Social Studies Tutors' Cognition in Formative Assessment in Colleges of Education in Ghana

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Abstract

Cognition base of Social Studies tutors in formative assessment in Colleges of Education has become very important since their products will be found in basic schools to teach. It is therefore paramount that college tutors have positive knowledge base of formative assessment and be able to follow laid down procedures in administering formative assessment in their colleges.

This study adopted a multiple case study research design. 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. Interviews and classroom observation were used for data collection.

It was revealed that 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 was recommended that since curriculum dictates what is taught and assessed in an educational institution, the University of Cape Coast (the examining body) should re-orient its course content for Colleges of Education to be more of skills acquisition, positive attitudes, values and not the over-emphasised knowledge components as revealed by tutors.

Key-words: Assessment. Formative assessment. Social Studies. Formative assessment in Social Studies. College of Education.

1. Introduction and Background

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 (Gipps, 1999; James & Pedder, 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 (Gipps, 1990; Black & William, 1998). According to Roberts, Gerace, Mestra and Leonard (2000) 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 teachers need to know what children are able to do 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 teachers' perception in designing assessment techniques 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 (Black & William, 1999; James & Pedder, 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. Quartey (1987) asserts that Social Studies is an issue-centred curriculum. Therefore learners must not only acquire knowledge but also demonstrate skills and develop values. This notwithstanding, according to Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh (2013:28) 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. Colleges 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). 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.

Perception of 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 produce 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 quality 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 examinations (Akyeampong, 1997). 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. It is as a result of the above that the researchers aimed at examining Social Studies tutors cognition in formative assessment in Colleges of Education in Ghana.

The problem has been the inability of some teachers to properly assess all the domains of learning in students. This 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 issue of students doing well in classroom assessment in colleges and yet performing poorly in the end-of-semester examination conducted by the University of Cape Coast further casts doubt on the effectiveness of teachers' formative assessment.

There is however, the consensus that, formative assessment is beneficial to both students and teachers if it properly handled. It is therefore important for teachers to have positive cognition towards formative assessment in order to win back public confidence. This could be achieved if teachers try to follow the laid down procedures in administering formative assessment in the college. The study sought to answer the research question: How do colleges of education tutors perceive formative assessment?

2. Literature Review on Cognition Base of Formative assessment

Rowntree (1987) sees assessment as some kind of interaction which takes place when a person obtains and interprets information about another person in terms of his knowledge and understanding or abilities or attitudes. This information collection and interpretation cuts across all situations or aspects of the student's education. To buttress Rowntree, Hammil (1987:5) defines assessment as "the act of acquiring and analyzing information about students. He explains further that the purpose for the collection of information about the student is diagnostic and for planning instructional performances. Hammil (1987), further states that the information collected on the student includes knowledge about an individual's personal attributes, cognitive abilities, environmental status and academic achievement.

Linn and Gronlund (1995:5) write that assessment is a general term that includes "procedures used to obtain information about students learning". They explain that, devices such as observation, ratings of performance, paper and pencil tests are used to obtain information about student learning. The information collected enables teachers to make value judgment covering the learning progress of the student. This means that assessment is a

process of obtaining information about learners, and this can be used for making decisions about the learners, curricula programmes and educational policy.

Dhindsa, Omar and Waldtrip (2007:1261) characterised assessment as a key component of teaching and learning a systematic process of data gathering about students' progress. They maintain that student's performance can be measured in various ways, including "traditional paper and pencil tests, extended responses, performance of authentic task, teacher observation, and student self report". In addition, the authors distinguish between two other terms aligned with assessment:

a)   test "an instrument for measuring a sample of behaviour"

b)   Measurement "the process of obtaining a numerical description of the degree to which   an   individual processes a particular characteristic".

In addition to the above, the report of the National Conference on Teacher Education and its agencies in Ghana (1986:129) agree that assessment is a process of "collecting and analyzing information on trainees and using the results obtained to make decisions on their achievement and performance". It is apparent that assessment is concerned with acquiring knowledge on individual's characteristics in order to foster that individual's educational aspirations and future careers.

In the Western Countries at present, students are encouraged to fully participate in classroom activities. According to Herrera, Murry and Cabral (2007:23), students are now being asked to use their "cognitive development, academic knowledge, and language skills to read, comprehend synthesize, analyse, compare, contrast, relate articulate, write, evaluate and more". To them this encouragement builds the foundation for formative assessment to be used in the classrooms so that the instructors can "measure incremental gains". This implies formative assessment is of immense importance and should be understood very well by assessment practitioners.

Hancock (1994), Cooper (1999), Crawford and Impara (2001), Linn and Miller (2005), and Diaz-Rico and Weed (2006) maintain that formative assessment':

•   Are generally developed directly from classroom instruction, group work, and related classroom activities and provide an alternative to traditional assessment;

•   Can be considered valid and reliable in that they genuinely and consistently assess a student's classroom performance;

•   Facilitate the student's participation in the evaluation process;

•   Include measurement and evaluation relevant to both the teacher and the student; and

•   Emphasise real world problems, tasks, or applications that are relevant to the student and his or her community (cited in Herrera, Murry & Cabral, 2007: 23).

In contrast to summative assessment, which makes overall judgment about the learning achieved during a period of time for the purpose of accountability, formative assessment has learning as its purpose and places agency for the improvement of learning on both the teacher and student (Shavelson & Seal, 2003). The formative assessment literature frames the importance of better understanding in the move to raise standards and improve learning for all students so that high standards may be achieved (Black & William, 1998). Teachers commonly view assessment as something apart from their regular teaching, serving the purpose of assigning grades. However, in order for instruction to be effective, teachers must also assess their students while learning is in progress to gain information about their progress and understanding so that instruction can be adapted accordingly (Black, 1998). Teachers have the most direct access to information about student learning, and are thus in a position to interpret and use information about student learning to provide students with timely feedback (Shepard, 2003; Wilson, 2005). Teachers can also use the information to monitor the effectiveness of their own teaching (NRC, 2001). Formative assessment involves students since they need to recognize, evaluate, and react to their own learning (Sadler 1989; Bell & Cowie, 2001).

Bintz (1991) introduced a shift from traditional assessment forms to a newer paradigm, alternative assessment. Particularly, the emergence of formative and summative assessment as two different formats has attracted educators' attention to the current literature. The authors argue that the use of assessment for student learning is the main feature of formative assessment. According to William and Thompson (2008), Scriven (1967) and Bloom (1969) proposed the terminology "formative" and Bloom (1969) proposed the terminology "formative" and "summative" assessment, given the reason to differentiate the role of evaluation. Formative assessment is introduced, as an ongoing process of evaluating students' learning, providing feedback to adjust instruction and learning, improving the curriculum. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is bound to administrative decisions and assigning grades to the tests.

Bloom (1969) asserts that when assessment is aligned with the process of teaching and learning, it will have "a positive effect on students' learning and their motivation". Assessment in general accounts for "supporting

learning (formative), certifying the achievement or potential of individuals (summative), and evaluating the quality of educational institutions or programmes (evaluate)" (William, 2008:59), Black and William (2004) put more emphasis on the use of assessment to support learning; however, they also acknowledge the importance of using assessment for certification and evaluation. In addition, there is a rising consensus among educators that assessment should be used to diagnose students' achievement, measure their performance, sort students etc.

Current literature on assessment and instruction view assessment as a longitudinal process that occurs during instruction and supports lifelong learning. Birenbaum (1996) makes a distinction between testing and assessment, in which testing measures achievements, mainly cognitive skills such as memorizing factual-information, and is considered separate from instruction. However, the new paradigm of assessment offers an alternative for testing culture which is "characterized by so called objective, such as standardized tests that focused on atomized bits of knowledge at the expense of more complex higher order knowledge and skills", assessment on integrated part of instruction (Gulikers, Bastiaens, Kirshner & Kester, 2006:382.

Although perception of formative assessment vary widely, Black and William (1998:25) defined formative assessment as "all those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. This kind of assessment, called formative assessment, can be conceived as assessment for learning and not of learning (Black & William, 1998; Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glasser, 2008). Melmer, Burmaster, and James (2008) defined formative assessment as a process used during instruction to provide feedback for the adjustment of ongoing teaching and learning for the purposes of improving student achievement related to instructional objectives. An assessment is formative to the degree that the information collected from the assessment is used during assessed instruction period to improve instruction to meet the needs of the students assessed. Also, Popham (2008) defined formative assessment as a planned process during which the teacher or students use assessment-based evidence to adjust ongoing learning and instruction.

To further complicate the issue of operationalizing formative assessment based upon the assessment itself as well as the use of evidence from the assessment, formative assessment serves a myriad of feedback related purposes such as diagnosis, prediction, and evaluation of teacher and student performance (Black & William, 1998). For example, Perie, Marion, and Gong (2007) argue that assessment issues can be clarified if assessment is defined by its purpose. From this perceptive formative assessment is defined as assessment used by teachers and students to adjust teaching and learning, as compared to interim assessment that informs policymakers or educators at the classroom, school, or district level. Defining assessment in this fashion leaves a great deal of confusion for those trying to publish or consume assessment literature because one assessment could be used by students and teachers to inform the learning process as well as by administrators to create policy changes.

The primary goal of formative assessment is therefore to improve the quality of the learner being developed in order to achieve the outcomes. This is also obvious that information resulting from formative assessment serves as feedback for improvement rather than for purpose of grading. Young (2005:4) stresses that successful formative assessment depends on different factors amongst which learners need to believe that improvements in their learning are more likely to occur through their efforts than through their ability. This implies that belief that improvement is possible for everyone regardless of ability, should underpin every activity designed to harness formative assessment to raise standards. Teachers have another important role added to their teaching, that learners attention should be shifted from how clear they are to the effort they are willing to put in.

Formative assessment is used to provide information on the likely performance of students, to describe and feedback given to students, telling them which items they got correct. This opposes the way selected responses measures students' achievement, given students' scores instead of feedback. Formative assessment, according to Wiggins and McTighe (2007), occurs during instruction, as part of instruction rather than a separate activity. It has both formal and informal formats including ungraded quizzes, oral questioning, self-reflection, peer feedback, think aloud etc. A distinction is made between assessment for learning which describes the process of assessment as a support for learning compared to assessment of learning that describes the nature of assessment or the product (Black &William, 1998; William & Thompson, 2008). Similarly other researchers agree that the core features that characterize formative assessment are that it impacts the quality of teaching and learning, and it engages student in self-directed learning environment (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004).

The literature on assessment and teaching expounds on the importance of formative assessment and its implications for instruction and its ultimate goal, that assessment for learning feed into action in the classroom in order to affect learning" (William & Thompson, 2008: 63). Similarly Wiggins and McTighe (2007) argued that by embedding formative assessment in curriculum documents, and advice on how to use their results to adjust curriculum, a school stands to signal that such practices support effective teaching.

Assessment becomes formative in nature in teaching and learning only when the teacher uses that information to adapt instruction and students also uses the information to influence his or her learning (Black, 1998). For example, a 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 (Black & William, 1998; Bell & Cowie, 2001; Shavelson, Black, William & Coffey, n.d.).

The literature raises the issue of formative feedback by closely examining teacher's responses to student's work. For example, if the teacher asks students to provide more details about a written work, the practice is characterized as formative; however, a concern arises as to whether the student know what the instructor meant when he or she asks for elaboration and more details (William & Thompson, 2008). Formative feedback contradicts the traditional evaluative comments teachers frequently use, such as well done, good, or great work and more. Chappuis and Stiggins (2004) argue that judgmental feedback not only holds less for value for improvement and student learning, but it also discourages students from learning. Black and William (1998) assert that formative feedback illuminates students' strengths and weaknesses, provides some suggestion for improvement, and avoids comparing one student with his or her peers.

There are various definitions presented about feedback in the literature; among the authors, Ramaprasad (1983:4) describes feedback as a tool that provides information that has an impact on the performance, stating, "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." In addition, Black and William (1998) point out the importance of oral feedback provided by the teacher, enabling students to reflect on their learning. They write, "the dialogue between pupils and a teacher should be thoughtfully reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, so that all pupils have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas." Given the definitions and characteristics of formative feedback, it is an important component of instruction that occurs while the instruction occurs and enables the instructor to adjust instruction based on students' suppositions respectively. Feedback is most effective when it identifies what students are doing right as well as what they need to work on next (Stiggins, 2010). According to Black and William (1998), and other motivational researchers (Butler, 1988; Sadler 1989; Assessment Reform group, 2000; Dweck, 2001) clearly show that the type of feedback given to student affects their motivation to learn:

•   It is the quality of the feedback rather than its existence or absence that determines its power. Specifically, what makes the difference is the use of descriptive, criterion based feedback as opposed to numerical scoring or letter grades.

•   Feedback emphasizing that it is the learning that is important that leads to greater learning than feedback implying that what is important is good and how you compare it to others.

•   Descriptive feedback can focus on strength or weakness; feedback is most effective when it points out strength in the work as well as areas needing improvement.

Providing student with descriptive feedback is a crucial part of increasing achievements. Feedback helps students answer the question where am I now?" with respect to where do I need to be? "You are also modeling the kind of thinking you want students to engage in when they self assess. Basically feedback focused on the component of what had been taught and further narrow the volume of feedback students need to act on at a given time and raise their chances of success in doing so again, especially for struggling learning. This is a time saver for a teacher and more instructionally, powerful for students. Also, feedback from teachers and peers about student learning enhances their self assessment. This is important because when students are monitoring their learning they engage in meta-cognition. (National Research Council, 2001). Saddler (1989) emphasize that, to be able to self monitor and engaged in meta-cognitive activity students must come to hold a conception of quality similar to the teacher. Formative assessment can be summarized in three central questions to be answered by the students or teacher (NRC, 2001): Where are you going?; Where are you now?; and How are you going to get there?

This three-step process summarizes what has been called the "feedback loop" in formative assessment; that is, setting a learning goal, determining the gap between the learning goal and the student's present state of understanding, and formulating feedback to close the gap. Each step will be described in more detail below:

Although they may often be tacit, teachers have goals for their students as they conduct learning activities. Sadler (1989) described the process of goal-setting in detail. These goals may come in the form of what type of product they are looking for, the quality of their argument, or the clarity of an explanation provided by a student. Teachers can make goals explicit to students through descriptive statements, which detail the different aspects of

the goal; or examples, which show gradations of quality up to the desired standard. Despite a teacher's best efforts, a goal only becomes important to the students when they adopt the goal internally for themselves. In many educational settings, goals that are specific rather than vague have been shown to be most effective at capturing students' attention and increasing mobilization on a task. These learning goals, while often viewed as conceptual in nature, can also be spread across the other domains of learning (Duschl, 2003).

The literature offers a metaphor of a gap to help conceptualise the role assessment can play in helping students to achieve learning goals (Sadler, 1989; Black & William, 1998). If one side of the gap represents student learning goals (point B) and the other represents the current place where students sit with respect to those goals (point A), the distance between points A and B comprises a gap that needs to be bridged. To establish the size of the gap between points A and B, the teacher must in some way make the students' thinking visible so that their level of understanding can be compared to the goal. This can include eliciting students' thinking through verbal or written prompts, reviewing students' notebooks or homework, or listening to small-group conversations.

In many conversations about assessment, the focus stops with an inference concerning student understanding (point A), and at times includes how much it falls short of point B or the goals. While the gap metaphor lacks the complexity inherent in any classroom activity, it does capture the possibility of how assessment can provide teachers and students with information that can inform actions that bridge the gap. The optimum gap size is hypothesized to be not too large or too small, so as to create sufficient determination for the student to adopt and reach the goal and the process that connects the teacher's goals or criteria with the students' current state of understanding, that is, the process that closes the gap, is the "feedback loop" or the process of the teacher providing feedback to students. The extent that any such information serves to inform teaching and influence learning depends in a large part on how it is used. Teachers must not only interpret and make meaning of the information; they must also use the information to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of their students (Black & William, 1998). Assessment that facilitates learning not only helps the teacher know where the students is starting from (point A), but also highlights for the student where he or she is headed (point B) and provides actions to help them reach this point. A feedback loop from assessment to teaching and learning is a primary mechanism by which the gap between point A and point B is bridged.

This according to Sadler (1989), teachers can use feedback to make decisions about diagnosing levels of student understanding and preparing for remediation when it is necessary, whereas students gain information about the strengths and weaknesses of their performances so that they can maintain those aspects that are of high quality and focus their efforts on those in need of improvement (Sadler, 1989). In order to deliver feedback effectively, the teacher must have set clear goals and have some kind of interpretive framework for student understanding (Minstrell, 1992; Black & William, 1998), however, the teacher must also capitalize on opportunities to elicit student thinking and provide feedback based on the goal and framework. The feedback provided by the teacher is dependent upon the particular learning goal.

The medium for delivery of feedback, like formative assessment, can take many forms, formal written comments on a student's paper to informal conversations during class. Instructional feedback is not intended to be evaluative, but is a qualitative evaluation of a student's progress at a point in time. This aspect is a characteristic of all formative assessment where student work is not evaluated on a right or wrong basis, but as part of a continuum of growth toward increasing quality or degree of expertise (Sadler, 1989).

There are many actions a teacher can take to close the gap, from describing new procedures, to explaining how a sentence could be edited for more clarity, to planning another activity to re-teach a certain concept. While teachers are commonly engaged in the activity of critiquing the work of others, students are often not involved in this activity. Allowing students to review the work of peers provides them the opportunity to see how the work of others might be improved, and is an important step to helping them learn to self-assess (Sadler, 1989; Black *et al*., 2002).

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 described above. Other 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. When more specific comments are provided to the students, they should be based upon 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 (Sadler, 1989). The effectiveness of feedback depends on the quality of the feedback rather than existence or absence (Black & William, 1998; Black, 1998; Crooks, 2001). This includes the quality and saliency of the information gathered in the first place and the appropriateness and relevance of subsequent actions. There is all indication that the concept formative assessment has usefulness and this goes with each technique under it contributing. For formative assessment to

see the light of day there is always the need to evaluate student learning seriously. In this wise assessment implementers can do well if they are highly knowledgeable and abreast with how the concept "formative assessment" is conducted.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a case study research design. The study 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 Merriam (1998), 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 formative assessment 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 (Lunn, 2006; Cohen *et al.,* 2007).

As this case study focused is on the views of the tutors surrounding classroom formative assessment in three 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. We 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 population for the study 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 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 researchers. 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 thirteen semi-structured checklist and Observation guide made up of ten (10) 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), and Nancy Zarach (Syracuse City School District). The multiple instruments were used to 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. 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. Interviews and discussions were transcribed and responses used in analyzing the study. In addition, verbatim expressions of respondents were used where applicable.

4. Tutors' Cognition Base of Formative Assessment

Tutors perception of formative assessment is presented under this section. The main objective was to determine whether there are differences in the perception of formative assessment by social studies tutors of Colleges of Education in Central Region of Ghana. Some items were placed in the interview checklist to elicit tutors' views on the issue. Their responses are discussed below:

Item 1 of the interview checklist read *what do you perceive formative assessment to be?* Kweku (not his real name) said "is a form of assessment in which tutors or teachers assess students internally from the beginning of the lesson throughout to the end... It is also the hands on deck process of information on the students' academic achievements in the classroom". Ama (not her real name) said "it is any form of test teachers gives to students in the course of instructional period". Kwamena (not his real name) said "is the type of assessment which is ongoing or goes on in the course of instructional delivery". One of the respondent also viewed formative assessment as a process used during instruction to provide feedback for the adjustment of ongoing teaching and learning for the purposes of improving student achievement related to instructional objectives. This really shows that respondents are abreast with what formative assessment is and do not see it as the same as summative assessment. Although various definitions are given about formative assessment in the literature, in contrast to summative assessment, it makes overall judgment about the learning achieved during a period of time for the purpose of accountability; formative assessment has learning as its purpose and places agency for the

improvement of learning on both the teacher and student (Shavelson & Seal, 2003). This implies that formative assessment is introduced, as an ongoing process of evaluating students' learning, providing feedback to adjust instruction and learning, improving the curriculum, whilst summative assessment, on the other hand, is bound to administrative decisions and assigning grades to the tests. To further complicate the issue of operationalizing formative assessment based upon the assessment itself as well as the use of evidence from the assessment, formative assessment serves a myriad of feedback related purposes such as diagnosis, prediction, and evaluation of teacher and student performance(Black & William, 1998).

Item 2 of the interview checklist *reads do formative assessment and summative assessment serve the same purpose?* With this, respondents came out that formative assessment and summative assessment do not serve the same purpose. Mensa (not the real name) said "formative assessment is generally developed directly from classroom instruction, group work, and related classroom activities and provides an alternative to traditional assessment that normally deals with assigning grades to students". The formative assessment literature frames the importance of better understanding classroom assessment in the move to raise standards and improve learning for all students so that high standards may be achieved (Black & William, 1998). Teachers commonly view assessment as something apart from their regular teaching, serving the purpose of assigning grades. However, in order for instruction to be effective, teachers must also assess their students while learning is in progress to gain information about their progress so that instruction can be adapted accordingly (Black, 1998). Teachers have the most direct access to information about student learning, and are thus in a position to interpret and use information about student learning to provide students with timely feedback (Shepard, 2003; Wilson, 2005). This implies that teachers can also use the information to monitor the effectiveness of their own teaching; however, formative assessment also involves students since they need to recognize, evaluate, and react to their own learning and others' assessment of their learning.

Item 3 of the interview checklist reads *what purposes do formative assessments serve?* Ato (not his real name) said "(1) it helps the tutor shape the method of teaching…and (2)…in the classroom it assists the tutor to come to the extent at which students have assimilated the lesson content". Musa (not his real name) said it serves as remedial teaching to the tutor…also in the classroom context it assists the tutor to find out about what has been absorbed by students. Araba (not her real name) said "it helps the tutor to know if the objectives of the lesson have been achieved…and (2) if the students are improving on what the tutor is teaching". This shows that respondents are aware of the importance of formative assessment.

Item 4 of the interview checklist reads *can formative assessment enhances the efficacy of one's instructional strategies in social studies*? *Give reasons for your answer*. Most of the respondents said yes with varying reasons. Ama (not her real name) said "it usage helps one to assess himself or herself in teaching and learning process…whether he or she is making inroads in his or her classroom activities". Esi (not her real name) said "formative assessments encourage students to think of a response or an idea from different angles in social studies class". Another tutor also said that it helps to ascertain whether your students are ready to proceed to the next grade. This implies that formative assessment can enhances the efficacy of social studies tutor's instructional strategies.

Item 5 of the interview checklist reads *how can formative assessments provide a teacher with a bridge between assessment and teaching?* Kweku (not his real name) said that "formative assessment is a way of informing and involving the students themselves in the process of assessment and learning". One of the respondents said that while formative assessment provides a teacher with a bridge between assessment and teaching, it is essentially a way of creating independent, reflective learners who can plan and assess their own progress. Black and William (1998); Popham (2008) and quarters (2008) stated that formative assessment involves students in teaching and learning activities in the classroom. To construct a way forward for the learner, Sadler (1998:84) suggested that feedback must: be accessible to and understood by the learner; have a catalytic and coaching value which will inspire confidence and hope in the learner; enable the learner to identify gaps between current and desired performance, and to take some action to close that gap.

Item 6 of the interview checklist reads *do you consider formative assessment to be valid and reliable in assessing student's classroom performance and why?* Most of the respondents said formative assessment need to be considered valid and reliable in that they genuinely and consistently assess students' classroom performance. The concept of validity in formative assessment according to Herrera *et al* (2007) refers to the ability of an assessment, process, or product to measure the knowledge or skills it is intended to measure. Reliability is consistent assessment results that yield from a test (Linn & Miller, 2005). This implies that when tutors use validity and reliability in formative assessment it will improve students' performance in the teaching and learning activities in the classroom.

Item 7 of the interview checklist reads *do formative assessment facilitates students' participation in the evaluation process?* Most of the respondents said formative assessment can facilitates students' participation in the evaluation process. Mensa (not his real name) commented "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". This implies that student involvement in the learning process is critical. This was supported by 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. 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).

5. Conclusions

Tutors conceptualized formative assessment not to be the same as summative assessment and that both do not serves the same purpose. Formative Assessment Classroom Techniques (FACTs) is an integral part of teaching and learning; clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success, and engineer effective classroom discussions and learning tasks.

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.

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.

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.

6. Recommendations

That, in order to build a common knowledge base for tutors of the subject on formative assessment, the University of Cape Coast (UCC) and University of Education, Winneba (UEW) who are tasked in training Social Studies tutors for the Colleges of Education in Ghana should come together and set the bench mark for assessing Social Studies outcomes. This is because the observation and interviews outcome reveals that tutors were not abreast with and having the needed knowledge in some assessment tools like scoring rubrics, concept mapping, scaffolding and portfolio as tools in formative assessment for teaching and learning of Social Studies in the Colleges of Education. Out of the nine tutors, one was not a Social Studies trained and it is recommended that because of it sensitive nature it should be taught by professionally qualified Social Studies tutors.

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