

Formative Assessment Techniques Tutors use to Assess Teacher-Trainees' Learning in Social Studies in Colleges of Education in Ghana

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Abstract

Internal assessment 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. It is therefore important for teachers to be abreast with formative assessment techniques and how to use them in their classroom activities in order to win back public confidence. This could be achieved if, tutors try to follow the laid down procedures in administering formative assessment in their colleges. There is therefore the need to conduct a study into formative assessment techniques tutors use to assess teacher-trainees learning in Social Studies. Case study research design was used. The study was carried out in three Colleges of Education in 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. Interview guide and classroom observation checklists were administered to nine (9) Social Studies tutors of Colleges of Education. The research found out 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. Formative assessment should cover the three learning domains but in setting and scoring questions importance is attach to cognitive domain to the neglect of the affective and psychomotor domains. This make students pass through the academic system without acquiring needed skills, values and attitudes that will enable them to right the wrong in society using appropriate tools.

Keywords: Formative assessment techniques in social studies. Diagnostic assessment. Peer assessment.

1. Introduction

Assessment according to Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007) is a systematic process for gathering data about student achievement. It is also seen as an essential component of teaching. Assessment in education is the product of the 20th century (Linn & Miller, 2005). Michael Scriven (1967) proposes the use of formative and summative assessment in order to make the distinction between the roles of evaluation. Hence, assessment is perceived to serve two different purposes: (1) formative; to improve instruction and (2) summative; to measure students' achievement. The use of assessment to classify, predict, and sort has also changed to advance the process of teaching and learning in addition to accountability purposes (Gordon, 2008).

Assessment that acknowledges the diverse social, cultural and academic needs of learners as well as the situated nature of learning has enormous potential to not only scaffold effective learning but also to generate positive outcomes for students in Social Studies (Gipps, 2002; Aitkin & Sinnerma, 2008; Moss, 2008). This type of assessment often leads to better outcomes for students because formal assessment tasks are constructively aligned with the teaching and learning programme. This means that assessment information that is generated by these tasks is used by teachers and students to inform subsequent teaching and learning (Black & William, 1998; Crooks, 1998; Harlen, 2007). The active dynamic and socially responsive natures of these assessment processes are, not only thought to align with socio-cultural principles of learning but have also shown to be central to raising student achievement (James, 2006). Assessment from this perspective is therefore said to be formative assessment or assessment for learning (Black & William 1998).

It is becoming more and more evident that formative assessment is an integral component of the teaching and learning process (Black & William, 1998). 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, formative assessment techniques tutors use to assess teacher-trainees learning in social studies in colleges of education would be considered reasonable, given the fact that teachers rational might influence the way students proceed with learning and the way it is tested.

Contemporary perspective of assessment now considers assessment to be a critical and integral part of effective learning (James, 2006; Harlen, 2007). The emphasis in contemporary outcomes-based approach in education is mainly on skills. Outcomes-based education is an attempt to reform certain education practices in order to prepare learners better in schools to cope with the demands of life. Therefore learners must not only acquire knowledge but also demonstrate skills and develop values. Colleges of Education must provide the basis for learners to become informed independent, skilled and responsible people with ingrained values, who are able to make a positive contribution to society (curriculum standards for Social Studies, 2008).

Formative assessment techniques tutors use to assess teacher-trainees learning in social studies in 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 produce about 9000 teachers annually to feed the basic schools. 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 formulation in the educational career of the young ones entrusted to their care. According to Eshun (2013:17):

Colleges of Education use a particular conception of Social Studies curriculum for the production of Social Studies education teachers for basic schools different from the JHS Social Studies syllabus. Colleges of Education subscribes to discrete subjects perspective whereby facts, concepts and generalizations are bootlegged from the social sciences (i.e. geography, economics, history, sociology, etc) with a multidisciplinary approach, whilst the JHS syllabus is holistic, theme based, problem solving with a trans-disciplinary approach.

Social Studies teachers’ curriculum conceptions influence their classroom practices (Eshun, 2010). The indication here is that better formative assessment outcomes are derived from effective teaching method. Eshun (2013:17) asserts that, “teaching Social Studies is stressed to be done in student-centred techniques and strategies.” The author, further stressed that, brainstorming, role-playing, simulation, discussion and debate were the major techniques stressed by both Colleges of Education curriculum and the Junior High School (JHS) social studies syllabus in Ghana. This implies that the teaching and the system of assessment in the colleges of education need not be taken for granted if quality trained teachers are to be produced.

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. 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, teaching practice which takes 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 Kwesi (1993:36), “at present the methods of assessment of students largely focus on the aspect of academic learning and neglect of other equally important areas of social development.” According to Freeman and Lewis, (1998:63) when planning assessment, the following ways of expressing learning may be useful:

- Knowledge emphasizes the need to learn how to make a portion of the knowledge of humankind one’s own;
- Reasoning pertains to the need to understand the importance of knowledge in human life;
- Skills point to the need to dig such knowledge out as it may be needed;

- Products demonstrate the need to think critically about what has been previously accepted as knowledge to see whether or how well it tests out in today's circumstances; and
- Affect suggests the need for values and to learn how to be creative in the acquisition of new knowledge.

From the foregoing it can be asserted that, tutors scope of assessment at the pre-service level is limited to be the academic aspect of learning to the neglect of the other areas of human development. It is in the light of the above observation that makes it worth investigating into the formative assessment techniques tutors use to assess teacher-trainees learning in social studies in colleges of education. The study therefore sought to answer the question-what assessment technique do tutors use to assess students learning in the classroom?

The scope of study confined to the Colleges of Education in Ghana. These institutions play a pivotal role in producing teachers for the basic level of education in the country. The study focused in all the three Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana. Finally the study involved only Social Studies tutors in the colleges.

2. Literature Review on Assessment Techniques Used in Assessing Students Learning

There has been the debate of alternative techniques in assessment. However, Herrera, Murry, & Cabral, (2007) include formative and summative assessment along with other types of authentic assessment, such as performance-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment and peer-assessment, interview-based assessment, play based assessment, cooperative groups assessment, dialogue, journal, and scaffold essays.

Diagnostic assessment is also seen as an alternative form of assessment. Although some authors view diagnostic assessment separately from formative assessment, the intention is that diagnostic assessments are used for formative purposes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007:100). Diagnostic assessment or pre-assessment is used to collect information for planning instruction and acknowledging learners' needs (Black & William, 1998). Wiggins and McTighe (2007:101) assert that pre-assessments "include checks of prior knowledge and skill levels and surveys of interest or learning-style preferences." The authors maintain that, a great number of students come to school with a misconception that they are not talented enough to perform a certain task, such as drawing a picture or writing an analytic memo (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Given this scenario, a teacher is responsible for recognizing these misconceptions and finding ways to confront them.

Another debate is on portfolios as an alternative formative assessment. Portfolio development is not a new concept in the history of education. Portfolios originated with artists' collections of their works and have long been used to demonstrate competencies (Bintz, 1991). In response to the need for alternative and more authentic assessment practices, portfolios have become a communal tentative to the traditional assessment methods (Mayer & Tusin, 1999). According to William and Thompson (2008), gathering purposeful examples of students' work that demonstrate their effort, progress, and level of understanding over a period to time, compose the main features of portfolio. However, what has changed through the course of time is the format and content, making portfolios meaningful and purposeful. Based on the constructivist theories, which advocate that learning has to be constructed by the learners themselves, rather than being imparted by the teachers, portfolio assessment requires students to provide selected evidence to show that learning relevant to the course objectives has taken place. They also have to justify the selected portfolio items with reference to the course objectives (Steffe & Gale, 1995).

Biggs (1998) holds that the preparation of an assessment portfolio is an active process involving collecting, synthesizing and organizing possible relevant items to provide the best evidence of achievement of the learning objectives; a process that demands ongoing assessment, reflection and justification. There is also the assumption that during the process of preparing an assessment portfolio, learning is enhanced as students are encouraged to reflect on their experience, identify learning needs and initiate further learning (Harris, Dolan, & Fairbairn, 2001). Such an assumption, however, should be supported with empirical evidence if the full potential of portfolio assessment is to be realized. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) maintain that unlike the traditional forms of assessment that take a "snapshot" of students at one point in time, portfolios "function like a photo album containing a variety of photos taken at different times and different contexts". Similarly, Herrera *et al.* (2007) assert that the content of portfolios, which incorporate a collection of student work, "some indications that how student rated him/herself on the process and product included and the evidences of how those products met the established criteria".

Genesee and Upshur (1996: 99) define portfolio as follows:

As purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates to the students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas. Student portfolios have been inspired by professionals such as photographers and architects as a means of keeping a record of their accomplishments to show to others.

They maintain that the value of portfolios is in the assessment of student achievement. They are particularly useful in this respect because they provide a continuous record of students' development that can be shared with others. Genesee and Upshur clearly state that reviewing portfolio can increase the students' involvement in and ownership of their own learning. The positive effects of portfolios student learning arise from the opportunities they afford students to become actively involved in assessment and learning.

According to Wiggin and McTighe (2007) the importance of considering the intended purposes for developing portfolios, by establishing the targets for it use. An instructor can decide what kind of student work to incorporate, who should manage it, how often to review it, and more. The instructors regularly assign students to include writing samples, reflections, drawings, reading logs, student self-evaluation, and progress notes, visuals and audio clips, among the many. According to Herrera *et al.* (2007), the common forms of portfolios contain best examples of students' work that illustrate their learning and progress. Also, Belanoff (1994) believes that portfolio assessment promotes participation and autonomy by allowing students to select the work on which they will be evaluated to reflect on them; to take risks with their writing, and to seek advice from peers. The result is that evaluation becomes a positive force to encourage growth, maturity, and independence, rather than a means of pointing out deficiencies.

In addition, portfolios are considered a good alternative to traditional forms of assessment because they incorporate the perspective of students and teachers about learning and assessment. Another significance of a portfolio is that unlike the traditional synoptic evaluations, such as the final examination or any standardized test that happens once, portfolios provide a longitudinal observation of student progress as they show incremental gains in knowledge, skills, and proficiencies (Herrera *et al.*, 2007). Portfolios are also authentic because they are driven by classroom activities; in most cases, they reflect in-process adaptations to instructional methods and assessment, and they assess learning which motivates students (Herrera *et al.*, 2007:32). Gallagher (2001) also maintains that reflection is a major component of portfolios as it helps students to learn from experience and practice, thereby helping them to bridge the theory-practice gap. He says through the reflective process students are able to identify gaps in knowledge and/or skills and competence, but also to reconfirm and document strengths, skills and knowledge.

Self-assessment is another valuable tool for learning and measurement. For example, when students' are engaged in assessing their own work, they try to learn the criteria for high-quality performance, and they experience a willingness to apply those criteria (Herrera *et al.*, 2007). However, Black and William (1998:7) remain concerned about student readiness to self-assess or evaluate peers. They propose that once students acquire a clear picture of the outcome or purpose, "they become more committed and more effective as learners: their own assessments become an object of discussion with their teachers and with one another".

However, agreements exist among educators, in which they recognize the value of self and peer-assessment which helps students exert control over their learning (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2004). Initially, some teachers provide rubrics for student so that they can assess their progress. The rubrics incorporate the criteria that provide the opportunity for students to reflect on the extent to which they have made progress. Atkins, Black, and Coffey (2003) illustrate a feature of alternative assessment that asks learners to ask three questions as they assess themselves: "where am I trying to go? where am I now; and how do I close the gap" (cited in Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004:43).

Similar to self-assessment, educators consider peer-assessment advantageous, as it furthers opportunities for students to identify targeted learning goals (Herrera *et al.*, 2007; & Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004). In peer-assessment, students often assess other students' work compared to the criteria developed by the instructor, or both students and the class instructor. An important aspect of peer assessment is that it engages students in dialogue with their classmates, commenting on each others' work rather than a one-way feedback system from instructor to student.

To enrich peer-assessment and use it productively, Black and William (1998) propose that students be trained to assess their peers purposefully, with the goal of improving learning. As students comment on their peers work, they use informal language which is better understood by them. In addition, according to Herrera *et al.* (2007), given the concept of peer-assessment, students compare others students' work to the accepted criteria, which "enables them to discern outstanding elements of both their own and their classmate's performance and products". According to Gipps (1992), peer assessment is believed to enable learners to develop abilities and skills denied to them in a learning environment in which the teacher only assesses their work. In other words, it provides learners with the opportunity to take responsibility for analyzing, monitoring and evaluating aspects of both the learning process and product of their peers. Research studies examining this mode of assessment have revealed that it can work towards developing students' higher order reasoning and higher-level cognitive thought, helping to nurture student-centred learning among undergraduate learners, encouraging active and flexible learning and facilitating a deep approach to learning rather than a surface approach.

Performance-based assessment is also seen as a form of technique use in assessing. Linn and Miller (2005:7) explain performance-based assessment as “snapshots of students learning in time, which provide a longer exposure with panoramic lens, or real-time video”. The idea that knowledge is constructed during the learning process and that a student discovers knowledge for him/herself, rather than receiving knowledge, inspires the notion of performance-based assessment. This approach facilitates both the way students take information and the way they store and apply this information to deal with novel situations (Herrera *et al.*, 2007). This means that, in addition to eliciting constructed responses, performance based assessment incorporates authentic tasks that need higher level of thinking and application of skills. Herrera *et al.* (2007:28) interpret performance-based assessment as an opportunity that “tap(s) into the depth and breadth of students’ learning.

The concept of questioning has a long history in the area of formative assessment; however, what has changed over the course of time is a shift from close-ended questions to more informative, open-ended formats. Black, Harrison, Lee, & Marshall (2003) encourage teachers not only to develop more effective questions but also to facilitate an environment where students must think analytically and provide their own answers to their questions. In addition, Black *et al.* (2003:39) argue that formative questions challenge “a common misconception, to create some conflict that requires discussion” which encourages students to think of a response or an idea from different angles. 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.

Interview-based assessment is another form of alternative assessment that teachers use to gather data about students’ experiences, interests, background, thoughts, beliefs, activities etc. Teacher-student interviews vary from highly structured to informal conversations. Herrera *et al.* (2007) agree that unstructured detailed interviews with students help teachers to adapt the lesson based on the information gathered from students.

Play-based assessment is also a valuable assessment form that teachers can use at different grade levels. Examples include pre-school children who are learning the names of objects, language learners who can just barely explain things in the new language, and upper grade levels who role play or dramatize concepts from the literature, history, concurrent life situations, and politics (Herrera *et al.*, 2007). In addition, Herrera *et al.* (2007) indicate that assessment can take place in any manner but it does not mean that authentic assessment merely happens in non-traditional ways. Goodwin (2000:6) agree “authentic assessment begins with teachers making it their business to purposefully watch, listen to, talk with, and think about the children in their classrooms”. Some teachers reflect on who these children are, the extent of what they know, and the way they will learn, based on the evidence that they observe in the role-play (Herrera *et al.*, 2007).

Co-operative group assessment is seen as a form of alternative formative assessment. The concept of group work or team work varies, depending on the context. Recent recognition of collaborative or team work is increasing among education, realizing that strengths and skills of some students are well-defined when they are engaged in group activities such as cooperative learning or assessment. Herrera *et al.* (2007:38) observe that ‘collaborative or group activities often culminate in projects or experiments that may or may not require oral or written reporting’.

Slavin (2006) argues that planning for group assessment requires educators to consider both group efforts and individual liability. Herrera *et al.* (2007) note the complexity of assessing a cooperative group activity, in particular distinguishing an individual student’s effort and the contribution he or she makes performing a group activity or project. Teachers often document the thought and action of individual students in the process of performing an activity as they learn from cooperative activities and the dialogue that occurs among the students.

Dialogue journals and scaffold essays can also be used to assess students. Vygotsky defined scaffolding instruction as the “role of teachers and others in supporting the learner’s development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level” (Raymond, 2000:176). Scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy originates from Lev Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). “The zone of proximal development is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance” (Raymond, 2000:176). Accommodative or scaffold authentic assessment may take various forms, including dialogue journals requiring students to write their thoughts about certain topics, or stories. Another form, scaffold essays, allows the instructor to simplify a complex essay question by breaking it down into short answer questions. This is especially useful when assessing content information, because it reduces the stress of students who may assume that they will have to answer questions in an essay format (Berkowitz, Desmarais, Hogan, & Moorcroft, 2000).

Supports in scaffolding instruction, facilitate the learner's development. The scaffolds facilitate a student's ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information. The activities provided in scaffolding instruction are just beyond the level of what the learner can do alone (Olson & Pratt, 2000). An important aspect of scaffolding instruction is that the scaffolds are temporary. As the learner's abilities increase the scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable other is progressively withdrawn. Finally the learner is able to complete the task or master the concepts independently (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002:7). Therefore the goal of the educator when using the scaffolding teaching strategy is for the student to become an independent and self-regulating learner and problem solver (Hartman, 2002).

Teachers have also used scaffolding to engage students in research work and learning. In this context, scaffolding facilitates organization of and focus for students' research (McKenzie, 1999). The structure and clearly defined expectations are the most important component of scaffolding in this context. The teachers provide clarity and support but the students construct the final result through their research. Aligning the other forms of authentic assessment, teachers collect useful "information about student learning through accommodated and scaffold assignments" (Herrera *et al.*, 2007:39).

Scoring in formative assessment needs to be taken seriously by formative assessment practitioners. The literature sheds light that one core reason teachers hesitate to use alternative assessment is because they provide little information in a numerical way. However, Herrera *et al.* (2007) assert that if teachers become aware of the many ways that formative assessment makes it possible to quantify or measure the information, this concern can be alleviated. Some ways to achieve this numerical representation are using rubrics, checklists, and questionnaires. Wiggins and McTighe (2007) define a rubric as a "criterion-based evaluation tool, consisting of a fixed measurement scale (such as four score points) and descriptions of the characteristics for each score point". Scoring rubrics are descriptive scoring schemes that are developed by teachers or other evaluators to guide the analysis of the products or processes of students' effort (Brookhart, 1999). Scoring rubrics are typically employed when a judgment of quality is required and may be used to evaluate a broad range of subjects and activities. According to Schrock (2000), pre-college and college instructors use scoring rubrics for classroom evaluation purposes. Where and when a scoring rubric is used does not depend on the grade level or subject, but rather on the purpose of the assessment. Rubrics are used to engage students in the details of their own learning. Rubrics can be adapted based on grades of students, starting with picture style in pre-school and progressing to more structured forms in upper levels. Herrera, Murry and Cabral (2007) emphasize involving students in the process of creating rubrics, which provides an opportunity for the students to focus on the targeted goal, criteria. Herrera *et al.* (2007:43) summarize key tips to follow in developing a rubric:

Determine the desired outcome, develop your current classroom practices as task that will create opportunities for students to demonstrate the targeted skill, determine what a good or high-quality performance on this task might look like, and complete the rubric by describing the requirements that must be met to attain each quantified level of performance.

In addition to these formats, there are other alternative assessments to measure student learning. Questionnaires and checklists are developed initially by identifying skills, knowledge, and competencies to perform a task. Given the identified knowledge and skills, a series of questions or statements are developed to describe expected outcomes, taking into consideration the varying levels of students, as well. Herrera *et al.* (2007) believe that using questionnaires and checklists helps teachers to reduce repetition, and they also provide information about students' prior knowledge and what they bring into the classroom.

Although alternative authentic assessments can be developed and used in ways that demonstrate students' academic learning. Herrera *et al.* (2007:46) note that "such assessments are not immune to bias". This means that a teacher may provide more feedback to some students and less to some others, or the instructor may prioritize his/her perspective in assessing a performance, ignoring the fact that other voices and aspects should be considered accordingly. As can be summarize from the above discussion, increased student involvement in the process of assessment, can be used to reduce this concern (Herrera *et al.*, 2007; William & Thompson, 2008).

Concept mapping and meaningful learning has been a major issue in formative assessment. A major factor that gives rise to wide interest in concept mapping is that its theoretical power derives from Ausubel's (1968) idea of meaningful learning. Ausubel (1968), in his assimilation theory of cognitive learning, postulated that meaningful learning is a process in which new information is related to an existing relevant aspect of an individual's cognitive structure.

Meaningful learning occurs when learners build a new knowledge structure by consciously and explicitly constructing new nodes and interrelating them with existing nodes and with each other. Moreover, Jonassen, Beissner and Yacci (1993) conceive structural knowledge as the structure of how information within a knowledge domain is organized, and state the importance of structure knowledge as a conceptual basis for knowing why. The explicit awareness of those interrelationships and the ability to explicate those relationships is essential for higher order, procedural knowledge, a type of knowledge of knowing how. Novak (1980) demonstrates how concept maps put into practice the theoretical principles of Ausubel's assimilation theory. Novak describes how, during the evolution concepts that the learners already know. The new and more specialized concept is subsumed into more general concepts existing in the learner's cognitive structure. Thus, through such interaction with new learning, concepts are modified and integrated into a progressively more complex conceptual framework. Okebukola and Jegede (1988) have pointed out that Ausubel's learning theory places central emphasis on the influence of students' prior knowledge on subsequent meaningful learning. By explicitly identifying concepts and the relationships between concepts, concept mapping facilitates the development of a learner's representation of domain knowledge. Also, in order to establish a no arbitrary association between the new information and the relevant concepts or propositions they already possess, learners are required to engage in an analytical process in which they evaluate, integrate and elaborate on their understanding in new ways during the construction of concept maps. In this reflective process, concept mapping becomes a way "to learn how to learn" (Novak & Gowin, 1984). It serves as a metacognitive tool to help learners take charge of their own meaning making.

Much research states that the determination of meaningful learning can be based on the learners' comprehension of information and on their ability to use the new knowledge. There is all indication that each assessment technique under formative assessment has usefulness and this goes a long way in contributing to the conception of formative assessment.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a case study research design. It was carried out in three Colleges of Education in Central Region of Ghana. The data were used together to form one case. Several research scholars including Bassey (1999) and Yin (2003) consider that case studies are particularistic, descriptive and heuristic and are particular to a certain context and have a more human face than other research methods, as it is strong on reality and context which enables 'thick' description. Hence, gaining the tutors' descriptions on the use of formative assessment techniques was a crucial part of this study. Thick description in this context denotes a commitment to catch the diversity, variability, creativity, individuality, uniqueness and spontaneity of social interactions (Cohen et al., 2007; Lunn, 2006).

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

In order to obtain the most comprehensive and dependable data pertinent to the research questions, the researchers used two instruments namely interview and classroom observation for data collection. This was done to collect and compare data to minimize bias. The qualitative data entry and analyses was done by the use of both descriptive and interpretative techniques based on the themes arrived at in the data collection.

4. Assessment Techniques Tutors use to Assess Students' learning

Assessment techniques that Colleges of Education Social Studies tutors use to assess students learning in the classroom are discussed in this section. On interview item-*how do you understand diagnostic assessment and is it important in teaching and learning? Give reasons.* Mensah (not his real name) said "diagnostic assessment is done through questions and answers during teaching period". Manu (not his real name) said "diagnostic assessment is a form of assessment used by tutors or teachers before the lesson, during the lesson and after the lesson to adjust lesson plan and instruction". Serwa (not her real name) said "students can be assessed for diagnostic purpose during the course of teaching and series of oral questions and it is important because I can see where students are, in terms of their academic skills based on the result from their responses...one can adjust the syllabus based on the needs of the

students". This shows that tutors use formative assessment for diagnostic purposes during teaching and learning. This information collection and interpretation cuts across all situations or aspects of the student's education.

The interview checklist-*how you understand portfolio assessments and is it important in social studies class?* Ekuia (not her real name) said "it is the ongoing comprehensive collection of students work and getting to know where they are, in terms performance...It increases their involvement in formative assessment". According to William and Thompson (2008), gathering purposeful examples of students' work that demonstrate their effort, progress, and level of understanding over a period to time, compose the main features of portfolio. However, what has changed through the course of time is the format and content, making portfolios meaningful and purposeful Black and William (1998:140) argue that the active involvement of learners in their own learning is another essential that yields successful result in formative assessment. This means that for teachers making the purpose of teaching for improving the use of formative assessment real is to give their learners the capacity to assess themselves more often and effectively.

Item 3 of interview on the checklist reads *how do you understand self-assessment?* Kwamina (not his real name) said "here student are given the opportunity to assess their own performances...Self-assessment therefore is a valuable tool for formative purpose". However, Black and William (1998:7) remain concerned about student readiness to self-assess or evaluate peers. They propose that once students acquire a clear picture of the outcome or purpose, "they become more committed and more effective as learners: their own assessments become an object discussion with their teachers and with one another".

Item 4 of interview on the checklist reads *how do you understand peer-assessment and is it important at all in social studies?* Kweku (not his real name) said peer assessment is all about taking stock of another person's performance and it is believed to enable learners perform better since assessment was done by a friend and not the teacher...in this wise criticism is less felt". Tutu (not his real name) said "I believe that peer-assessment focused on improvement not grading and this enable learner for formative purposes. Musa (not his real name) said "in peer-assessment, students often assess other students' work compared to the criteria developed by the instructor, or both students and the class instructor". This indicated that respondents share the same thought that an important aspect of peer assessment is that it engages students in dialogue with their classmates, commenting on each others' work rather than a one-way feedback system from instructor to student. The import of this is to enrich peer-assessment and use it productively. Black and William (1998) propose that students be trained to assess their peers purposefully, with the goal of improving learning.

Item 5 of interview on the checklist reads *Is the assessment method enabling you gather adequate information about what your students have attained and thus can perform?* Esi (not her real name) said yes it does, it helps the tutor to know the level of understanding of the students and their ability level. Ekuia (not her real name) said Yes to some extent, because social studies is citizenship education it should also cover the three learning domains but due to importance we attach to scoring we only emphasis on cognitive domain to neglect affective and psychomotor domains. This goes to prove that tutors use performance-based assessments are used for formative purposes. The idea that knowledge is constructed during the learning process and that a student discovers knowledge for him/herself, rather than receiving knowledge, inspires the notion of performance-based assessment. This approach facilitates both the way students take information and the way they store and apply this information to deal with novel situations. This means that, in addition to eliciting constructed responses, performance based assessment incorporates authentic takes that need higher level of thinking and application of skills. Interpret performance-based assessment as an opportunity that "tap(s) into the depth and breadth of students' learning.

Item 6 of interview on the checklist reads-*how do you understand interview-based assessment?* Afe (not her real name) said "is assessment technique that teachers use for formative purposes...it is an alternative assessment teachers use to gather data about students' experiences, interests, thoughts and activities carried out in school. Herrera et al (2007) agrees that unstructured detailed interviews with students help teachers to adapt the lesson based on the information gathered from students. These authors note that, through a teacher's interview held with a student, the instructor realized that "Linguistic differences can interfere with the development of deeper connections with students" (Herrera *et al.*, 2007:36).

Item 7 of interview on the checklist reads *how do you understand play-based assessment and is it a valuable assessment for formative purposes?* This indicated that respondents agree that play-based assessment is a valuable assessment for formative purposes. Awortwe (not his real name) said that "assessment can take place in any manner but it does not mean that authentic assessment must merely happens in non-traditional ways...it must always be conducted in a formal way under the tutelage of the social studies tutor" Goodwin (2000:6) agree "authentic

assessment begins with teachers making it their business to purposefully watch, listen to, talk with, and think about the children in their classrooms”. Some teachers reflect on who these children are, the extent of what they know, and the way they learn, based on the evidence that they observe in the role-play (Herrera *et al.*, 2007). This implies that planning for play based assessment requires educators to consider how better one can role play and dramatize.

Item 8 of interview on the checklist reads *how do you understand scaffolds assessments and is it important in formative purposes?* Most of social studies tutors interviewed were confused as to what Scaffold authentic assessment is. Scaffold authentic assessment may take various forms, including dialogue journals requiring students to write their thoughts about certain topics, or stories. When this is well planned by tutors it will help students to be analytical thinking capabilities as this will facilitate a student’s ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information.

Item 10 of interview on the checklist reads *how do you understand scoring rubrics and how can it be used for formative assessment?* Ato (not his real name) said “scoring rubrics are descriptive scoring schemes that are used for formative purposes”. Efuia (not her real name) said rubrics are used to engage students in the details of their own learning...it can be adapted based on grades of students, starting with picture style in pre-school and progressing to more structured forms in upper levels...it is descriptive schemes developed assess of students”. This was supported by Wiggins and McTighe (2007) that a rubric as a “criterion-based evaluation tool, consist of a fixed measurement scale (such as four score points) and descriptions of the characteristics for each score point”. Scoring rubrics have a common method for evaluating student work in college classroom (Rudner & Schafer, 2002). Pavelinch (2000) asserts that pre-college and college instructors use scoring rubrics for classroom evaluation purposes. Where and when a scoring rubric is used does not depend on the grade level or subject, but rather on the purpose of the assessment. Herrera, Murry and Cabral (2007) emphasize involving students in the process of creating rubrics, which provides an opportunity for the students to focus on the targeted goal, criteria. This implies that scoring rubrics are typically employed when a judgment of quality is required and may be used to evaluate a broad range of subjects and activities.

5. Conclusions

It was agreed that 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. Due to hasty nature 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.

Interview-based assessment acts as alternative assessment to gather data about students’ experiences, interests, background, thoughts, beliefs and activities. 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. What they said during the interview were weakened and negated by the complementary instrument (observation) used.

It was realised that diagnostic assessments are used for formative purposes and it can be done through series of oral questions and answers during teaching period and after the lesson. It was realised that 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.

Tutors agreed that interactive formative assessments promote learning outcomes through questioning in a form of dialogue. It was observed in a classroom setting that tutors asked questions in open discussion; use questions and answers to introduce their lesson; and students were called to summarize what they learnt after the lesson.

6. Implications for Teaching and Recommendations

Institute of Education of the University of Cape Coast and the Colleges of Education in Ghana should come together and set the benchmark for assessing Social Studies outcomes. Students taught and assessed not to understand Social Studies as citizenship education is a problem. Formative assessment should cover the three learning domains, but in setting and scoring questions importance is attach to cognitive domain to the neglect of the affective and psychomotor domains which are also important. The over emphasised knowledge component of the subject may let students pass through the academic system without acquiring needed skills, values and attitudes that will enable them to right the wrong in society using appropriate tools.

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. This was evidence as the strength of some interview items were weakened and negated by the complementary instrument (observation) used. It was

revealed that most of the 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. 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.

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