe and caring environment (where they can freely discover, create and interact with others) and a significant degree of choice about what (and how and why) they are learning (Black & William, 1998).

The ability for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve is another key characteristic of implementing formative assessment. The importance of involving students in their own learning through peer and self-assessment as strategies for operationalizing the principles of formative assessment are enormous. This section briefly discusses peer and self-assessment and how it can be utilized to improve student learning. Peer and self-assessment are critical components of formative assessment. According to Sadler (1989); Black and William (1998); and Black et al., (2003, 2004) students will achieve more if they are fully engaged in their own learning process, aware of what they need to learn and why, and what they need to do to reach it. While this is undisputable, Black et al., (2004) cautioned teachers that peer and self-assessment can only be meaningful in the classroom if it is used to assist students, especially low achievers, to develop the knowledge and skills of assessment (e.g. goals, criteria and interpretation).

Peer assessment, as complementary to self-assessment (Black et al., 2004), is generally recognized as an integral component of formative assessment (Noonan & Duncan, 2005). Although the definition for peer assessment varies, evaluators generally agree that peer-assessment involves "one student's assessment of the performance or success of another student" (Noonan & Duncan, 2005:2). This process may involve various types of activities such as peer feedback and peer learning. A central purpose of peer assessment is to enhance students' understandings in the cognitive and meta-cognitive process so that one's social and transferable skills are developed (Stobart & Gipps, 1996; Rubin, 2002). Peer assessment, a formative strategy, is critical to students' interaction, understanding and learning gains (Anthony & Lewis, 2008). It enables students to take control over their own learning and to gain insight into their own performance (Heywood, 2000).

Self-assessment is a complementary component of formative assessment (Black and William, 1998) and provides a fundamental link with learning (Boud, 1995; Crooks, 2001). According to Boud (1995), self-assessment is concerned with learners valuing their own learning and achievements on the basis of evidence from themselves and from others and being encouraged to take responsibility, especially when they are involved in considering criteria which are meaningful to them. It is a means by which students take responsibility over their own learning. Gregory, Cameron and Davies (2000) highlighted that when teachers employ self - assessment in their classroom, they were able to view the gaps between what they have taught and what students have learned.

This really shows that "formative assessment provides the teacher with a bridge between assessment and teaching as it is an essential way of creating independent, reflective learners who can plan and assess their own progress" (Bordoh et al., 2013:9). This gives students time to process new information. Both the teacher and students can set targets relating to specific goals rather than to national curriculum levels. The students will then be able to guide their own learning, with the teacher providing help where necessary or appropriate.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a case study research design. The study was carried out in three Colleges of Education in Central Region of Ghana. As this case study focused is on the views of the tutors surrounding evaluation of Social Studies students' learning using formative assessment in selected Colleges of Education, it was a bounded study and particularistic (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2003; Lunn, 2006). It was particular to the specific context of the tutors in three Colleges of Education. The researchers used the tutors' self reports and classroom observation to gather information regarding their understanding and use of formative assessment. This formed the boundary of this case study. Triangulation was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments used.

The population in this study consisted of all Social Studies tutors in the three Colleges of Education in Central Region of Ghana. The target population therefore was the nine (9) Social Studies tutors in all the three colleges of education: Komenda, Ola and Fosu, in the Central Region of Ghana.

The study involved all the Social Studies tutors in the three Colleges of Education in the Central Region, both the Tutors and the Colleges were purposively and conveniently used for the study. The purposively sampling procedure was adopted because the tutors were the only ones involved in the teaching of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana. These three Colleges of Education - Komenda, Fosu and Ola were conveniently sampled because they were the available or nearest units within the reach of the researcher. This implies that researchers are supposed to obtain a convenient sample by selecting whatever sampling units are conveniently available (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000).

The researchers used the following in gathering the data: Interview guide made up of fifteen (15) semi-structured guides for nine (9) social studies tutors of Colleges of Education; and observation guide made up of twenty (20) structured classroom setting checklists with different option adopted from Formative Assessment Classroom Observation and Lesson Planning Tool Created by: Margaret Heritage (AACC), Susan Janssen (NYCC), Adam Tanney (NYCC), Nancy Zarach (Syracuse City School District) for nine (9) Social Studies tutors of Colleges of Education.

Data analysis was done by the use of both descriptive and interpretative techniques based on the themes arrived at in the data collection. This was based on questions on the semi-structured interviews and classroom observation of College of Education Social Studies tutors' while they teach the subject in a classroom setting.

**USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TO EVALUATE STUDENTS' LEARNING**

Assessment techniques Colleges of Education Social Studies tutors use to assess students learning in the classroom are presented under this section. Item 1 of the interview checklist reads *what interactive formative assessment is and why is it important?* In response to this, Kojo (not his real name) said it is the all round assessment during the course of teaching and learning and this promote better learning outcomes. Fiifi (not his real name) said it is the form of assessment which helps the tutor to find out what students have assimilated during the course of teaching in the classroom. With the observation checklist which read *Tutor used*

*formative assessment strategies during lesson in an interactive way*. In the classroom observation the researchers observed that tutors asked questions in open discussion. With this tutors were seen using questions and answers to introduce their lesson. Students were grouped into small groups while they present to the class written report. Students were called to summarize what they learnt after the lesson. This shows that interactive formative assessments promote learning outcomes.

Item 2 of the interview checklist reads *how can formative assessments be used to examine and improve teaching practice?* With this question, Ato (not his real name) said it helps one to find out the level of students understanding before moving onto the next topic. Also, Kwamena (not his real name) said it helps one to check whether his students are doing well in academically or not and ways to use in checking their performances. In the observational checklist item on *Tutors use of formative assessment techniques to improve teaching practice,* the researchers observed that few of the tutors made used of assessment techniques to improve teaching practice. Bell and Cowie (2001) came out that, through interaction with students, teachers are only able to notice information from some students; however, they notice different information from different students at different times. When observing, talking or listening to students, teachers notice something and recognize its significance for the learning of the students. This attest to the fact that if tutors made good use of formative strategies in assessing students, it will help them to examine and improve teaching practice.

Item 3 of interview checklist reads *how can questioning be used to promote classroom dialogue*? One of the nine respondents said that questioning can be used to promote dialogue; introducing a lesson, during the course of teaching and during the culminating stage of the lesson. The rest added to this and agreed that questioning can be used to promote classroom dialogue. With the observation checklist which read *Tutor used formative assessment strategies during lesson in an interactive way*. Tutors observed were seen using questions and answers to introduce the lesson. Tutor posed questions to the students and paused for while, for students to answer. This is an indication that FA is used in lesson presentation at the Colleges of Education. Teacher asking a planned sequence of questions might find out that students had not understood the concept to be learned in a particular lesson, and as a result the teacher might use that information to modify the subsequent lesson to reinforce the prior learning goal. In another situation, a student comparing his or her own work to an exemplar shown by the teacher might make modifications on the basis of reaching the goal made explicit in the form of the example. Therefore, whether assessment is formative hinges on a criterion of use; that is assessment can be considered formative when information is used to take action to advance students toward learning goals. To develop more formative questions, Black et al., (2003:42) encourage classroom teachers to organize their questions considering three themes: "frame questions" around the big idea that are worth asking; increasing the "wait time" so that students can think and express their responses; and facilitating "follow-up' questions or activities to ensure students understand.

Item 4 of the interview checklist reads *why is the interaction between the teacher and the students important feature in formative assessment?* Kweku (not his real name) said "it is like the bridge that holds two roads together and that when there is lack of interaction in class it is the student that suffers and reveals the weakness of the teacher". With the observation checklist which read *Tutor used formative assessment strategies during lesson in an interactive way*. Most of the tutors observed were seen using discussion in the lesson development and during the course of the lesson they pursed to listen to students views as their lessons were not tutor centred. The implication is that students will understand lessons

better when they are brought on board during teaching and learning process. Therefore, teachers should spend more effort in framing questions to explore issues that are critical to students' development of understanding of the subject matter.

Item 5 of the interview checklist reads *is the presence of mere feedback sufficient for judging the guidance of learning in formative assessment? Give reasons for your answer.* Most of the respondents agreed that the presence of mere feedback is insufficient for judging the guidance of learning and that feedback help learners to assess themselves whether they are doing well or not. Black et al., (2004); Clarke et al., (2003) assert that students are motivated to learn through success and competence, and that they are more likely to invest time and energy when they feel ownership and have choices in their learning. Therefore, the teacher needs to understand the way students think and the way they take in new messages, both at the general and the specific level.

Item 6 of the interview checklist reads *what makes a tutor a good formative assessor and is it important at all?* Esi (not her real name) said "effective formative assessor requires someone who has the necessary depth of content knowledge of the subject he/she is teaching...this motivate teacher-student relationship in formative assessment...as he/she will always set realistic questions covered in class". This in the view of Bell and Cowie (2001) teachers need to interpret information by making use of their content knowledge, general and pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge of learners in particular, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational aims and goals for them to be effective assessors. This implies that teachers act on the interpreted information in order to enhance the learning of students. They need to plan a flexible programme and allow ways in which they can act in response to the information collected.

Item 7 of the interview checklist read *why is clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria important in formative assessment?* With this most of the respondents agreed that it is of paramount importance to bring on board the sharing of learning intentions and success criteria with learners. To them this will engineer effective classroom discussions and learning tasks to be achieved in formative assessment. However the classroom observations negate what was said as most of the respondents were seen not doing as such based on the observation checklist which read *Teacher shared criteria for success with students*. Few of the tutors observed were seen using relevant activities as students were involved from the beginning of the lesson to the end, making lesson delivery unique.  This shows that lesson delivery is a two way affair. This implies that for lesson delivery to be a success then tutors must consider and involve students in lesson presentation.

Item 8 of the interview checklist reads *must emphasis be laid on descriptive than evaluative feedback and why?* Most of the respondents agreed that in formative assessment emphasis should be placed on descriptive than evaluative feedback. Araba (not her real name) said "the manner in which feedback is communicated to students is essential, since the application of an evaluative statement, such as "you are right" which implies the existence of correct or incorrect criteria can defeat the purpose of the continuum...comments may be lacking in specificity, like saying "yes" students may not be expected to make progress if their teachers are providing them with evaluative or nonspecific feedback on the basis of looking at their work". However, the classroom situation observed on the above theme was not the ideal based on what most of the respondents said. This implies that when more specific comments are provided to the students, it should be be based on a clear description of what the

underlying criteria are; for example, a student needs to know what "clarity" means in terms of their own work. This shows that the effectiveness of feedback depends on the quality of the feedback rather than existence or absence. This includes the quality and saliency of the information gathered in the first place and the appropriateness and relevance of subsequent actions. To improve formative assessment, Black and William (2004) suggest classroom teachers should put more emphasis on descriptive than evaluative feedback. When feedback is given as rewards or grades, it increases ego rather than task involvement. Such feedback focuses students' attention on their 'ability' rather than on the importance of their effort, lowering the self-esteem of low achievers.

Item 9 of the interview checklist reads *is the use of Formative Assessment Classroom Techniques (FACTs) an integral part of teaching and learning in formative assessment and why?* Most of respondents commented that the use of Formative Assessment Classroom Techniques (FACTs) is an integral part of teaching and learning in formative assessment. Three of the respondents however said although it is an ideal situation but at times they do not go strictly to it if one is to complete his or course outline within a semester. To them it is the final examination conducted by the University of Cape Coast (UCC) and passing of their students that will determine whether they had taught them well and not about going strictly to lay procedures in formative assessment. This was witnessed in the classroom observation on checklist item on *Tutor used FA techniques during lesson*. Most of the tutors observe were not seen using assessment techniques that will involve their students in teaching and learning process. With this there were having in mind that they will be delayed in completing their course outline given them when they tend to involve their students often in lesson delivery. Dixon and William (2003) for example indicates that incorporating formative assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process implies a more dynamic, interactive, dialogic and challenging role for teachers as they are charged with the responsibility of being responsive to students' needs, intervening where necessary during the learning process. This implies for teaching and learning to be worthwhile there is the need to incorporate Formative Assessment Classroom Techniques (FACTs) as an integral part in classroom activities.

Item 10 of the interview checklist reads *what is self-formative assessments and is it important at all?* Most of the respondents said it is important as it assist students to become self-regulated in learning. One of the tutors said "self-assessment is concerned with learners valuing their own learning and achievements on the basis of evidence from themselves and from others and being encouraged to take responsibility... When they are involved in considering criteria which are meaningful to them". This means that it is the procedure by which students take responsibility over their own learning. Formative assessment that involves students in the assessment process will not only improve learning but can also assist students to become self-regulated learners (Black &William, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Self-assessment is a complementary component of formative assessment (Black and William, 1998) and provides a fundamental link with learning (Boud, 1995; Crooks, 2001).

Item 11 of the interview checklist reads *can classroom methods improve formative assessment? Explain your answer.* Most of respondents commented that classroom methods improve formative assessment. To them, formative assessment plays a significant role in informing the teacher about students' progress as well as about the effectiveness of teachers' classroom instructions, and the effectiveness of the curriculum materials being used in the classroom. However, the classroom observations on the above theme negate what was said by

the respondents in the sense that most of them used teacher-centred method in teaching. Boston (2002) suggested that employing formative assessment methods such as teacher observation, classroom discussions, homework and the analysis of tests, can help the classroom teacher gain an understanding of what the students know or do not know. When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having difficulties, they can use this information to make necessary instructional adjustments, such as re-teaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice. This indicates that incorporating varied classroom techniques of teaching and learning process will result in students to become responsive during the learning process.

Item 12 of the interview checklist reads *how do classroom rewards improve learning in formative assessment?* Respondent said classroom rewards improve learning in formative assessment in the sense that it motivates learners to participate in the teaching and learning process. The type of assessment strategy a teacher employs in his/her classroom can have a huge effect on students' intrinsic interest and attitude to learn (Clarke et al., 2003). Black et al., (2004); and Clarke et al., (2003) assert that students are motivated to learn through success and competence, and that they are more likely to invest time and energy when they feel ownership and have choices in their learning. Motivation and self-esteem play a significant role in learning and assessment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This implies that, when tutors effectively use rewards in formative classroom it motivate students to take part in classroom activities.

Item 13 of the interview checklist reads *do the use of peer and self-assessment enhance formative assessment and why?* With this most of the respondents said that the use of peer and self-assessment enhance formative assessment. With the observation checklist on items which read *evidence of self-assessment; teacher supported students in process of self-assessment; Teacher provided opportunity for peer-assessment; teacher supported students in process of peer-assessment; and teacher made use of either student self-or peer-assessment during instruction.* With this 3 out of the 9 tutors observed used peer and self-assessment in enhancing formative assessment. Self-assessment is an important tool for teachers. Gregory, Cameron and Davies (2000) highlighted that when teachers employ self - assessment in their classroom, they are able to view the gaps between what they have taught and what students have learned. This gives students time to process new information. Both the teacher and students can set targets relating to specific goals rather than to national curriculum levels. The students will then be able to guide their own learning, with the teacher providing help where necessary or appropriate.

Item 14 of the interview checklist read *does activating students as the owners of their own learning promote effective formative assessment and how?* All of the respondents indicated it is very important to activate students as the owners of their own learning promote effective formative assessment. However, with the classroom observation checklist which read *teacher encourage students to assess their own learning.* With this it was observed that few of the tutors were giving them good remarks when rights responses are given to questions. Others were also giving immediate feedback. Appropriate feedback made the class observed very lively. This implies that students will always get on board in lesson delivery when they are motivated with good remarks when they respond to questions correctly. This goes to supports what Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) said that when students are involved in formative assessment, they learn to use assessment information to manage their own learning "so that they understand how they learn best, know exactly where they are in relation to the defined

learning targets, and plan and take the next steps in their learning". This implies that student involvement in the learning process is critical.

Item 15 of the interview checklist reads *do providing feedback to learners in the learning process enhances formative assessment? Explain your answer.* Most of the tutors said it is important to provide feedback to learners in the learning process and this enhances formative assessment. However, there were differences in what they said and the situation observed in the classroom. This was done using observation checklist which read *when in the lesson did teacher offer feedback to students; and teacher provided feedback to the students (e.g., individual or class).* With this it was observed that few of the tutors were seen giving feedback at the beginning, during and at the end of the lesson. Feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way. Providing student with descriptive feedback is a crucial part of increasing achievements. To improve formative assessment, it is therefore suggested that classroom teachers should put more emphasis on descriptive than evaluative feedback.

## CONCLUSIONS

Effective formative assessor requires someone who has the necessary depth of content knowledge of the subject s/he is teaching. Evaluation in the classroom motivates tutor-student relationship in formative assessment but it was observed that most teachers were not using concrete evaluation feedbacks. Effective use of rewards in formative classroom motivates students to take part in classroom activities. Students get on board in lesson delivery when they are motivated with good remarks when they respond to questions correctly.

The presence of mere feedback is insufficient for judging the guidance of learning and that feedback help learners to assess themselves whether they are doing well or not. Emphasis should be placed on descriptive than evaluative feedback in formative assessment. Effectiveness of feedback depends on the quality of the feedback rather than existence or absence. Interactive formative assessments promote learning outcomes; students suffer when there is lack of interaction in class, this reveals the weakness of the teacher.

Formative assessment plays a major role in informing the teacher whether the objective of the lesson has been achieved and if the students are improving on what is taught. Formative assessment is those activities that are used to improve student learning, shows the efficacy of teachers' classroom instructions, and the usefulness of the curriculum materials being used in the teaching and learning process.

Sharing learning intentions and criteria for success foster effective classroom discussions and learning tasks in formative assessment. Lesson delivery is seen to be a two way affair only if teachers share achievable success criteria with student in lesson presentation; using relevant activities from the beginning of the lesson to the end make lessons delivery unique.

Formative Assessment Classroom Techniques (FACTs) is an integral part of teaching and learning; for teaching and learning to be worthwhile there is the need to incorporate FACTs. However, most of the teachers observed were not using assessment techniques that involve students in teaching and learning process. With this there were having in mind that they will be delayed in completing their course outline given them when they tend to involve their students often in lesson delivery. Making good use of formative strategies in assessing

students helps them to examine their strength and weakness and this result in improving teaching practice. Students understand lessons better when they are brought on board during teaching and learning process.

## REFERENCES

Akyeampong, K. (1997). *Continuous assessment in post-secondary teacher training in Ghana: A case study evaluation.* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of Nottingham, U.K.

Ampiah, J. G., Hart, K., Nkhata, B., & Nyirenda, D. M. C. (2003). *Teachers' guide to numeracy assessment instrument.* Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Anthony, M. C. & Lewis, D. (2008). *Alternative assessment: An action research study on the use of peer assessment as a learning tool for education students in a university in Jamaica.* Retrieved December 10, 2012, from: http://www.waikato.ac.nz.

Assessment Reform Group (1999). *Assessment for learning: Beyond the black box.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge, School of Education.

Atkin, J. M., Black, P., & Coffey, J. (2001). *Classroom assessment and the national science standards.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Bassey, M. (1999). Case Study in Educational Setting. Philadelphia. OH: Open University Press.

Bell, B., & Cowie, B. (2001). *Formative assessment and science education.* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Bekoe, S. O., & Eshun, I. (2013). Curriculum feuding and implementation challenges: The case of Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *4*(5), 39-45.

Bekoe, S. O., Eshun, I., & Bordoh, A. (2013). Formative assessment techniques tutors use to assess teacher-trainees' learning in Social Studies in Colleges of Education in Ghana. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, 3*(4), 20-30.

Black, P. J. (1993). Formative and summative assessment by teachers. *Studies in Science Education*, *21*, 49-97.

Black, P., Lee, C., Harrison, C., & Wiliam, D. (2004). Teachers developing assessment for learning: Impact on student achievement, *Assessment in Education, 11*(1), 49-64.

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning.* London: Open University Press.

Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education, 5*(1), 7 - 71.

Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (2001). Theory and practice in the development of formative assessment, *EARLI* 8/01

Bordoh, A., & Eshun, I. (2013). *Tutors' conceptions and use of formative assessment in social studies.* Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishers.

Bordoh, A., Bassaw, T. K., & Eshun, I. (2013). Social Studies tutors' cognition in formative assessment in colleges of education in Ghana. *Development Country Studies, 3*(11), 1-11.

Boston, C. (2002). The concept of formative assessment. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, *8* (9). Retrieved January 21, 2013, from : http://www.pareonline.net/getvn.asp

Boud, D. (1995). *Enhancing learning through self-assessment.* London: Kogan Press.

Chappuis, S. & Chappuis, J. (2007/2008). The best value for formative assessment. *Educational Leadership Journal.* Retrieved on Jan. 05, 2012, from: http://www.waikato.ac.nz.

Chappuis, S. & Stiggins, R. (2004). Classroom assessment for learning. *Educational Leadership Journal*. Retrieved on January 22, 2013, from: http://www.waikato.ac.nz.

Clarke, S., Timperley, H., & Hattie, J. (2003). *Unlocking formative assessment*. New Bombay: Sage.

Crooks, T. (2001). *The validity of formative assessment.* University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand: Educational Assessment Unit.

Davis, A. (2000). *Making classroom assessment work*. Merville: Connections Publishing.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1994). Promoting self-determined education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *38* (1) 3-14.

Dixon, H., & William, R. (2003). Teachers' understanding and use of formative assessment in literacy learning. In the *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*. Available at: http://www.tki.org.nz

Dweck, C. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development.* Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

Eshun, I. (2013). Appraisal of Colleges of Education Social Studies curriculum vis-à-vis the Junior High School (JHS) Social Studies curriculum implementation in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, *4*(1), 12-18.

Eshun, I., & Bordoh, A. (2013). *Social Studies teachers' curriculum conceptions and their practices.* Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishers.

Faleye, B. A., & Dibu-Ojerinde, O. O. (2005) Some outstanding issues in assessment for learning. *Paper Presented at the 31st Annual Conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment, Abuja, Nigeria*.

Falchikvo, N. (2000). Peer feedback marking: developing peer assessment, *Innovations in Education and Training International*, Vol. 32, pp. 175-187.

Frankfort, A., & Nachmias, D. (2000). *Research in the social science*. New York: Worth publishers.

Gipps, C. (1992). *Assessment: A teachers' guide to the issues*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Goodrum, D., Hackling, M., & Rennie, L (2001). The status and quality of teaching and learning of science in Australian schools. Canberra Department of Education: Training and Youth Affairs.

Harlen, W., & Deakin, C. R. (2002). Pupils assessment in science at the primary level. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *178*, 323-340.

Heywood, J. (2000). *Assessment in higher education: Student learning, teaching, programs and institutions.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Lunn, J. (2006). *A study on teacher professionalism and teacher leadership: The teachers' viewpoint*. Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved December 20th, 2012, from: http:/adt.waikato.ac.nz.

Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulate learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*. *31*(2), 99-218.

Noonan, B., & Duncan, C. R. (2005). Peer and self-assessment in high schools. *Medical teacher*, *27*(6) 509-513.

Perrenoud, P. (1998). From formative assessment evaluation to a controlled regulation of learning processes: Towards a wider conceptual field. *Assessment in Education*, *5*(1), 85-102.

Quashigah, A. Y., Eshun, I., & Mensah, M. F. (2013). Influences of the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) of graduate Social Studies teachers on questions they set in Senior High Schools in Ghana. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, *3*(6), 76-86.

Rubin, L. (2002). "*I just think maybe you could ...". Peer Critiquing through Online Conversations, Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 29, pp. 382-392.

Sadler, R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*, 18, 119-144.

Shepard, L. A. (2001). The role of classroom assessment in teaching and learning. In V. Richardson (Ed) *Handbook of research on teaching (4th Edition).*Washington DC: AERA.

Stiggins, R. J. (2001). *Student-involved classroom assessment* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Merrill-Prentice Hall.

Stobart, J. & Gipps, C. (1996). *Assessment: A teacher's guide to the issue*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Torrance, H., & Pryor, J. (1997). Making sense of formative assessment. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, *25*(2), 115-125.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. H. (eds) (1989). *Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Springer.