Rethinking Assessment in the 21st Century Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies Classroom in Ghana

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Abstract:
An emerging vision of educational assessment in this era is that of a dynamic process that continuously provides information with regard to learners' progress and is generally geared towards achieving learning goals and the imbibitions of core competencies or survival skills in the learner. These competencies are but not limited to creativity and innovation, digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, cultural identity and global citizenship, communication and collaboration, etc. This vision acknowledges that information collected as a result of student assessment is aligned to the curriculum goals. This is to ensure that data is appropriately used to inform instruction and justifies the fact that assessment is inseparable from teaching and learning. But the questions that emerge are: (1) How do Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies teachers in Ghana assess their learners and (2) For what purposes do SHS Social Studies teachers in Ghana assess their learners? As a qualitative meta-synthesis study, this paper sampled forty-four (4) works directly related to educational assessment but analysed in the context of Social Studies at the SHS level in Ghana. Sequel to this, the paper discusses the need for the adoption and use of alternative/authentic forms of assessment within the context of key debates in the field of educational assessment. It also examines the implications of the shift that is being called for in relation to the rationale and general goals of Social Studies.

Keywords: Conventional/traditional assessment, alternative/authentic assessment, social studies, core competencies

1. Introduction

For many people engaged in the field of education, several questions that border on assessment have been left largely unanswered. These questions include, but not limited to, the following:

- What is student assessment?
- Is student assessment important?
- If yes, how important is it to you and if no why?
- Is there the need for a second look at the assessment system in the Social Studies classroom in Ghana?

These questions are more pertinent in the teaching and learning of Social Studies at pre-tertiary level, especially the Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana. This is due to the introduction of some novelties in the Social Studies curriculum in the SHSs since 1998 (CRDD, 1998). These novelties largely have to do with the nature, goals and objectives of the subject. For instance, the subject is described as a problem-solving one with its central focus being the inculcation of relevant knowledge, positive attitudes and values, skills and other competences in the learner for the purpose of helping the learner to solve both his/her personal problems and that of the society (Ayaaba, 2008). The profile dimension as provided in the syllabus calls on teachers to dedicate much of their classroom assessment practices on assessing learning outcomes in the affective domain (CRDD, 2010) However, the practices in our classrooms at the SHS level are still steeped in the traditional mode thus implying a potential dysfunctional relationship between the assessment of Social Studies learning outcomes and its goals and objectives.

The four questions raised about educational assessment serve as guide in the presentation of arguments in this paper and for the need to realign assessment practices with the rationale/goals, and objectives of the subject. The aim is to see to the restoration/presentation of a balance among the SHS Social Studies curriculum, its instruction and assessment as asserted by Maduas (1988) to you as a reader and user of this paper. The paper is outlined as follows:

- Introduction
- The context
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusion

1.1. The Context

It is noted that over 75% of the time in the classroom is spent on assessment and assessment related activities (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992; Linn & Miller, 2005; Abdul Rahim, Venville & Chapman, 2009). The following can be adduced as reasons behind this phenomenon:

- Assessment is a vital constituent of instructionas it provides important information to the teacher necessary for decision making in the classroom setting; and
- It is also important to learners as it informs them of their progress as well as helps them identify areas that need improvement (Nitko & Brookhart, 2007).

The issue that arises therefore, is, whether SHS Social Studies teachers do consider these reasons as what triggers the classroom/student assessment decision they make in their instructional practices. How do teachers even understand the concept of educational assessment, for what reason do they assess (what is the role of assessment in the teaching and learning process)?

1.2. Educational Assessment Explained

According to Lambert and Lines (2000, p 4), educational 'assessment is the process of gathering, interpreting, recording and using information about pupils' responses to educational tasks.Satterly (1989: 3), in a more comprehensive way defines assessment, as 'an omnibus term which includes all the processes and products which describe the nature and extent of children's learning, its degree of correspondence with the aims and objectives of teaching and its relationship with the environments which are designed to facilitate learning'. This definition corresponds very well with Mager's (1990) thesis that a potentially useful assessment is the one which's performance does not only match the performance in the instructional objective, but also matches the conditions in which the teaching and learning took place.

From these definitions, educational assessment can be surmised to be the process of acquiring all kinds of data, through multiple possible means, with regard to the characteristics of learners, for the purpose of making informed decisions about the student learning and the teachers' teaching all through the teaching and learning process. Also, a critical analysis of these definitions reveals that assessment plays a very definitive and significant role in the teaching-learning process. Thus 'assessment is seen not as a time-wasting appendage to classroom practice but as an integral part of planning of affective instruction' (Satterly, 1989:4). Rowntree (1987:1) makes a strong case for the role of assessment when he stated that 'if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures' and that 'the spirit and style of student assessment defines the de-facto curriculum' (Rowntree, 1987:1).

The role of assessment in the teaching and learning process can be placed under two main categories; the Summative role (assessment of learning (AoL)) and the Formative role (assessment for learning (AfL)) which Rudner and Schafer (2002) and Heritage (2013) cite as the principal purposes of assessment. In other words, the argument Rudner and Schafer (2002) and Heritage (2013) put forward is that, the two are the major classifications. On the part of Earl and Kartz (2006) and Earl (2013), the roles educational assessment plays are three. That is AoL, AfL, and assessment as learning (AaL) They include assessment of, for, and as learning. Irrespective of whether the classifications are two or three, the common point that is deducible from these two different categorisations is that, they both talk about assessment(s) other than/in addition to assessment of learning (that is AfL and AaL) whose focus is on the progress of the learner. that whereasAoL is perceived to be a traditional/conventional form of assessment and usually used to establish whether or not learners have attained curriculum objectives and the extent to which they have attained them.

AoL therefore identifies for both teachers and learners what has been achieved and what they need to do next (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2003). This role of assessment is said to exert a potentially powerful effect on students' self-esteem and the growing sense of identity as learners in a particular subject area. Withthe Formative role, assessment is noted to be doing the following:

- Helps learners to recognise their strengths and identify their weaknesses,
- Serves as a tool for promoting formative feedback to both learners and teachers,
- Provides information that is potentially capable of improving teaching and learning,
- Consolidates students' learning prior to moving to the next unit of instruction, and
- Plays a filtration role in the instructional process (Popham, 2008; Heritage, 2011; Harlen, 2006).

We can therefore, establish thatoverall,assessment is for decision-making and the use of assessment in decision-making defines its purposes in the educational enterprise (Bekoe, 2006; Shepard, 2000).

1.3. Purposes of Assessment

Whereas Kelly (2009)places the purposes or uses of educational assessment broadly under: (i) educational, (ii) administrative, and political. Similarly, Archer (2017) also places the purposes of assessment under: (i) assessment to support learning; (ii) assessment for accountability; and (iii) assessment for certification, progress, and transfer. Black (1998); Earl and Kartz (2006); Newton (2007); Schildkamp and Kuiper (2010); Earl (2013); and Heritage (2013). All agree that categorising the purpose of assessment as threefold affords us a good opportunity as educators to interrogate assessment to support quality of education. Each of the three main purposes of assessment all need to get the needed attention to support quality education (Archer, 2017) and thus, ensure the attainability of equity and inclusion. Accountability and certification, progress, and transfer in Archer's (2017) or the administrative and political classifications as put up by Kelly (2009) in the words of Archer (2017) are implicitly standardised and or high stakes due to systemic pressures such as state/institutional funding as well as funding from international agencies or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), accreditation with various bodies, legislative requirements, national and international competition, and public and media pressure.

Notwithstanding the different classifications of the purpose of assessment as discussed, Rowntree (1987); Cizek (1997) Lambert and Lines (2000) maintain that educational uses of assessment or assessment to support learning are mostly synonymous to assessment for and as learning as they are usually meant to be used for diagnosing learning, motivating students, eliciting evidence and giving feedback to learners. When assessment is effectively used as suggested by Rowntree (1987); Cizek (1997) Lambert and Lines (2000), then the other purposes such as reporting to various stakeholders in education including the learner; selection/placement/certification of learners, maintenance of Standards in the educational system, accountability to stakeholders especially, policy makers/ administrators and parents. Nonetheless, the purposes of assessment as afore indicated sometimes conflict with the kind of role they ought to play, hence, making such purposes potentially being undermined (Pratt, 1994; Rowntree, 1987) as cited in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018). As a result of the contradictions, some debates in the field of assessment have emerged. The debates appear in the form of tensions during assessment decision-making which are reinforced by certain principles that McMillan (2002) are expected to provide the most essential and fundamental structure of assessment knowledge and competencies that make up effective educational practices.

1.4. Assessment Decision-Making and the Arguments

It is espoused in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) by Rudner and Schafer (2002) that there are many contentions in assessment decision-making resulting in some academic arguments in the assessment literature. The assessment decisions are propelled by what is conceived to be the principles fundamental to assessment and with reference to:(i) what the concept of assessments understood to be, (ii) the purpose it ought to serve; (iii) what actually is to be assessed; (iv) how the assessment data are to be interpreted (Bekoe, 2006); and (v) whose responsibility is it to carry out/conduct the assessment. These principles fundamental to assessment additionally serve as the basis for doing the analysis as I sought to do in this paper.

Broadfoot (1995) as cited in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) postulate that educational assessment was historically necessitated by a perceived need to measure individual intellectual capacity so as to respond to demands of employers to provide a ranking of opportunity into the expanding industrial economies of that era. This brought about theadoption of a means that would not only be socially acceptable and able to identify the best employees, but also appear to be fair and objective, with a high degree of reliability. The emphasis then was on the need to assess what was perceived to be measurable (Bekoe, 2006). This brief historical antecedent contributed to the emergence of several questions being preferred against the kind of thinking that went into the adoption of the conventional or traditional form of assessment, thus, resulting in the many contentions and debates in the field (Adam, Bekoe & Ngaaso, 2018).

The contentions and debates are varied and of many different folds. For the purpose of this paper however, Ifocused on the conventional (traditional) and alternative (authentic) assessment divides. The reason is that the conventional and alternative assessment schools of thoughts are held as the two primary assessment cultures (Bekoe, 2006; McMillan, 2001; Broadfoot, 2000, 1996; Wilson, 1992) as cited in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018). Additionally, the reason that the major questions asked by opponents of the conventional practice is whether traditional assessment can and should be singularly used to adequately assess learning outcomes in a new curriculum that is with expanded goals, that are broader than and also different from those of the traditional disciplines (Adam, Bekoe & Ngaaso, 2018). This question is particularly more important and of interest to the writer in view of the fact that the current Social Studies curriculum in the SHSs has expanded goals with a greater emphasis on the affective outcomes, thus making it different in character and content from the traditional school subjects (Bekoe, 2007 & 2006) as cited in (Adam, Bekoe & Ngaaso, 2018). Additionally, in a contemporary school setting like we have today, several cross-cutting issues including equity and inclusion are riffed in the classroom that ought to be dealt with through assessment.

1.5. Conventional/Traditional Assessment

Traditional assessment otherwise referred to as conventional assessment is based on the early notions of learning which maintains that learning is linear and sequential. This suggests that learning begins from simple to what is complex or more complex. Shepard (1991) as cited in Adam, Bekoe, and Ngaaso (2018) maintains thatcomplex understanding can occur only through accretion of elemental, prerequisite learnings. Hence, in the words of ÇalÕúkan and Yigittir (2008) includes assessment tools generally focusing on attainments in intellectual abilities, that is a focus on the cognitive area. The traditional/conventional assessment measures and quantifies learningin relation to an individual's task performance and in respect of reference. Pencil-and-Paper Test, constructed response items, selected response items, true-false, multiple choice and matching tests are the common tools for conventional assessment.

From what it entails, traditional assessment can be said to be concerned much about objectivity and reliability. It is also deducible thatit focuses on learning outcomes that easily lend themselves to measurement. It has to be emphasised however, that, this form of assessment stresses on factual knowledge and reproduction of solution or procedures.

1.6. Criticisms of Traditional Assessment

In Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018), it is espoused that a number of criticisms have been levelled against the traditional assessment culture, for example, it is mentioned that its over emphasis on reliability (Broadfoot, 1995)leads to relative/absolute neglect of higher-level intellectual skills, personal and social competences and attitudes (Wilson, 1992). Additionally, conventional assessment system is blamed because it compels learners to memorise factual knowledge which comes with its attendant negative consequences of undermining the quality and serenity of the assessments, especially, standardised examinations like the BECE and WASSCE. It also argued by Madaus (1988) as cited in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) that, the traditional assessment leads to a narrowing effect on the curriculum. As a result,

students end up knowing without understanding (Torrance, 1995). Additionally, Resnick and Resnick (1992); and Bekoe, 2006) agree that the traditional notions of learning are seen as unrepresentative of thinking and knowledge acquisition in the face of current developments in the theories of learning and cognition. Implying that in this 21st century where societies are facing daunting challenges like the Covid-19, the school as an agent of societal transformation through Social Studies, ought to guide learners to acquire the needed competencies that will enable them think outside the box and arrive at meaningful solutions and judgments to such problems and not through rote means of learning and assessment of the cognition alone.

Torrance (1995) is thus, of the view that, the only reason for the pervasiveness and prevalence of traditional assessment in many countries including Ghana is the political and administrative need for simple and quick tests that can produce comparable results across very large groups of students. Cizek (1997)cited in Adam, Bekoe, and Ngaaso (2018) however, argues that there is the need to employ a myriad of tools necessary for assessing the universe of expanding valuable educational outcomes as encompassed in the 2010 SHS Social Studies curriculum, in today's society that is fast developing and ever-changing. Cizek's (1997) argument therefore, implies that,the needs and aspirations of every society or nation are not static, andfor that matter aneed/aspiration of a society today may not be the same tomorrow. This among others, basically, determines curriculum development/curriculum change and also leads to the call for an alternative and a more authentic means of assessing learning outcomes not only in the SHS Social Studies classroom but beyond.

As Genesee and Hamayan (1994) argue, these tests prove to be useful for gathering information regarding students' achievements under specified conditions, but they fail to provide information about students' motivations, their interests and their learning strategies. Moreover, negative criticism has been levelled at the 'washback effects' of the high-stake standardized tests at the curriculum, educational and psychological level.

Standardized tests direct teachers to center attention to only those subjects that are taken account of in the examinations. Therefore, they dominate and direct the whole curriculum (Shepard, 1991). At the educational level, they affect the methodology the teachers use in their classes as they take up various kinds of exam preparation practices at the expense of other didactic activities (Wall, 1996). Moreover, these tests gradually change didactic tools into replicas of the final examination papers (Bailey, 1999).

Additionally, they direct students to adopt surface approaches to learning rather than profound ones (Newatead & Findlay, 1997). This process gradually impedes students' reasoning power in the favor of rote memorization (Black & William, 1998). At the psychological level, they affect the students' psychology negatively as the students become the passive recipients of information with no attention to their motivation, interests, efforts and confidence (Broadfoot, 2003).

1.7. Alternative/Authentic Assessment

Koh (2017) asserts that in the assessment literature, some authors such as Cumming and Maxwell (1999); and Palm (2008) have argued the term 'authentic' was first introduced by Archbald and Newmann (1988) in the context of learning and assessment. Nonetheless, the term 'authentic' as used by Archbald and Newmann (1988) was in respect of achievement rather than assessment (Koh, 2017). As to the one who first used it as a term relevant to the collection of data for the purpose of making informed decision about students' learning and the teachers' teaching, Koh (2017) maintained the term 'authentic assessment' was first coined in 1989 by Grant Wiggins in K–12 educational contexts. According to Wiggins (1989, p. 703) as cited in Koh (2017), authentic assessment is 'a true test' of intellectual achievement or ability because it requires students to demonstrate their deep understanding, higher-order thinking, and complex problem solving through the performance of exemplary tasks. Just as the Social Studies is a problem-oriented school subject, Wiggins (1989) as cited in Koh (2017) is of the view that authentic tasks replicate real-world challenges and 'standards of performance' that experts or professionals (e.g., educators/teachers, mathematicians, scientists, writers, or doctors) usually face in the field. For example, authentic tasks in Social Studies need to elicit the kind of thinking and reasoning used by Social Studies practitioners in their efforts to solving problems. In other words, identifying problems that actually threaten the very survival of the society, doing a prognosis of such problems and getting the required solutions to them demands a kind of individual who is thought-provoking, have desirable attitudes and values.

In the words of Koh (2017), authentic assessment played a focal role in driving curricular and instructional changes in the context of global educational reforms, of which Social Studies is of no exception. It is further observed in Koh (2017) that since the 1990s, initial teacher training education and teacher professional development programmes in a number of education systems across the world have focused on the development of assessment literacy for teachers and teacher trainees which include teacher competence in the design, adaptation, and use of alternative/authentic assessment tasks or performance assessment tasks to engage students in in-depth learning of subject matter and to promote their mastery of survival skills otherwise called 21st-century competencies (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Koh, 2011A, 2011B, 2014; Shepard et al., 2005 Webb, 2009) cited in Koh (2017). I prefer to refer to such skills survival skills because such competencies are not new, and according to Darling Hammond and Adamson (2010), have become increasingly in demand in schools and by industry players that have shifted from lower-level cognitive and routine manual tasks to higher-level analytic, sophisticated and manipulative and interactive tasks that ought to be executed through collaborative problem-solving. Due to the advancement of digital technology, there is also information explosion. As a result, rote learning and the memorisation and subsequent regurgitation of facts or procedures are no more relevant and suitable in contemporary educational contexts. What is rather expected of students is that they are able to surf for new information, organise, interpret, analyse, evaluate, synthesise, and apply such new information or knowledge to solve non-routine problems. This fits the rationale and goal of Social Studies.

Authentic assessment as maintained by Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) encircles real problem solving, designing and conducting experiments on real problems. In essence, every worthwhile school discipline or curriculum must be society-focused and should be tailored towards addressing society's problems. Authentic assessment uses methods and strategies such as allowing students engaging in debates, constructing models, creating videotapes of performances, doing fieldwork, creating exhibits, developing demonstrations, writing in journals, creating new products, formulating computer simulations, and creating portfolios (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). According to de Blij (2005), authenticassessment employs strategies and approaches that present students with real-life situations and conditions. It is against this background that Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) assert that authentic assessment involves teachers engaging is in thorough observations of students' activities and inventories of their work with accompanying useful feedback regarding the judgments made. Per these attributes of authentic assessment catalogued by de Blij (2005), and Ornstein and Hunkins' (2018), it can be concluded that the very things that authentic assessment hinges on, similarly forms the soul, heart and spine of the Social Studies curriculum. This shows that authentic assessment fits well in Social Studies instruction. Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) corroborate this when they assert that the rationale and objectives of the Social Studies dictates that the focus of instruction of the subject must be on the learners/students. Additionally, just Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) further maintain that the 21st century classroom is not a place where the teacher assumes the sole responsibility of dictating the pace and content of learning to students (acts as a depositor of knowledge). To actually prepare a well-informed, reflective, active and participatory citizens to champion the development of her/his society, Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) rather argue that as a social constructivist aligned subject, learners should rather be evoked to be actively involved in their own process of learning with the teacher acting as a facilitator of the processes.

It can be extrapolated from these discussionsthat, contrary to conventional assessment, authentic assessment aims at restoring the balance among assessment, curriculum and instruction. It for this reason that Palm (2008) as cited in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) notesthat authentic assessment also possesses meanings such as assessment aligned with curriculum and assessment that effectively supports learning. Characteristically, authentic assessment is noted in Adam, Bekoe, and Ngaaso (2018) to have the following features:

- Its focus is on higher-order learning outcomes and effective performance of curriculum tasks;
- Authentic assessment involves performance of tasks that are valued in their own right and not as correlates/indicators of other valued performance (Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 1991);
- Authentic assessment is seen by Torrance (1995) to be more practical and realistic than conventional/traditional assessment;
- As an alternative to conventional research, authentic assessment requires learners to integrate knowledge, produce ideas and complete tasks that have real-world meaning and application (International Bureau of Education (International Bureau of Education-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IBE-UNESCO (2017);
- The approaches, methods/techniques of authentic assessment require the assessor to use human judgement in the application of criterion-referenced standards (Archbald, 1991) cited in (IBE -UNESCO, 2017).

Similarly, in Adam, Bekoe, and Ngaaso, (2018) Broadfoot (1995) is cited to have catalogued the following as common elements of the alternative/authentic assessment culture:

- Commitment to raising the level of teacher understanding and expertise in assessment procedures
- Increasing emphasis on validity
- Emphasis is on describing learning outcomes in terms of particular standards achieved by learners
- Emphasis on using the assessment of individual student's learning outcomes as an indicator of the quality of educational provision.
- In addition to the above by Broadfoot (1995), Earl (2013) also postulates that the emphasis of authentic assessment is on; (i) formative assessment or assessment for learning: assessment that occurs during instruction to be used in the service of the next stage of learning, and (ii) assessment as learning: assessment which occurs when students personally monitor what they are learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make informed decisions, adjustments, adaptations, as well as major changes in what they understand. According to Earl (2013), it is through assessment for and as learning as exemplars of authentic assessment that prompt or timely feedback and feedforward relating to criteria that students can act upon are produced and used.

The methods or techniques for authentic assessment include, but not limited to: open-ended problems; ands-on science problems; students' portfolio; computer simulated real world problems; attitudinal scales; observation; and investigative/research reports

1.8. Barriers to the Use of Authentic Assessment

Notwithstanding the numerous benefits of authentic assessment as a useful alternative to traditional assessment, it is also not without some challenges or barriers. In the words of Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, Bruna, and Herrera-Seda (2018), a major barrier of authentic assessment may be the lack of conceptualisation of the term 'authentic assessment' sufficient to inform assessment design at the individual course or subject level. On her part, Brown (2015) identifies what she called inertia factors as another important challenge. According to Brown (2015), inertia factors imply that many teachers/assessors 'would prefer to stick to 'tried and tested methods' they are used to since organising traditional exams, multiple-choice questions and essays requires less effort to set up than assignments which include the development of case study material, and the establishment of authentic practice setting environments in university buildings. Additionally, authentic assessment tasks may involve additional costs' (Brown, 2015, p7).Also, authentic assessment according to

Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) as cited in Adam Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) is noted to be time consuming and relatively expensive and for that matter difficult to implement at the national level. Finally, critics of the authentic assessment culture fear that it is being promoted to completely replace traditional assessment (Broadfoot, 1995 as cited in Adam Bekoe & Ngaaso, 2018).

In spite of the barriers to its implementation, a careful analysis of the authentic assessment culture and the assessment practices recommended for use in the 2010 SHS Social Studies syllabus suggest that they are both contingent on each other and are congruent with the goals and objectives of the subject. A quick glance at the 2010 SHS Social Studies syllabus reminds us of the following general aims:

- develop the ability to adapt to the developing and ever-changing Ghanaian society
- acquire positive attitudes and values towards individual and societal issues
- develop critical and analytical skills in assessing issues for objective decision-making
- develop national consciousness and unity
- use enquiry and problem-solving skills for solving personal and societal problems
- become responsible citizens capable and willing to contribute to societal advancement (CRDD, 2010 as cited in Adam, Bekoe & Ngaaso, 2018).

The NCSS (2010) as cited in Adam, Bekoe and Ngaaso (2018) also calls for Social Studies assessment to be well aligned with its major goals, and more complete in the range of objectives addressed. The context as described sets the stage for the study to examine what is going on in the Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies classroom in respect of assessment of its learning outcomes.

2. Methodology

As a qualitative study, the study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm. Specifically, the design adopted was qualitative meta-analysis (Paterson, Thorne, Canam & Jillings, 2001; Sandelowski, Docherty & Emden, 1997) as cited in Erwin, Brotherson, and Summers (2010). Qualitative meta-analysis is an interpretation of qualitative findings that are in themselves interpretive syntheses of data including for example, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theories, and other integrated and coherent descriptions or explanations of phenomena, events, or cases that are the hallmarks of qualitative research (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) maintain that the shift toward evidence-based practice has been a positive impetus to align qualitative research and research synthesis efforts. Qualitative meta-synthesis allows for a collective way of viewing specific research within a discipline and integrating the findings into a form that is readily accessible and understandable (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

In the case of this study, the idea was not to collect any new data, but to gather and synthesise already existing data and the literature on educational assessment as means of answering the questions that were formulated for the synthesis. Hence, the caution Erwin, Brotherson, and Summers (2010) give in connection to the use of qualitative meta-synthesis was adhered to. They caution that qualitative meta-synthesis does not create an opportunity for generalisation about findings gathered through qualitative research. Instead, the large and increasing body of qualitative research demands a procedure to understand more about how a collective body of research contributes to our understanding of a particular phenomenon within the field. The following six (6) stages of qualitative meta-synthesis proposed by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) were therefore adapted and used in the study:

- Formulating the review question;
- Conducting a systematic literature search;
- Screening and selecting appropriate research articles;
- Analyzing and synthesizing findings to integrate and qualitatively analyse research findings;
- Maintaining quality control;
- Presenting findings (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003, 2007).

Findings of forty-four (44) different works across education or student assessment-related studies as evident in this study were purposively accessed and analysed. The basis for their selection had to do with their direct focus on general assessment practices of teachers, and more specifically, traditional and alternative/authentic assessment practices elsewhere and in Ghana.

3. Findings

A thorough synthesis of the findings across these studies revealed the following:

- SHS Social Studies teachers, even though are aware of the assessment regime suggested in the syllabus, still employ the traditional means in assessing their students' learning outcomes (Bekoe, 2007; 2006; Adam, 2012; Adam, Bekoe & Poatob, 2019).
- SHSSocial Studies teachers are reticent to use the full range of assessment techniques suggested in the syllabus (Bekoe, 2006; Gross & Allen, 1970). A situation they blame on the administrative and political purposes of assessment as Kelly (2009) has pointed out already.
- Social Studies teachers apply traditional assessment and evaluation tools, especially the multiple-choice test, the open ended, short answer, gap-filling tests (ÇalÕúkan & Yigittir, 2008).
- Theteachers consistently fail to relate their assessment practices to the goals and objectives they claim to be teaching for students to attain (Bekoe, 2006; Adam, 2012; Adam, Bekoe, & Poatob, 2018; and Adam, Bekoe, & Poatob, 2019).

- There are also the strangleholds or restriction of the West Africa Examinations Council's WAEC assessment demands on teachers' classroom assessment practices (Bekoe, 2007 & 2006).
- It has also been found from the analysis that teachers lack the knowledge and skills in using many alternative assessment devices (for example, those in alignment with assessments for and as learning) or are unfamiliar with them, apart from the traditional ones (Gross & Allen, 1970; Adam, Bekoe, & Poatob, 2018; and Villarroel, et al., 2018).
- Lastly, many teachers are often inconsistent in their perceptions/conceptualizations and practices of assessment (Bekoe, 2006; Adam, 2012; Adam, Bekoe, & Poatob, 2018; and Adam, Bekoe, & Poatob, 2018).
- In some instances, ÇalÕúkan and Yigittir (2008) in the case of Turkey, Adam (2012) and Adam, Bekoe and Poatob (2018, 2019) in the case of Ghana, report that some Social Studies teachers generally prefer project and performance assignments to alternative assessment methods and evaluation tools but are times negligent of using them because they feel it is time consuming.

The foregoing has led to many Social Studies goals and objectives not being attained by students and has resulted in the narrowing of the curriculum. In effect, only tested content is taught in the Social Studies classroom to the exclusion of non-tested content. Moreover, if we are to take into account the nature of items that have plagued the field of traditional assessment of the Social Studies, it is clear that they often focus on trivial learnings (Ebel & Frisbie, 1991) and largely banal and elemental (Bennett, Jenkins, Perskey & Weiss, 2003). It can therefore, be concluded that what is being assessed is in the SHS Social Studies classroom is largely unrepresentative of the learning the subject's learning domains.

4. Implication of Findings and Recommendations

One major implication of the findings reported above is the fact that there is a disjointed relationship between Social Studies curriculum goals and objectives asenshrined in the 2010 SHS syllabus, and what the SHS Social Studies teachers are teaching. It is for instance, argued in this direction that, in the circumstance where assessment coverage is inadequately representing curriculum content, the learning outcomes that are expected from the implementation of the curriculum are almost certainly not going to be attained (Bekoe, 2006; see also Kliebard, 1988; Madaus, 1988). Since teachers are largely teaching-to-the-test, an unplanned drift from the curriculum goals and objectives is characterising the implementation of the SHS Social Studies curriculum. The fore-going portends danger for the subject in the effort towards playing its citizenship education role, as the curriculum change, as planned and installed, stands being jeopardised and possibly jettisoned. Thus, for Social Studies in Ghana to be salvaged from its current state and prop-up properly, as was initially intended, there is the need to change the assessment system to ensure a more comprehensive attainment of its goals and objectives and not to stand and watch while it becomes doomed for a short life (Kliebard, 1988).

From the foregoing, it is imperative that Social Studies educators in Ghanawill pay heed to the call by Gardner (n.d) and cited in Dysthe (2004) for a shift in teachers' general classroom practices; underpinned by the rationale that a shift from the current culture is to move from a uni-dimensional view of learning and intelligence to a multidimensional one. If we, as Social Studies educators, are able to expand and reformulate our view of what counts as learning or human intellect, we will be able to arrive at a more appropriate ways of assessing it and thus a more effective way of educating a responsible citizenry. It is also argued that seeing learning as a social activity implies that it is vital to assess how students participate, contribute and take advantage of interactions and at the same time perform tasks. Eventually, we ought as Social Studies educators to:

5. Conclusion

If Social Studies is to attain its loftygoal and objectives, by way of inculcating in learners the relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will make them not only capable, but also reflective, participatory and willing problem solvers, then its practitioners/teachers should aim at restoring the balance among the curriculum, instruction and assessment. In other words, the teachers' assessment practices ought to be aligned with the most valuable outcomes in the Social Studies curriculum. This therefore, calls for a broader and expanded means of assessing learning outcomes that will place much emphasis on not only the didactic outcomes but also importantly, the affective or philetic outcomes of the subject. Such an assessment should not be seen as looking for constructs that are viewed as correlates of other valued performances, but be based on performances that are valued in their own right and are deemed as socially acceptable. In effect, the call is for assessment of learning outcomes in Social Studies to be more meaningful and educationally worthwhile so as to better prepare learners to acquire the competencies that will enable them solve problems that confronts them and the society.

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