Classroom Assessment of Learners: Assessment Practices of Junior High School Social Studies Teachers in two Districts of Ghana

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine Junior High School Social Studies teachers' assessment practices in two districts in Ghana. The study was conducted in the Asuogyaman and Krachi East districts in the Eastern and Oti Regions respectively. The participants of the study were one hundred (100) Junior High School Social Studies teachers drawn purposively from the two selected districts. Data were collected through the administration of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observation. The study employed the mixed-method approach. Results of the study revealed that the Junior High School teachers preferred and actually used traditional assessment techniques in their teaching activities. Their assessment conceptions and practices are rooted in the traditional learning paradigm. It is recommended that Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) should reconsider their curriculum and emphasise more on the teaching of alternative or contemporary approaches to educational assessments. It was also recommended that refresher courses should be organised for in-service teachers to up-grade their knowledge and skills in alternative educational assessment practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The intimate connection between classroom assessment, teaching and learning has long been established [1,2]. Using classroom assessment to promote teaching and student learning is highly supported by the literature (Black & William, 2005). The seemingly huge support for classroom assessment as a means of promoting learning has come on the heels of the emergence of the constructivist learning paradigm [3,4]. The thrust of this theory advocates that assessment in education should primarily be used to promote learning and not for grading and promotion purposes as in the case of the traditional learning paradigm [5]. Despite the enormous potential of using classroom assessment to promote learning [6], it appears this form of assessment is not widely used by teachers [4]. This situation according to Pellegrino [4] is because most teachers' conceptions of teaching, learning and assessment are inherently rooted in the traditional learning paradigm where learning is seen as atomistic bits of knowledge, learning tightly sequenced and hierarchical. Martin [5] also posits that teachers enter teaching with prior knowledge and beliefs about learning and assessment. This prior knowledge, according to Martin [5], affects teachers' choices of teaching and assessment practices.

In recognition of the changing conceptions and importance of assessment to the teaching and learning process, the 1987 educational reform in Ghana introduced the Continuous Assessment (CA) policy into the Ghanaian Education System. The policy replaced the traditional one- shot examination system that existed before the reforms in 1987. The reform introduced a new assessment culture into Ghanaian schools. The policy mandated that a percentage (30%) of the cumulative classroom assessment scores of students were to be added to the external examination marks for grading and certification. The policy was also to ensure that teachers incorporated assessment in their teaching. Subsequently, the School Based-Assessment (SBA) system was introduced. It was a variation of the Continuous Assessment (CA) policy. However, these classroom or formative assessment policies have been criticised as being fraught with computation malpractices thereby making them unreliable to be used for grading and certification.

The introduction of these classroom assessment policies appear to have suffered a setback.

Students' chances of progressing in education at the pre-tertiary level depend heavily on external examinations conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). To get admission into Senior High School (SHS), Junior High School (JHS) students are required to have good passes in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). Likewise, Senior High School students are also to obtain extremely good passes in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in order to gain admission into public tertiary institutions in Ghana. Even primary school pupils are not spared this ordeal; they are expected to do well in end-of term examinations in order to earn promotion to the next class. In view of the high-stake nature of assessment at the pre-tertiary level in Ghana, students are mostly interested in passing their examinations so that they are not left behind. Teachers are also compelled to teach in a way that would make their students pass their external examinations and move on. The resultant effects confirm what Pellegrino [4] states that high-stakes assessment leads to narrowing of instruction by teaching to the tests with restricted performance outcomes, and also often leads to misalignment of tests, curricular and instruction.

Undoubtedly, efforts have been made to reform educational assessment in Ghana. But there have been concerns about the effectiveness and success of the reforms. In particular there have been concerns about the assessment practices of teachers, including basic school Social Studies teachers [7,8]. In view of the assertion that teachers are the main conduit [8] for the transformation from traditional assessment to alternative assessment practices, it is imperative to understand the situation from the teachers' standpoint by probing into their assessment practices.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research indicates that classroom assessment is very critical in teaching in that effective teaching practices and classroom decisions rely heavily on assessment [4, 9]. Researchers have also documented that teachers' personal teaching beliefs and philosophies significantly impact their actual teaching practices such as assessment [10-12]. Recognising the invaluable role educational assessment plays in the teaching and learning process, all successive educational reforms since 1987 have recommended the need to integrate

assessments in teaching and learning activities in schools. Junior High School Social Studies teachers, classroom assessment is very essential in achieving the ultimate objective of training responsible citizens who are well-informed, concerned, reflective and participatory [13].

But, concerns have been raised about the implementation of assessment in relation to how teachers approach classroom assessment in schools. Notably, concerns have been expressed about the non-use of assessment to drive instructional activities in the classroom, perceiving and using assessment as an adjunct to the instructional process. Also, assessment techniques and practices usually adopted by most teachers have been considered inappropriate and not in conformity with best practices. In addition, assessment results are mainly used to promote learners to the next level and for certification purposes. What is really not clear are the practices employed by the teachers as they seek to integrate assessment in their teaching and learning activities. Drawing from the assessment literature [14,10], that the pedagogical beliefs and practices of teachers are crucial factors to consider when introducing reforms in education, it is important to ascertain through empirical studies the way Junior High School Social Studies teachers' embed assessment activities in their lessons in order to understand the situation and inform practice.

3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to create awareness about the classroom assessment practices of Junior High School Social Studies teachers in two districts in Ghana. The objective of the study was to assess Junior High School Social Studies teachers' classroom assessment practices in the Asuogyaman and Krachi East districts of Ghana.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Theoretical Considerations

Shepard [15] developed a historical framework to illustrate the transformation taking place in the field of assessment as a result of the emergence of the constructivist learning theory. The constructivist learning theory has brought about new thinking about learning that has necessitated reforms in teaching and assessment. Delandshere and Jones [16, p. 217] state that assessment is at the centre of current educational reforms as a result of new perspectives on teaching, learning, and curriculum. They indicate that the driving force behind most educational reforms are constructivist learning principles. Consequently, teachers who are implementers of these reforms are encouraged to be guided by these principles in their teaching and assessment activities. For instance, Shepard (2007) contends that for teachers to be compatible with the constructivist model of teaching and learning, classroom assessment practices must change in two basic ways. First, he states that the form and content of assessment must be changed to better represent important problem solving skills in each of the disciplines. Second, he suggest that the usage of assessment in classrooms and how it is perceived by teachers and students must change. To better appreciate the driving force behind the transformation in educational assessment, Shepard [15] provides a historical framework that chronicles the transformation of curriculum and learning theories that have underpinned teaching, learning and assessment to current practices and perspectives. The chronology is illustrated in Fig. 1.

The thrust of Shepard's [15] conceptual framework is to highlight the fact that traditional views and practices of assessment are underpinned by past (traditional) models of curriculum and instructions. Shepard [15] contends that the framework is relevant because dominant theories of the past continue to operate as the default framework affecting and driving assessment practices and perspectives. As depicted in the conceptual framework, the traditional measurement perspective originated from an earlier and highly consistent theoretical framework (as found on the left in Fig. 1). In these theories, conceptions of scientific measurement were closely associated with traditional curricular and beliefs about learning. The other side (right of the framework) depicts an emergent constructivist learning paradigm in which teachers' assessment of learners understandings, feedback from peers, and students self – assessments are a central part of the instructional process that enhance the development of intellectual abilities, construction of knowledge, and formation of students identity.
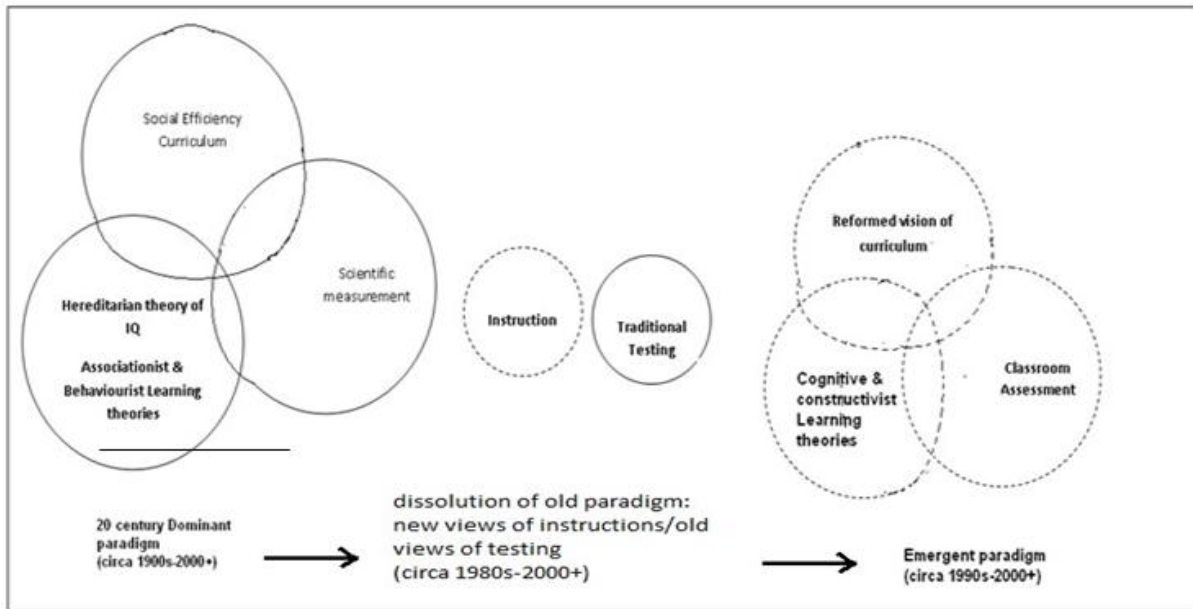
Fig. 1. A historical framework illustrating how changing conception"s of curriculum, learning theory, and measurement explain the current incompatibility between new views of instruction and traditional views of assessment (from Shepard, 2000) [15]

The middle of the framework (Fig. 1) depicts the lack of harmony between current instructional assessment practices. The dissonance is created because current instructional views and practices are based on emergent learning paradigm, whilst most assessment conceptions and practices are still hinged on traditional views of learning [15:4]. The existence and parallel use of the two paradigms to inform practice have therefore created broadly two schools - of - thought on the practice and role of assessment in education. While traditional theories of learning emphasise summative role, emergent theories of learning emphasise a formative role in the instructional process. In view of this, Pellegrino [4:9] states that "every assessment is grounded in a conception or theory about how people learn, what people know, and how knowledge and understanding progress over time". Pellegrino [4] further submits that most current assessment practices are the cumulative product of various prior theories of learning and methods of measurement. While acknowledging that some of these foundations are still important for certain functions of assessments, Pellegrino argues that change is needed. Pellegrino [4] intimates that summative functions of assessment such as measuring knowledge of basic facts and procedures and producing overall estimates of proficiency for restricted parts of the curriculum are inconsistent with current views of learning and therefore needs to be done away with.

Pellegrino emphasise that the strength and weaknesses of summative assessment are a product of adherence to theories of learning and measurement that is outmoded and fails to capture the breadth and richness of knowledge and competence.

4.2 Empirical Review on Teachers' Assessment Practices

Rudner and Schafer [17] indicate that to talk about assessment is to discuss several things at once. This is because assessment encompasses several things including measuring, analysing, evaluating, defining and summarising what students can do or conferring what students could do. Thus, assessment comes in various forms and addresses many purposes [17], as a result there is no single definition or easily cut out meaning that one can identify with the concept 'assessment'. Despite the lack of consensus regarding the true meaning and nature of assessment, various scholars and researchers have attempted to define it, perhaps with different goals. In the opinion of Palomba and Banta [18, p. 4] assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programmes for the purpose of improving learning. Similarly, O'Leary [19] asserts that educational assessment is the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and communicating information about all

27

aspects of a learner's development to aid in decision making. The Irish National Teachers' Organization [INTO] [20,p. 21] also perceive assessment as "all those activities undertaken by teachers and by their students in assessing themselves, and which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engage". Pellegrino [21] in defining assessment inadvertently distinguishes between assessment for accountability and assessment to assist learning. Pellegrino asserts that assessment involves the process of gathering information for the purpose of making judgments about a current state of affairs. In educational assessment, the information collected is designed to help teachers, administrators, policy makers and the public to infer what students know and how well they know it, presumably for the purpose of enhancing future outcomes [21, p. 49]. By this definition, Pellegrino [21] presents a perceived duality nature of assessment. Pellegrino [21] argues that part of the confusion stems from the fact that some of these outcomes are more immediate, such as the use of assessment in the classroom to improve learning, and others are more delayed, such as the use of assessment for programmed evaluation. Pellegrino's assertion implies that in thinking about assessment there is the need to keep in mind issues of context and purpose. Thus, sometimes assessment is used to look for an insight into the state of affairs in the classroom while at other times emphasis is on the school system.

Educationist and researchers are increasingly interested in identifying practices that contribute to improved learning. In recent time, assessment has gained a centre stage in the education system [22]. Steinberg [22] posits that assessment has become a pivotal aspect of education for three main reasons. First, assessment is a key institutional structure in the struggle for increased social justice. That is, it acts as a gate keeper that enables or denies access to higher education, work increased income/social status. Second, assessment is a leverage point used by education policy-makers to generate educational reform. Third, through externally-set standardised testing, schools are held accountable for educational quality.

Classroom assessment practices have particularly been identified as a useful tool for supporting student learning [6]. Therefore, since teachers are primarily responsible for assessing student learning, there is a widespread concern

about teachers' assessment practices [23]. Zhang and Burry-Stock [23] indicate that investigation into teachers' assessment practices involve a broad array of activities ranging from constructing assessment items, administering, grading, interpreting scores, communicating results, and using assessment results in decision-making. To Shaw [24] these assessment practices are categorised broadly into three stages: designing the assessment, delivering the assessment and making decisions from assessment observations. According to Shaw [24], while teachers engage in specific assessment practices at each stage, researchers and educators usually only have access to or are able to observe delivery-related practices.

The principal objective of classroom assessment should be to obtain information about students' progress and achievement [25]. To this end, teachers employ various methods of assessment in the classroom to identify students' progress in learning and their academic achievement [26]. Airasian [26] has observed that, teachers usually use written test and performance or authentic assessment such as observation and questioning to obtain information about students' learning. Researchers have intimated that assessment-related activities used in the classroom convey important information about what is valued there, and also have a great deal of influence on students' performance [27, 23]. Mertler [28] surveyed classroom activities and concluded that teachers spend a large amount of time on assessment-related activities. Mertler therefore contends that in view of the considerable time teachers spend on assessment, it is crucial to identify the classroom assessment practices of teachers.

Brown [29] provides empirical evidence that suggest that there is a strong correlation between teachers' assessment practices and teaching and learning activities. Brown [29] surveyed basic school teachers and concluded that most basic school teachers base their assessment practices on their individual values and notion of teaching. However, Brown's study further revealed that the relationship of teachers' assessment practices to teaching and learning were highly diverse. This implies that the assessment practices of teachers are varied and sometimes inconsistent with their values. Kahn [30] clarified these inconsistencies in an observational study of secondary school teachers. Kahn observed that teachers' classroom practices were 'eclectic'. Kahn's study

also revealed that most of the teachers' classroom practices were drawn from the two main learning paradigms: traditional or behaviourist and constructivist learning paradigm. Most of the teachers observed by Kahn incorporated teaching and assessment practices associated with the constructivist learning theory as well as traditional learning models in their teaching. This confirms the proposition that instructional activities such as assessment are influenced by the beliefs or conceptions of teachers about the nature of teaching and learning [29]. This inconsistency reflected in a study conducted by Maclellan [31] to describe the assessment practices of tutors in higher institutions. The study posted that, the teachers declared commitment to formative assessment, but they mostly engaged in assessment practices contrary to their espoused beliefs and commitment.

Generally, researchers have documented that traditional assessment practices dominate in most classroom assessment activities [32-34]. Kuze and Shumba [32] investigated how teachers implemented formative assessment practices in Grade nine (9) technology classrooms in the Fort Beaufort district in South Africa. The investigation revealed that the teachers studied had no knowledge of how to implement formative assessment in their classrooms. The study also found that the teachers did not only lack knowledge on formative assessment practices but had negative attitude towards it. The authors recommended that teachers need to be re-trained on how to implement formative assessment practices in schools.

In Ghana, Nabie, Akayuure and Sofo [35] investigated Ghanaian teachers' assessment practices and challenges of integrating problem solving and investigations in teaching Mathematics. A sample of 159 certificated teachers' assessment practices were examined. The study found that many practicing teachers integrated and used multiple assessment techniques in their problem solving and investigation lessons. However, a majority of the teachers' (62.65%) indicated the use of traditional rather than alternative assessment techniques in their lessons. The study reports that the teachers posited a variety of reasons for their choice of those assessment techniques. These included pedagogical issues, motivation, social learning, diagnosis and student thinking problems. The major challenges limiting the teachers from using problem solving and investigations assessment techniques were categorised by the researchers as curriculum, student-related and teacher-related issues. A similar study was conducted by Sofo, Ocansey, Nabie and Asola [36] to describe Ghanaian Secondary School Physical Education teachers' assessment practices. The study found that the teachers employed observation, skill test, knowledge test, demonstration, peer observation and oral report in their Physical Education lessons. The study reported the teachers employed three types of assessment practices in their theory lessons. These were knowledge test, individual project and essay.

Studies have revealed that teachers face lots of challenges in conducting classroom assessment. A study by Lumadi [37] found that major challenges such as policy interpretation, assessment planning, implementation of assessment, the use of variety of methods in assessment and time for assessment affect teachers' assessment practices. Also, studies by Hsu [38] and Gatullo [39] revealed that teacher characteristics such as teacher beliefs, teacher training, class size, gender, and teacher experience influence teacher assessment practices. Lumadi [37] contends that in view of the importance of classroom assessment practices of teachers to teaching and learning, teachers need to understand and be familiar with a variety of essential assessment concepts, principles, techniques, tools, strategies and procedures. Lumadi contend that knowledge of these will improve the assessment skills of teachers. Brown [29] on his part argues that classroom assessment is one of the most crucial teacher professional development needs. As a result, Brown submits that understanding teachers' ideas, views, perceptions and beliefs about assessment as well as the challenges associated with classroom assessment practices is an essential step in teacher education and professional development.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Approach and Design

The general research approach employed in this study is the mixed method. The approach allows the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in one study [40]. Molina- Azorin [41] suggests that an important consideration in designing and conducting a mixed method design is whether that design best addresses the

research purpose and questions. Specifically, the sequential explanatory mixed-method design were employed. Consistent with the strategy, quantitative data was first collected from the Junior High School Social Studies teachers in the two districts and analysed. This was followed with a collection of qualitative data through interviews and observations and then analysed. The data collected and analysed separately were then interpreted together using the entire results.

5.2 Population of the Study

The population for this study comprised of all Junior High School Social Studies teachers in the Oti and Eastern Regions of Ghana. The accessible population comprised of basic school Social Studies teachers in the Asuogyaman District and Krachi East Municipality in the Eastern and Oti regions of Ghana. The districts used for the study in the two regions were conveniently chosen as a result of extensive working knowledge of the two districts. This facilitated sampling of schools and respondents (teachers) for the study. Records from the education directorates (2021/2022 academic year) of the two districts indicated a total of 1,013 basic school teachers in the Asuogyaman district. This was made up of 473 males and 540 females. The Krachi East Municipal had a total of 924 basic school teachers, comprising 443 males and 481 females. A total of 100 basic school Social Studies teachers were drawn from the two districts for the study.

5.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

Probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to sample the participating schools and teachers respectively. Participating schools were randomly sampled in the districts. The homogeneous purposive sampling was employed to select one hundred (100) teachers from forty (40) Junior High Schools (20 per district) to form the respondents for the study. Records from the districts estimate 60 out of the 1,013 and 55 out of the 924 basic school teachers in the Asuogyaman and Krachi East districts respectively were Social Studies teachers. Using Krejcie and Morgan's [42] table for determining appropriate sample size from a population for research, 52 and 48 Social Studies teachers were selected from the Social Studies in the Asuogyaman and Krachi East districts respectively to constitute the sample size of 100 Social Studies teachers for the study. To be included in the sample, that teacher should be a trained teacher teaching Social Studies in a public Junior High School in the districts.

5.4 Instrumentation and Procedure for Data Collection

A survey questionnaire (α= 0.74) titled teachers' classroom assessment practices, a semi-structured interview guide and observation guide were used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire was used to collect data on the teachers' routine classroom assessment practices in five main areas: techniques used to record students' assessment results, techniques used to give feedback assessment feedback, assessment techniques used by teachers in teaching, uses of assessment results, techniques used to communicate or report assessment results. Each area was made up of assessment activities comprising traditional and constructivist or alternative assessment techniques. The respondents were to indicate the frequency at which they employed each technique in their assessment techniques. This aimed at identifying which theoretical or conceptual assessment practices that the teachers fancy and use regularly in their teaching activities. The survey asked respondents to grade their use of various assessment techniques on a five (5)- point likert scale ranging from 5 (Always) to 1 (Never) in their teaching. First three questions of the five questions were related to the teachers' assessment practices in their daily teaching. Questions 1 and 2 sought to find out the frequency at which the teachers' use the assessment techniques listed to record students' results and give feedback respectively. Question 3 sought to find out the preferred assessment techniques that are commonly used by the teachers in their classroom assessment practices. Questions 4 and 5 sought to find out how the teachers' use the assessment results they generate (question 4), and the preferred means by which assessment results are communicated to students, parents and other stakeholders (question 5).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to probe into the teachers' classroom assessment practices. Using an interview guide, in all four (4) teachers (2 per each district) were interviewed. Two Junior High School Social Studies teachers in each district were interviewed and immediately followed with observations. Interviews generally have been described as very useful when they are applied to the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena [43]. Therefore, the

teaching of two teachers in each of the districts was observed immediately after interviewing them. The observations lasted for the entire duration of the lessons, which is70 minutes. The observations were aimed at determining whether what the teachers professed as their classroom assessment beliefs actually reflected in their assessment practices in their Social Studies instructional activities. The teachers who were interviewed and their lessons observed were assigned pseudonyms (Mr. Coffie, Mr. Boye, Mr. Doe and Ms. Roselyn) appropriate to their sex for ethical reasons.

6. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The study was conducted purposely to assess the assessment practices of Junior High School Social Studies teachers. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to run descriptive statistics of the quantitative data and qualitative data was analysed thematically. The quantitative data were presented in tables. One hundred (100) questionnaires were administered to public Junior High School Social Studies teachers in the Asuogyaman District and Krachi East Municipal Assembly in the Eastern and Oti Regions of Ghana respectively. Four teachers (2 each from the districts) were interviewed and their lessons observed.

6.1 Presentation of Quantitative Data Results

The questionnaire elicited assessment practices that the teachers (respondents) employ in their instructional activities in Social Studies. The first two questions sought to find out about the frequency at which the teachers use a list of assessment techniques to record and give feedback of assessment results to their students. The third item solicited information about how often they employed a list of assessment techniques (traditional and constructive) in their teaching. The fourth and fifth items also requested the teachers to indicate how they used assessment data and the means they use to communicate or report classroom assessment results to the students and other stakeholders. The analysis was presented in the order in which the items were stated in the questionnaire.

6.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In addition to the assessment practices, the questionnaire was also used to collect biographic information of the respondents. The findings in relation to the demographic variables of the respondents are summarised in Table 1, and followed by a description of the results in the table.

Respondents for the study consisted of 100 Junior High school Social Studies teachers' purposively drawn from the two districts. The sample consisted of 39 females and 61 males representing 39% and 61% respectively. More than half (n =59, 59%) hold a Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) followed by 38 (38%) respondents with a Bachelor of Education degree. Just 3 (3%) possessed a Master's degree. In terms of teaching experience,

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Items	Variables	Frequency (*f*)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	39	39
	Male	61	61
Academic qualification	Masters	3	3
	Bachelors Degree	38	38
	Diploma Basic Edu.	59	59
Years of teaching experience	Below 5	39	39
	6-10 yrs.	40	40
	11-15 yrs.	16	16
	16-20 yrs.	12	12
	Above 20	9	9
Attended in-service training in the last three years?	Yes	45	45
	No	55	55
Type of in-service training attended in last three years.	SBI	58	58
	Assessment related	14	14
	Others	28	28

Source: Field work, March 2022

Table 2. Assessment techniques used by jhs social studies teachers to record and give assessment feedback to students in the two districts

Item	Assessment techniques	N f (%)	R f (%)	S f (%)	O f (%)	A f (%)	Mean M
	Marks	1 (1)	2 (2)	5 (5)	21 (21)	71 (71)	3.06
	Letter Grades	41 (41)	18 (18)	33 (33)	5 (5)	3 (3)	2.11
Recording students work using…	Written Comments	1 (1)	5 (5)	67 (67)	18 (18)	9 (9)	3.29
	Teaching diary/log	61 (61)	25 (25)	9 (9)	2 (2)	3 (3)	1.61
Giving feedback using…	Marks	1 (1)	0 (0)	8 (8)	15 (15)	76 (76)	4.65
	Letter Grades	34(34)	20 (20)	40 (40)	6 (6)	0 (0)	2.18
	Written Documents	7 (7)	3 (3)	61 (61)	18 (18)	11 (11)	3.23
	Dialogue/ Conference	16(16)	26 (26)	44 (44)	12 (12)	2 (2)	2.58
	Discussion	0 (0)	8 (8)	38 (38)	32 (32)	22 (22)	3.68

Source: Fieldwork, March 2022. KEY: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, O = Often, A = Always

39 (39%) had less than five years teaching experience, 40(40%) had 6-10 years' experience in teaching, 16(16%), 12 (12%), and 9(9%) of the respondents also had 11-15 years, 16-20 years and above 20 years teaching experiences respectively. 45% indicated they have not attended an in-service training over the past three years as against 55% who indicated they have attended an in-service training in the same period. However, it must be noted that those who indicated that they have attended some in-service training, stated in-service trainings that were not related to assessment.

6.3 Assessment Techniques JHS Social Studies Teachers use to Record and Give Feedback to Students

Table 2 presents information about teachers assessment practices in respect of assessment techniques used to record assessment results and give assessment feedback to students.

As presented in Table 2, the descriptive analysis indicate that majority of the teachers preferred using marks to record students' performance (92%, M=3.06), 33% of the respondents preferred using letter grades to record student work sometimes, while only 2% and 3% indicated they preferred using teaching diary/log often and always respectively. A significant number

comprising 86% indicated they have never or rarely used teaching diary or log to record students work (M=1.61). Theoretically, the teachers preferred using the traditional assessment technique (Marks) most as compared to the alternative techniques such as written comments and teaching diary. Table 2 also presents the results of assessment techniques used by the respondents to give assessment feedback to their students. As indicated in the table, the teachers preferred using marks more often to give feedback (M=4.65), followed by the use of discussion (M=3.68). This further emphasised the respondents' preference for marks as a means of giving assessment feedback to students as opposed to other alternative techniques such as dialogues /conferencing.

6.4 Assessment Techniques Used by JHS Social Studies Teachers in their Teaching

Table 3 displays results about the assessment techniques used by the respondents during their lessons in the two districts during teaching. The descriptive analysis presents the frequency at which the teachers employed the assessment techniques made up of both traditional and alternative assessment techniques in the table as part of their teaching activities.

Table 3. Assessment techniques employed by jhs social studies teachers in their teaching in the two districts

Assessment techniques	N f (%)	R f (%)	S f (%)	O f (%)	A f (%)	Mean M
Multiple choice	1 (1)	4 (4)	42 (42)	30 (30)	23 (23)	3.7
Blank filling	5 (5)	9 (9)	39 (39)	29 (29)	18 (18)	3.46
Short – answer questions	1 (1)	6 (6)	32 (32)	35 (35)	26 (26)	3.79
True/False questions	3 (3)	13 (13)	46 (46)	22 (22)	16 (16)	3.35
Matching questions	10 (10)	21 (21)	48 (48)	14 (14)	7 (7)	2.87
Essay questions	3 (3)	11 (11)	55 (55)	17 (17)	14 (14)	3.28
Dictation	6 (6)	7 (7)	37 (37)	23 (23)	27 (27)	3.58
Observation	7 (7)	29 (29)	52 (52)	9 (9)	3 (3)	2.72
Attitudinal scale	66 (66)	24 (24)	6 (6)	2 (2)	2 (2)	1.5
Interview	21 (21)	49 (49)	28 (28)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.11
Peer/group assessment	16 (16)	24 (24)	42 (42)	3 (3)	3 (3)	2.65
Student self-assessment	14 (14)	25 (25)	44 (44)	10 (10)	10 (10)	2.74
Exhibitions	28 (28)	37 (37)	33 (33)	0 (0)	0 (00	2.09
Simulations	33 (33)	46 (46)	17 (17)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.94
Projects	14 (14)	38 (38)	40 (40)	3 (3)	3 (3)	2.48
Portfolio	27 (27)	37 (37)	28 (28)	4 (4)	4 (4)	1.68

Source: Fieldwork, 2022. KEY: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, O = Often, A = Always

The results as presented in Table 3 indicate that the teachers' mostly preferred using the short-answer question technique during teaching (M=3.79). This was followed closely by the multiple choice technique (M=3.7). The third most preferred technique employed by the teachers in their teaching was dictation (M=3.58), and fourth was blank filling (M=3.46). Next was true or false questions (M=3.35). The techniques that were least preferred or used were attitudinal scale (M=1.5) and portfolio techniques (M=1.68). The third least preferred technique was simulation (M=1.94). Theoretically and conceptually, the first seven assessment techniques were made up traditional assessment techniques. The other nine were alternative assessment techniques. The purpose for combining them was to identify which of the assessment paradigms was preferred and employed by the teachers in their daily routine teaching activities. A comparison of the mean scores clearly indicated that a significant number of the teachers' preferred and employed traditional assessment techniques in their instructional activities (traditional: M=3.79- 3.46, alternative: M=1.5-1.68). This is evidenced by the teachers mostly preferring the traditional assessment techniques to the alternative assessment techniques. Overall, a comparison of the mean scores of the assessment techniques clearly indicate that the teachers preferred and actually use traditional assessment techniques in their teaching activities more frequently than the alternative techniques.

6.5 JHS Social Studies Teachers' Uses of Assessment Data/Results

Table 4 presents results of descriptive data analysis of the uses of classroom assessment results by JHS Social Studies teachers in the two districts.

Table 4 indicates that among the list of the uses of assessment results, a significant number of the teachers (92%) reported using assessment data very often and always to promote students to the next class/form (M=4.52). This was followed by those who indicated that they use assessment data to provide feedback to the students (M=4.23). Only 4% of the teachers reported using assessment data to refer students for guidance and counseling services (M=2.16). A close examination of the results in Table 4 indicates that, over all, most of the teachers use assessment data mainly for traditional assessment purposes. That is, to promote

students to the next class and to provide feedback to students and not necessarily to promote learning.

6.6 Techniques JHS Social Studies Teachers use to Communicate/Report Assessment Results/Data

Table 5 presents results of descriptive analysis on assessment techniques JHS Social Studies teachers use to communicate or report assessment data to students and other stakeholders.

From Table 5, among the list of techniques preferred and used by the teachers to communicate assessment results, the teachers reported using report cards (M=4.75) more frequently than any other technique. Also, the information showed that the teachers' preferred communicating assessment results by sharing the result with school administration. The least preferred and used technique was teacher/student/parents conference. From Table 5, again it became apparent that the teachers preferred and used traditional assessment techniques to report assessment results. The overall picture portrayed by this data confirms the earlier ones presented in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 that showed that the teachers felt comfortable using traditional assessment techniques in all facets of their assessment activities when teaching Social Studies.

6.7 Presentation of Qualitative Data Results

Four of the teachers (two from each district) were interviewed and their lessons observed immediately after the interview, using interview and observation guides on classroom assessment practices. The interview and observation data analysis and results are presented in this section.

6.7.1 Results of interview data analysis

The interview data was related to the observation data to ascertain whether what the teachers professed as their assessment practices actually reflected in their teaching practices in the course of their teaching. From the responses of the teachers during the interview, it became apparent that they mostly employ traditional assessment techniques in their teaching activities. When asked, *what assessment techniques do you use when teaching*

Social Studies? Mr. Boye and Mr. Coffie indicated that:

> *I usually use short-answer questions, true/false questions. At times I ask oral questions to find out whether what I taught yesterday they (students) still remember them.(Mr. Boye)*

> *At the end of every lesson, I try to give an exercise. They are mostly written or in the form of essay. Sometimes too I use true or false, short-answer and multiple choice. (Mr. Coffie)*

It is very instructive to note from the responses of the two teachers that the assessment techniques they mentioned were all traditional assessment techniques. Mr. Coffie stated that he uses assessment techniques such as class exercises, essay, true or false, short-answer and multiple choice questions at the end of the lessons. Mr. Doe on his part mentioned that he mostly uses sentence completion, question and answer, and essay assessment techniques during teaching.

Ms. Roselyn also mentioned that she uses mostly simple essays, multiple type questions and sometimes debate when the issue is very controversial.

The reasons behind the choice of the assessment techniques of the teachers were solicited through the question, *for what purpose(s) do you use the assessment techniques you have stated in teaching Social studies?* Mr. Boye responded that, *I use the techniques to find out whether the students have understood what I taught them.* Roselyn also said:

> *I use mostly essay type questions because I want to know how they will express themselves because it is through this you know their real thinking. It also helps them to come out with their own ideas. Then also the BECE questions are essay and multiple - choice questions so I need to start training them on it so that when they get there they can answer them (questions).*

Table 4. JHS social studies teachers uses of assessment data in the districts

Using assessment data to…	N f (%)	R f (%)	S f (%)	O f (%)	A f (%)	Mean M
Provide feedback to students	2 (2)	4 (4)	15 (15)	27 (27)	52 (52)	4. 23
Review work	3 (3)	0 (0)	31 (31)	26 (26)	40 (40)	4.00
Group students for learning	1 (1)	2 (2)	61 (61)	21 (21)	15 (15)	3.47
Modify learning task	4 (4)	6 (6)	48 (48)	28 (28)	14 (14)	3,42
Motivate students and arouse interest	1 (1)	2 (2)	41 (41)	24 (24)	32 (32)	3.84
Discuss upcoming quizzes or tests	11 (11)	39 (39)	25 (25)	14 (14)	11 (11)	2.75
Review assessment techniques	1 (1)	5 (5)	67 (67)	20 (20)	7 (7)	3.27
Reduce students' anxiety in tests	17 (17)	32 (32)	33 (33)	10 (10)	8 (8)	2.60
Modify instructional practices	7 (7)	11 (11)	58 (58)	18 (18)	6 (6)	3.05
Promote students to next class/form	0 (0)	1 (1)	7 (7)	31 (31)	61 (61)	4.52
Report students learning progress	1 (1)	3 (3)	44 (44)	34 (34)	18 (18)	3.65
Refer students for counselling	19 (19)	53 (53)	24 (24)	1 (1)	3 (3)	2.16

Source: Fieldwork, 2022. KEY: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, O = Often, A = Always

Table 5. Techniques JHS social studies teachers use to communicate/report assessment results in the districts

Assessment techniques	N f (%)	R f (%)	S f (%)	O f (%)	A f (%)	Mean M
Review with students	9 (9)	10 (10)	54 (54)	14 (14)	13 (13)	3.12
Interview with parents/guardians	11 (11)	15 (15)	57 (57)	13 (13)	4 (4)	2.84
Teacher/Students/Parents Conference	17 (17)	16 (16)	55 (55)	7 (7)	5 (5)	2.67
Report Cards	0 (0)	1 (1)	3 (3)	16 (16)	80 (80)	4.75
Talking to other teachers	0 (0)	3 (3)	78 (78)	10 (10)	9 (9) 20 (20)	3.25
Sharing assessment data with school administration	7 (7)	4 (4)	47 (47)	22 (22)		3.44

Source: Fieldwork, 2022   KEY: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, O = Often, A = Always

For Mr. Coffie, he uses the essay technique in order to assess how the students are able to express themselves, while multiple choice questions are used to identify how the students can think and select from various options. He indicated that:

> *I use the essay to know how a student can express him or herself on a particular topic or question. The multiple- choice questions also help to identify how fast a student can think and select from similar options.*

In order to ascertain how the teachers actually practice assessment as part of their teaching and learning activities, the teachers were asked to describe briefly how they conduct assessment when teaching. Roselyn gave a description of how she conducts assessment by stating that:

> *Taking the essay type for instance, I usually discuss whatever I want them to write about in the class with them. Then after that I give them some time to write it and bring it for marking. Sometimes I allow them to take them to the house. Then after that I discuss the marked scripts with them.*

Clearly, the teachers' responses demonstrated their reliance and use of traditional assessment techniques in the teaching of Social Studies. Apart from using traditional assessment techniques to teach, assessment feedback is giving to the students in the form marks.

An important aspect of assessment practice is the uses of assessment results. Results generated from assessment activities are used by teachers and other stakeholders for various purposes. The manner in which assessment results are applied indicates whether the results is used for traditional purposes or alternative purposes. The participants were asked, *what do you use the results you obtain from classroom assessment activities to do*? Mr. Coffie responded that:

> *I use the results for continuous assessment in order to know those who can be promoted and those who can be repeated. I think sometimes too I use it to monitor them, that is, it helps to know whether those who are good are either improving or coming down.*

Similar sentiments were shared by Mr. Doe. He indicated that:

> *It helps me to know the student's performance in the class. We use it to fill continuous assessment records. We also use it to decide at the end of the year who to promote and who to repeat (Mr. Doe.)*

The teachers professed in the interview unambiguously preference for traditional assessment techniques such as marks to record and give assessment feedback to students. They also indicated using multiple choice questions, blank filling, short answer questions, true/false questions and so on in their teaching of Social Studies. These conceptions of the teachers manifested in the lessons observed.

6.7.2 1 Results of observation data analysis

At the lesson introduction stage, the techniques the teachers adopted were mainly to write the topic on the board and asked the pupils to read it. The topic taught by Mr. Boye was "Gender relations in our communities". On the part of Mr. Coffie, the lesson was introduced by asking pupils what was taught previously. After that he asked them some few questions on the previous topic. He then told them the topic for the lesson as "The role of government in promoting private business'. Mr. Doe's lesson was on Composition of District Assemblies, while Ms. Roselyn taught Sources of Revenue for District Assemblies. Both of them wrote the topic on the board and asked the students to read it. They then asked the pupils how they understood the topics.

6.7.2.2 Description of how assessment was incorporated in the lessons observed

The main object of the lesson observation was to ascertain how the teachers incorporated assessment in their teaching activities. The observation was guided by an observation protocol that contained a list of assessment indicators (practices). Notes were taken on how the teachers carried out assessment in the lesson. The observation covered four main assessment areas: ways in which students were involved in the assessment practice, ways in which assessment was structured in the lesson, ways in which students were provided with assessment feedback, and ways in which assessment was integrated in the lesson.

6.7.2.3 Ways in which students were involved in the assessment practice

The observation guide identified four major ways in which the students may be involved in assessment in the lesson. These were as a whole group, as a small group, in pairs and on individual basis. The teachers (participants) assessed pupils individually by mostly using oral questions. The questions were specifically targeted at individual pupils in the class because the teachers occasionally posed oral questions and called individual pupils to answer. However, the oral questions were not built upon as a means of facilitating the instruction. For instance, at the introduction stage of the lesson, Mr. Boye wrote the topic 'Gender Relations in our Community' on the board and informed them that was the topic for the lesson. He then wrote the words, 'Gender', 'Sex' and 'Misconceptions' on the board and asked students how they understand those words. Some of the students tried to answer it. Mr. Coffie also taught the topic 'The role of government in promoting private businesses'. He started by asking the students their understanding of the term government. He then asked them to mention some of the things a government does that promote private business. Those who were not able to answer the questions correctly were not assisted to understand the question after it was answered by another pupil. Those who got the answer correctly were not also probed with further probing questions by way of follow-up.

6.7.2.4 Ways in which assessment was structured in the lesson

From the observation of the lessons, assessment was largely organised or structured in the lesson as an end-of- lesson assignment. The teachers gave students exercise at the end of the lesson to do. The assignment questions were written on the board and the students were asked to do it in their exercise books and present it for marking. Thus, assessment was treated as an appendage to the lesson, and not as an integral part of the teaching activity.

6.7.2.5 Ways in which students were provided with assessment feedback during the lesson

Assessment feedback was provided by using marks. The exercise or assignment given at the end of the lessons were marked by the teacher and marked scripts (books) returned to the students. The students received feedback in the form of marks. No further explanations or discussion was held with the students concerning their performance.

6.7.2.6 Ways in which assessment was integrated in the lesson

The observation sought to find out whether assessment was wholly integrated, partially integrated, episodic integration and end-of-lesson or appendage integration. Largely, assessment was treated as an appendage to the lesson. The main assessment task was an end-of-lesson assignment. However, during the lesson occasionally the teachers asked oral questions, but they were not used as a means to facilitate the instruction.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATION

The questionnaire, interview and observation instruments solicited information about the teachers' classroom assessment practices. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 presented results of descriptive analysis of the quantitative data that clearly revealed that the JHS Social Studies teachers prefer and use traditional assessment techniques in their teaching activities. In four of the five areas of assessment practices assessed, traditional assessment techniques were most preferred by the teachers. The teachers preferred an alternative assessment technique (written comments, M=3.29) as indicated in Table 2 to record students work, but the interview and observation results were contrary to this finding. The teachers also indicated using traditional assessment technique (marks, M=4.65) to give feedback. This inconsistency aligns with findings of a study conducted by Maclellan [31] which sought to describe the assessment practices of tutors in higher institutions. The study found that the teachers declared assessment conceptions and commitments did not reflect their actual assessment practices. Kahn (2000) clarified this inconsistency in an observational study of the classroom practices of secondary school teachers. Kahn's study found the teachers classroom practices to be 'eclectic' and concluded that most teachers' classroom practices such as assessment are associated with both traditional as well as the constructive learning paradigms.

The results reveal that the teachers mostly use traditional assessment techniques in their

teaching activities. Among the sixteen (16) assessment techniques listed (7 traditional and 9 alternative assessment techniques), the teachers' indicated they used the traditional assessment techniques more frequently in their teaching. As presented in Table 3, the mean scores of the different assessment techniques reveal that all the seven traditional assessment techniques (multiple choice, blank filling, short answer questions, true or false, matching questions, essay questions and dictation) top the list of 16 techniques listed, followed by the alternative techniques (observation, attitudinal scale, interview, peer or group assessment, student self-assessment, exhibition, simulation, projects and portfolio). The teachers' preference for traditional assessment techniques reflected in the observation lessons and interviews. It was observed that the teachers principally used traditional assessment techniques such as essay questions, multiple choice questions short answer questions and others in their lessons. This revelation affirms the general conclusion of most assessment researchers that traditional assessment practices dominate most classroom assessment activities [35, 32-34].

Results in Table 4 reveal that among the various uses of assessment data, the desire to use assessment results or information purposely to promote students to the next class or stage (M= 4.52) is the top most priority for most of the teachers. Similarly, the teachers reportedly used report card (M=4.75) as the main medium to communicate assessment feedback from assessment activities to students instead holding conference or discussion with them so that the feedback could serve as a useful information to facilitate learning. This finding is at variance with the popular opinion in the literature that the nature and most critical role of assessment is to facilitate learning [44,12, 27,45].

Overall, the results establishes that JHS Social Studies teachers in the two districts prefer and use largely traditional assessment techniques in their Social Studies instructional activities. This revelation has serious implications for teaching and educational delivery in Ghana. The outcome of the study provides opportunity for stakeholders and policy makers to rethink assessment reforms starting from the teachers theoretical conceptions of assessment. That is in order to reap the full benefits of assessment at the basic school level, teachers' beliefs and theoretical conceptions about assessment must adequately be addressed.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the Junior High School teachers do not consider assessment as part and parcel of the entire instructional process. It is considered as an add-on or a separate activity outside the instructional process which outcome may not have a significant impact on teaching and learning activities. It is recommended that, Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) should intensify the teaching of alternative assessment strategies in their curriculum and training programmes. Also, to tackle the assessment conceptions and practices of Junior High School Social Studies teachers on the field; in- service training, workshops, short term courses and seminars on assessment should be organised in regular intervals for the teachers in order to upgrade their knowledge, change their assessment beliefs and practices about educational assessment.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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