

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**



**SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES  
IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE AWUTU-SENYA WEST DISTRICT  
OF THE CENTRAL REGION OF GHANA**

**ALBERT EFFUM**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**



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**A thesis submitted to the school of graduate studies in  
partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of  
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(Social Studies Education)**

**Department of Social Studies Education  
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UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

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## DECLARATION

### **Student's Declaration**

I, Albert Effum, declare that this thesis with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have been identified and duly acknowledged is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature.....

Date.....

### **Supervisor's Declaration**

I, hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Dr. Anthony Bordoh (Supervisor)

Signature.....

Date.....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, my parents, auntie Vero, Rita Maame Esi Mensah, and my siblings.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>SHS</b>	–	Senior High School.
<b>SST</b>	–	Social Studies Teacher
<b>MoE</b>	–	Ministry of Education
<b>NaCCA</b>	–	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
<b>NCSS</b>	–	National Council for Social Studies
<b>WASSCE</b>	-	West African Senior School Certificate Examination
<b>PLC</b>	-	Professional Learning Community
<b>DoK</b>	-	Depth of Knowledge
<b>FUST</b>	-	Formative Use of Summative Test
<b>TPACK</b>	-	Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in Senior High Schools within the Awutu-Senya West District. A qualitative research approach with an exploratory design was adopted. Ten Social Studies teachers were selected through non-probability sampling methods, specifically census and purposive techniques. Data were collected using interviews and observation guides, then analysed thematically. Findings revealed that teachers possessed basic theoretical conception of formative assessment and they rarely applied it during instruction. Most teachers did not adjust lessons after eliciting student responses, and only a few employed ongoing assessment strategies to monitor learner progress. The study further showed limited awareness and use of alternative formative assessment tools, with traditional methods dominating classroom practice. Challenges such as large class sizes, time constraints, examination-driven culture, and inadequate teaching resources hindered effective implementation. Based on these findings, the study recommended that teachers move beyond conceptual understanding to daily classroom application of formative assessment. Continuous, practical, and collaborative training, alongside reflective teaching practices, would help embed formative assessment into instruction. Teachers should also explore diverse assessment tools that foster learner engagement and deeper understanding of Social Studies concepts. Additionally, the Ghana Education Service and school authorities should regulate class sizes in line with national standards or provide extra teachers to reduce learner–teacher ratios. The NaCCA and school heads should allocate more instructional time to Social Studies, ensure adequate funding for teaching resources, and prioritise curriculum goals over high-stakes testing and certification.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Assessment remains one of the most crucial aspects of the teaching and learning process, serving as the bridge between curriculum delivery and the measurement of educational outcomes. Assessment is more than just testing; thus, it is a systematic and continuous process used to determine how well learning objectives are being achieved, and also providing evidence for both teaching decision and students' progress. Many researchers have defined assessment in several ways in the literature depending on their viewpoint. According to Hernández (2012), assessment involves grading and reporting on students' accomplishments while also providing support for their learning. In a similar vein, Lambert and Lines (2013) emphasised that assessment entails the process of collecting, analysing, documenting, and utilising information regarding students' responses to educational tasks. Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007) defined assessment as a systematic approach to gathering data about student performance. From these perspectives, it can be concluded that assessment involves the collection, interpretation, and evaluation of information about a student's knowledge, skills, attitudes, or performance. This process helps educators comprehend what students have learned, how they think, and what they are capable of doing, thereby guiding teaching, learning, and improvement.

Writers indicated, "Ghana has since made several changes to the structure and curricula of her formal educational system. One of these changes is the evolution of Social Studies as a single discipline of study in the school curriculum in Ghana" (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013; Ocansey, 2021). The writers further revealed that "the tacit

and piecemeal curriculum that has long characterised the Social Studies classroom seems to be gradually giving way to a more coherent and integrated set of objectives, benchmarks, and performance indicators. This approach is goal-oriented, emphasising learner outcomes; the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and disposition to civic action teachers wish to develop in students” (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013; Ocansey, 2021). According to Ocansey (2021), Social Studies is an educational discipline that integrates sociology and the humanities to foster civic engagement. The writer further revealed that “it gives a deliberate and systematic study to shape citizens into productive members of a socially diverse, popularity-based society. Thus, through the Social Studies subject, students are provided with citizenship education.” This has, therefore, called for a practical use of formative assessment by Social Studies teachers by using the criteria for success and the profile dimensions during teaching and learning to develop in their students how to construct knowledge by themselves through critical thinking and problem-solving abilities and cooperative learning. This makes students in these ever-changing societies assertive and collaborative in solving personal and societal problems whenever confronted.

However, assessment must be given critical attention to ascertain whether students have developed positively at the end of every instruction. Therefore, assessment and learning outcomes are indistinguishable. Assessment is integral to teaching and learning (Pradnya, 2020). A writer indicated that “Educators have extensively employed assessment to evaluate, quantify, and record students’ academic preparedness, learning advancement, and skill development throughout their educational journey from preschool to college and beyond” (Idun, 2020). This indicates that assessment is undertaken to know students’ level of understanding, assess students’ knowledge and capabilities. In furtherance, “assessment can be

explained as the competitiveness of the Ghanaian educational system where high-level testing plays an essential role in the students' future advancement and places schools in ranks, ranging between most successful and less successful" (Evans & Acosta, 2021; Osman, Bordoh & Eshun, 2021). A writer indicated that "the more a teacher conceives assessment as improving teaching and learning, the more the teacher believed that assessment ensures students, teachers and schools are accountable" (Bordoh, et al, 2021). The writer further revealed that "effective teachers use a repertoire of teaching models and assessment strategies depending upon their situations and the goals and objectives they wish to attain." This statement confirms Olele (2012) and Eshun, Bordoh, Bassaw, and Mensah's (2014) assertion that "instruction would be viewed as incomplete if it is not assessed".

According to Adam (2020), educational assessment is the process of acquiring all kinds of data, through multiple possible means, about the characteristics of learners, to make informed decisions about the students through the process of instruction and learning. Similarly, Adam et al., (2019), this explains why "assessment, teaching and learning are said to be inextricably linked as each informs the others". This is in line with NaCCA (2018, p. 31), which states that assessment in education denotes a procedure for acquiring and analysing information utilised for decision-making about learners, curricula, programs, and educational policy. From the definitions above, it is clear that assessment is all about collecting data to make an informed decision about teaching and learning. This presupposes that "with assessment, teachers are provided with authentic evidence to ascertain whether students have achieved the stated goals and objectives set for them. It is against this background that Bialik et al. (2016) postulate that "assessment provides valuable information to students, educators, parents, policymakers, and the public about the effectiveness of educational services."

Teachers must therefore take into account the goals of each assessment procedure and related activity (Brown et al., 2014).

Formative assessment is a systematic procedure for continually collecting evidence regarding students' learning outcomes (Heritage, 2007; Ochour et al., 2022). The authors disclosed that "the data are utilised to ascertain a student's present level of learning and to modify lessons to assist the student in achieving the intended learning objective." Formative assessment according to Bordoh, Bassaw, and Eshun (2013:9), is the practical method of gathering information regarding students' academic performance in the classroom. It is a form of continuous assessment that occurs throughout the instructional process. In this context, Social Studies teachers formative assessment strategies and their evaluation of students for the sake of learning must be regarded with utmost seriousness. Moreover, Opre (2015) emphasised that "when teachers conceive assessment as a useful method of obtaining the information needed to make critical learning and teaching-related decisions, while teaching and learning are occurring (formative), they will always use the assessment tools that are complementary to the process of teaching and learning."

However, Eshun (2013:17) posits that "teaching Social Studies is stressed to be done in student-centered techniques and strategies." The writer further indicated that "these strategies include brainstorming, role-playing, simulation, discussion and debate as the major techniques stressed by both SHS Social Studies curriculum and the Social Studies syllabus." Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh (2013:28), "... in formulating formative assessment and scoring, teachers rather emphasised the cognitive domain to the neglect of affective and psychomotor domains, which are also of paramount importance." This aligns with Parker's (2015) assertion that "to prepare learners for

active and responsible citizenship fully, it is paramount to address both the affective and psychomotor domains in Social Studies education alongside cognitive and behavioural objectives.” This can help learners better understand themselves and their societal roles and cultivate the dispositions necessary for civic engagement and social justice.

Previous investigations conducted indicated that the majority of the teachers use the traditional teacher-centered approach to teaching due to classroom challenges, despite the fact that Social Studies should be taught as a holistic subject, should reflect a behavioural change in students rather than just fact from other Social Sciences, and that Social Studies teachers should emphasise teaching skills more than the factual content (Eshun & Mensah, 2013a). Against this background, Bordoh, Brew, Otoo, Owusu-Ansah, and Yaw (2021) stressed that social studies topics taught in the classroom have an impact on students' performance on expository questions as well as their capacity to apply what they learn to real-life circumstances. This calls for an efficient formative assessor with the requisite level of subject-matter expertise and the right assessment instruments to employ in the classroom.

It is the teacher's primary duty in a formative classroom to share "criteria for success" with students by giving them feedback while they both strive to meet the lesson's goal. Quick answers from teachers engage students in class activities, which leads to the accomplishment of learning objectives (Bordoh, Brew, Otoo, Owusu-Ansah, Yaw, 2021). This claim supports the claim made by Bordoh et al. (2022) that good feedback reduces the discrepancy between the intended and actual results of a lesson. This demonstrates that Social Studies lessons will be successful when constructive criticism is used without a teacher-centered approach. The idea behind this is that

Social Studies teachers should think about how formative assessment and feedback relate to success criteria and reducing the gap. Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasises the need for teachers to continuously assess (formative) and adapt their assessment strategies based on students' responses and outcomes to improve the effectiveness of instruction and learning.

Formative assessment is a cornerstone of useful instructional practice, particularly in senior high school Social Studies, which emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement. Although, studies have revealed that Social Studies teachers generally report an adequate understanding of formative assessment and its intended benefits, however, numerous challenges limit its meaningful implementation in the classroom. Large class size, examination-oriented culture (for example, West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination, WASSCE), a lack of assessment resources, and other issues were noted as obstacles SHS teachers have while using formative assessment Songnalle (2019). According to Asante, et al., (2023) resources and materials are required to guarantee successful evaluation of Social Studies lesson in the classroom. Additionally, in order to make it easier to explain and evaluate concepts to students, Social Studies rooms and museums can be utilised for practical lessons.

Formative assessment is an essential part of successful instruction and learning, usually in Social Studies where critical thinking, inquiry, and value-based learning are emphasised. Traditionally, formative assessment has often relied heavily on questioning, class exercises, home works, written exams, quizzes, and oral feedback; however, recent educational reforms and pedagogical shifts advocate for the integration of alternative formative assessment tools such as portfolios, peer

assessments, self-assessment, scaffolding, concept maps, and reflective journals to better support student learning and engagement. Research conducted by Songnalle, (2019) showed that the most common formative assessment methods employed by SHS teachers was oral questioning. In Ghana, while the national curriculum encourages continuous assessment practices, few empirical studies have been conducted on how SHS Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise these alternative tools in practice.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate formative assessment in different subject areas and at different levels of our educational system (Bordoh et al., 2022; Ochour et al., 2022; Idun, 2020; Adam et al., 2019; Eshun et al., 2014), but these studies were more focused on tutors and trainee teachers in the colleges of education in Ghana, with few of them concentrating on the Junior High Schools. With this viewpoint, using the qualitative approach to determine how Social Studies teachers practice formative assessment in SHS in the Awutu-Senya West District in Ghana is expedient.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping students' lives beyond the classroom. In Social studies, learners are expected to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to become responsible and active citizens who can improve their living conditions and contribute to sustainable communities. However, this intended outcome has not been fully realised in Awutu-Senya West District senior high schools due to the manner in which Social Studies is taught and assessed. The education system's heavy emphasis on high-stake testing and accountability has led to a focus on rote learning and exams preparation rather than developing the practical

competencies and critical thinking skills that Social Studies aims to instill. A growing body of research highlights the value of formative assessment in promoting meaningful learning and active student participation. Despite this, Social Studies teachers in Awutu-Senya West District often struggle to effectively implement formative assessment practices. Studies (Adam et al., 2019; Amoako et al., 2019) reveal that many teachers misconstrue formative assessment in both theory and practice, rely predominately on traditional and lower-order task instead of alternative (authentic), high-level assessment that foster critical and reflective thinking (Asante et al., 2023). Consequently, students are deprived of opportunities to engage in deeper learning experiences that connect classroom knowledge to real-life situation.

This issue affects Social Studies teachers and students alike. Teachers face challenges in conceptualising and applying alternative formative assessment principles, tools, and techniques, which limits their ability to nurture the desired civic competencies among learners. Students, on the other hand, are denied the benefits of a learner-centered and feedback-driven instructional approach that encourage participation, reflection, and personal growth. The persistence of this challenge suggests a need for a paradigm shift in how assessment is understood, implemented, and valued in Social Studies education from high-stake, summative models toward balanced, formative approaches that emphasize learning as an ongoing process.

Although several studies in Ghana have examined formative assessment (Eshun et al., 2014; Adam et al., 2019; Idun, 2020; Bordoh et al., 2022; Ochour et al., 2022), the existing body of research is both contextually and methodologically limited. Most of these studies focused on teacher trainees and tutors in colleges of education and junior high schools, with only limited attention given to practicing SHS Social Studies

teachers, who operate under different curricular demands, assessment expectations, and classroom realities. Consequently, current literature provides incomplete picture of formative assessment practices by SHS Social Studies teachers. Moreover, these studies predominantly adopt quantitative and mixed methods, leaving a gap in qualitative understanding of how SHS Social Studies teachers conceptualise and implement formative assessment in their classrooms. Notably, no existing research has explored this issue within the Awutu-Senya West District. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in SHSs within the Awutu-Senya West District, with focus on: examining the extent to which SHS Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools when assessing their students, and exploring the challenges they face in implementing these practices effectively. By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute to improved teaching and learning practices that aligns with the transformative goals of Social Studies education.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The study aimed to examine Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in Senior High Schools in the Awutu-Senya West District.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine how senior high school Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District conceptualise formative assessment.
2. Examine the extent to which senior high school Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools when assessing their students.

3. Examine SHS Social Studies teachers' challenges in using formative assessment in their classrooms.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. How do senior high school Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District conceptualise formative assessment?
2. To what extent do senior high school Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools when assessing their students?
3. What challenges do SHS Social Studies teachers face when using formative assessment in their classrooms?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The findings and recommendations of this study will be valuable to policymakers, school administrators, educational planners, and teachers who aim to understand the role of formative assessment in improving students' academic performance and overall development. The research also seeks to identify challenges faced by Social Studies teachers in implementing formative assessment practices in senior high schools and to propose practical recommendations that will guide teachers in effectively integrating formative assessment into their instructional processes.

Furthermore, the results of the study are expected to support policy formulation and informed decision-making, as the research explores how Social Studies teachers apply formative assessment in teaching and learning. It highlights that formative assessment should be implemented as an integral and continuous teaching strategy rather than a tool used only when instructional difficulties arise. Also, the study will contribute to

the limited existing literature and provide a foundation for further research on the evolving nature of educational practices, by informing future educational policies.

### **1.7 Delimitation of the Study**

This study assesses Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in SHS in the Awutu-Senya West District of the Central Region of Ghana. For this purpose, it was not interested in all other forms of assessments.

### **1.8 Organisation of the Study**

The study is structured into five chapters. Chapter One presents the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the research. Chapter Two reviews related literature under three major sections: the theoretical framework, conceptual review, and empirical review. Chapter Three describes the research methodology adopted for the study, including the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sampling procedures and sample size, research instruments, trustworthiness, data collection procedures, methods of data analysis and presentation, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four focuses on the analysis and discussion of Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices. Finally, Chapter Five presents the summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, recommendations based on the research questions, and suggestions for further research.

### **1.9 Operational Definitions**

**Assessment:** is the process of obtaining data for decision-making regarding the teaching and learning process in order to make well-informed choices regarding students' learning, teachers' pedagogies, and other related activities.

**Formative Assessment:** is a method used by both teachers and students during instruction that offer feedback to modify continuing instruction and learning in order to enhance students' accomplishment and teachers' conception of anticipated instructional result.

**Formative assessment Practice:** is a manner and process of conducting assessment through teaching and learning. It entails teachers' actual application or use of ideas, strategies, techniques, and/or assessment methods to enhance instruction and learning.

**Alternative formative assessment:** is the non-traditional, ongoing methods that goes beyond standard tests to provide ongoing, in-depth insight into student learning, focusing on skill application and self-reflection.

**Social Studies teacher:** someone trained in the subject area with in-depth knowledge of the subject and the skills, techniques, and methods of teaching the subject in the curriculum.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of other research works carried out in this study area and other scholarly works that support the grounds for this study. Literature relating to the present study was reviewed under the following broad headings: Theoretical, Conceptual, and Empirical Review. The theoretical review covered one leading theory, the Social Constructivism Theory. The Conceptual review captured the concept of common core curriculum, concept of assessment, assessment in senior high school, concept of formative assessment, teacher knowledge and skills in formative assessment, alternative formative assessment tools in Social Studies, uses of formative assessment practices in classrooms, and challenges of using formative assessment. Other research works that have a bearing on the study were discussed under the empirical review.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

The concept of formative assessment is a critical part of teachers' lesson presentation in the classroom. Teachers use a range of assessment activities and strategies in the school to gain comprehensive insight into how much students learn as part of formative assessment. Formative assessment informs teachers about whether the students have learned, and they have indicators for how the teachers should plan their next lesson (Wuest & Fiset, 2012). The goal of formative assessment is to monitor students' learning progress by an instructor by providing feedback that informs the teacher's teaching and helps students improve their learning. Effective implementation and understanding of formative assessment require grounding it within a comprehensive theoretical framework. Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory is a

significant and influential framework that aligns with formative assessment practices, especially in the context of Social Studies education.

### **2.1.1 Social Constructivist Theory**

Social Constructivist Theory, propounded by Lev Vygotsky (1968), posits that learning is an active, social, and culturally mediated process. The theory maintains that language and culture serve as the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development is deeply influenced by social interaction, dialogue, and shared experiences. Hence, learners do not passively receive knowledge; rather, they co-construct understanding through interaction with teachers, peers, and their environment (Kapur, 2018). In the context of educational assessment, Social Constructivism provides a robust theoretical foundation for formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning. This is because both share the central principle that learning occurs most effectively through social mediation, reflection, and feedback. From this perspective, formative assessment practices are not merely evaluative tools but interactive processes through which teachers and learners jointly construct knowledge, identify learning gaps, and co-develop strategies for improvement (Akpan et al., 2020).

Formative assessment aligns with Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that is the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. This zone demonstrates the potential for developmental growth via social interaction, essential for scaffolding learning experiences. Through formative assessment, teachers identify students' current levels of understanding and provide scaffolding to help them progress to higher levels of competence (Idun, 2020). This process illustrates how social constructivism predicts formative assessment behaviours: teachers act as facilitators who use evidence of

learning to support students within their ZPD, while learners actively engage in self-assessment and peer feedback to regulate their own learning (Guo, 2022).

Furthermore, formative assessment embodies key principles of social constructivist learning environments identified by Vygotsky as: (i) Social interaction as a catalyst for learning, (ii) The significance of language, (iii) Scaffolding, (iv) Cultural and contextual influences. The principles of Vygotsky supported by Saleem et al. (2021) highlighted (i) Learners construct their own understanding. (ii) Knowledge is built through social experience. (iii) Learning is a communal and interactive activity. (iv) Learners' cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions are interconnected. (v) Learning occurs within inclusive and equitable communities. These characteristics are reflected in formative assessment practices such as peer review, collaborative learning, self-assessment, feedback dialogue, and reflective questioning, which engage learners in constructing meaning together. For example, Taylor (2018) emphasises that dialogue, collaboration, and shared information use are essential components of learning, principles enacted when teachers use formative feedback to guide classroom discussion and co-develop success criteria with students.

Social constructivism also explains why formative assessment fosters metacognitive development. As learners interact, discuss, and reflect on feedback, they become aware of their thought processes and learning strategies, leading to self-regulation and deeper understanding (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020). This ongoing dialogue between teacher and learner transforms the classroom into a co-learning environment where assessment is integrated into instruction rather than being a separate evaluative act.

Moreover, Social Constructivism shifts the responsibility for learning from teacher to student, transforming students into active participants and co-constructors of

knowledge. This aligns with the essence of formative assessment, where learners are encouraged to identify their learning needs, set goals, and engage collaboratively to bridge learning gaps (Al-Qaysi et al., 2021). Through this interaction, students' prior knowledge is activated and refined as they reconcile cognitive conflicts and build new understanding (Singh & Yaduvanshi, 2015).

Therefore, within the framework of Social Studies education, the Social Constructivist Theory provides both an explanatory and predictive model for formative assessment practices. It explains how Social Studies teachers, through formative assessment, guide learners to construct knowledge collaboratively about social and cultural issues. It predicts that when teachers implement formative assessment strategies such as questioning, feedback, and peer dialogue, students will engage more deeply in reflective thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and conceptual understanding.

Ultimately, the theory underscores the reciprocal relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. Teachers, as facilitators, use formative assessment data to mediate students' progression toward learning goals, while learners internalise feedback through social interaction and reflection. Thus, Social Constructivism not only explains how formative assessment supports learning but also predicts the kinds of teaching and learning behaviours such as dialogue, collaboration, reflection, and scaffolding that lead to improved student outcomes in Social Studies (Aljohani, 2017; Sardareh & Saad, 2012).

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory provides a robust framework for understanding and improving formative assessment practices, particularly in contexts constrained by time, resources, and educators' perceptions. The theory highlights the significance of social interaction, language, scaffolding, and cultural relevance in

fostering collaborative, reflective, and learner-centered assessment environments. The application within this study's context can enhance teachers' instructional strategies, professional development and teacher training, promoting collaborative and dialogic assessments, emphasising verbal and reflective practices, scaffolding and differentiation, establishing a culture of continuous feedback, and ultimately result in more effective and meaningful Social Studies education. Adopting Vygotsky's principles allows educators to address current challenges and utilise social learning in formative assessments to enhance educational outcomes.

In conclusion, the Social Constructivist Theory provides a comprehensive framework that integrates the social nature of learning with the formative use of assessment. It explains how formative assessment practices function as social processes that bridge the gap between a learner's current and potential understanding, and predicts that collaborative, feedback-driven classrooms will yield more meaningful and sustainable learning outcomes. I support the theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1968) and also agrees with the idea that teachers do not become owners of their learning and experience by default and, as such, must be trained to appreciate the essence and believe in the virtues of formative assessment practices in the process of instruction.

## **2.2 Conceptual Review**

This conceptual review is built around these key concepts: the concept of the common core Social Studies curriculum, assessment, formative assessment, teacher knowledge and skills in formative assessment, formative assessment tools in Social Studies, and challenges of using formative assessment. An operational definition of these concepts is provided to define them better.

### **2.3 The Concept of Common Core Curriculum**

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative Website (2010), a Common Core Curriculum is a set of standards defining what students should learn in each grade level in different subjects, such as Mathematics, Arts and English. It is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language, Arts and Mathematics at each grade level to be prepared to succeed in college, career, and life. In line with this, Opong (2024) postulate that a common core curriculum programme is a set of content standards that define what students are expected to know and be able to do at various critical points in their education. Further, McLaughlin and Overturf (2012) opine that a standard core curriculum is a framework for developing and implementing curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with the expectations of higher education, employers, and global competition. Based on the definitions, a standard core curriculum is a set of state-standard academic work that outlines what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level to prepare them for college and the world of work.

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative Website (2010), a Standard Core Curriculum programme aims to ensure that all students nationwide have access to a high-quality education that prepares them for college and career readiness. Notwithstanding, the Common Core Curriculum as an educational framework has generated various interpretations and opinions among scholars and writers. Below are a few perspectives on the Common Core Curriculum: Supporters argue that the standards provide a more rigorous and consistent framework for education. They argue that it provides a consistent set of learning goals, ensuring students in different states receive a similar education. Common Core is often praised for its emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Writers argue that it encourages students

to delve deeper into subjects and develop a deeper understanding rather than just memorising facts. They further emphasise its potential to better prepare students for tertiary education and career success (Polikof, 2015; Pasi, 2016). Again, proponents support that with a standard curriculum, students can change schools without interrupting the continuity of their educational studies (Deas, 2018).

Critics of the Common Core Curriculum argue that implementing Common Core is problematic since it narrows the curriculum and relies too heavily on standardised testing (Ravitch, 2014). The research findings of Nahar (2023) indicate that "emphasis on standardised assessment can limit the incorporation of these 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, thereby narrowing the curriculum and affecting the overall quality of education. Also, they argue that top-down, high-stakes standards will diminish the wide variety of experiences in the classroom. Moreover, they contend that a one-size-fits-all education model is not ideal for every child. They also contend that it may limit teaching to testable information and stifle knowledge, flexibility, and creativity, vital to quality educational experiences (Deas, 2018).

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS, 2010) postulates that the "Common Core Social Studies Curriculum is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in the subject to be prepared to succeed in college, career, and life. It is a set of standards that define what students should learn at each level in the subject or discipline of Social Studies." The Common Core Curriculum Social Studies Programme aims to help students develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for active and responsible citizenship in a diverse and interconnected world (NCSS, 2010).

### **2.3.1 The Rationale of the New Senior High School Social Studies Curriculum**

The vision for Ghana’s secondary education curriculum is to establish a system that equips all Ghanaian learners with the 21st-century skills, competencies, knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary to become responsible citizens, adequately prepared for the world of work, further education, and adult life. The nation’s core values underpin the Senior High School (SHS) curriculum, which is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2023). Ultimately, the curriculum seeks to produce graduates capable of contributing meaningfully to the sustainable growth and socio-economic development of Ghana (MoE, 2023).

The Senior High School (SHS) curriculum is purposefully designed to stimulate, develop, and sustain the interest of all learners, regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds, enabling them to realise their full potential and contribute meaningfully to Ghana’s socio-economic development within an increasingly interconnected world. It provides learners with opportunities to take active roles in the teaching and learning process, fostering engagement and ownership of learning. Adequate provisions have been made for both teachers and learners to identify and address barriers and misconceptions that impede effective instruction. Furthermore, the curriculum adopts a progressive approach that allows learners to move from the known to the unknown, as reflected in the structured sequencing of strands and sub-strands. In alignment with the developmental needs of Ghana and the global community, the strands, sub-strands, and content standards are systematically organised to incorporate entrepreneurial skills, civic education, environmental awareness, and career guidance (MoE, 2023).

Ghana, as a multi-ethnic nation, encompasses a diversity of cultural practices, beliefs, values, and norms that, when effectively harnessed, can promote national cohesion and foster social, economic, and political advancement. However, the nation is increasingly confronted with issues such as indiscipline, declining patriotism, and the erosion of traditional values that once characterised the Ghanaian identity such as respect, honesty, and hard work. Moreover, global and local challenges, including environmental degradation, civic illiteracy, economic mismanagement, gender inequality, and the rapid pace of digital and technological transformation, have significantly influenced the nation's developmental trajectory (MoE, 2023). These factors undermine Ghana's capacity to fully develop its human and capital resources, impeding its competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Compounding these challenges is the prevalence of measurement-measurement-driven instructional practices that emphasise rote learning over critical and creative thinking (MoE, 2023).

A well-structured Social Studies programme integrates knowledge, experience, and resource utilization to promote national unity and effective citizenship education (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013). According to the Ministry of Education (2023), Social Studies is inherently multidisciplinary, designed to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for active, informed, and responsible citizenship. The curriculum emphasises the development of learners' curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and leadership skills, alongside fostering communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, digital literacy, cultural identity, and global citizenship (MoE, 2023).

Furthermore, the Social Studies curriculum seeks to empower learners to address challenges that threaten Ghanaian society by applying interdisciplinary concepts, theories, and generalizations to identify, research, and develop appropriate solutions

to both personal and societal issues. It also nurtures individuals who are responsive to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) concerns, and who possess the competencies required to thrive in contemporary workplaces and global contexts (MoE, 2023). In essence, Social Studies serves as a vehicle for inculcating ethical values, responsible citizenship, and sustainable environmental stewardship in cultivating conscientious, accountable, and well-rounded individuals equipped with 21st-century skills for lifelong learning and national development (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013; MoE, 2023). This implies that, the subject seeks to inculcate relevant knowledge, skills (21st-century skills), attitudes, and values into students to cultivate ethically principled citizens who are conscientious, accountable, and adept at sustaining healthy lifestyles while safeguarding and conserving their environment for sustainability.

### **2.3.2 The Content and Assessment Instruction of the New Senior High Social Studies Curriculum**

In discussing the content of Social Studies, it will be incomplete to neglect the scope of the subject. The scope directly influences the content (Oppong, 2024). The writer further revealed that “When the scope is extensive, the content is likewise extensive; conversely, when the scope is limited, the content will also be limited. Consequently, every effort to ascertain the subject's content must first define its scope (Oppong, 2024). Upon completion, relevant subject matter, ideas, concepts, and generalisations may be derived from diverse fields within the scope (Laraba, 2018). The contents of Social Studies are drawn from several Social Sciences but not determined by the discipline of any of these. Social Studies is meant to cover the ground by picking content from the traditional disciplines such as History, Geography, Economics, Sociology and Civics, among others. Therefore, the whole group of subjects can be

considered compact, with the objective of adjusting the students to their social environment (Bordoh et al., 2018).

The MoE (2023) has developed a new SHS, Senior High Technical School and Science Technology Engineering Mathematics curriculum. It aims to ensure that all learners achieve their potential by equipping them with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, competencies, character qualities and shared Ghanaian values. This will prepare learners to live responsible adult lives. Further their education and enter the world of work. The new Social Studies curriculum for SHS (MoE, 2023) is organised and structured under six thematic areas. The thematic areas are organised under six strands and sub-strands:

- **Strand 1: Identity, Significance and Purpose.** The concepts to be taught under this strand are a geographical and historical sketch of Africa, identity, and national cohesion.
- **Strand 2: Environmental and Sustainability.** This strand covers environmental policies and laws in Ghana, environmental literacy, and sustainability.
- **Strand 3: Law and Order in the Ghanaian Society.** Law Enforcement Mechanism in Ghana; Wars and Conflict and their Implications; Legal Frameworks; and Civic Ideal and Practices.
- **Strand 4: Nationalism and Nationhood.** European encounter, Colonialism and Neo-colonialism, Nationalism, Citizenship and Nation-building.
- **Strand 5: Ethics and Human Development.** Indigenous Knowledge System; Ethics and Human Values; Civilisation of Africa; Leisure and Tourism;

Revolution that Changed the World; and The Youth and National Development.

- **Strand 6: Production, Exchange and Creativity.** Economic activities in Ghana; Entrepreneurship, Workplace Culture and Productivity; Consumer Rights, Protection and Responsibilities; Financial Literacy; and Globalisation (NaCCA, MoE, 2023).

### **2.3.2.1 Curriculum and Assessment Design: Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DoK)**

The curriculum and assessment framework is grounded in the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DoK), which together guide decisions about instructional content and assessment design. The Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy serves as a structure for planning meaningful learning experiences by identifying varying levels of cognitive demand. An understanding of these learning levels informs the development of instructional activities and assessments that appropriately challenge learners while supporting their progression toward more complex thinking. The framework places particular emphasis on higher-order cognitive skills such as analysing, evaluating, and creating, which are essential for learners to function effectively in an increasingly complex and dynamic global environment. As such, the taxonomy provides educators with a valuable tool for designing instruction that promotes deep learning and prepares learners for the demands of the twenty-first century (MoE, 2023).

The Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy is organised into six hierarchical cognitive levels.

1. **Remembering:** involves retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory, such as recalling facts, concepts, or information.

2. **Understanding:** requires learners to explain ideas, interpret meaning, and classify information.
3. **Application:** level focuses on using acquired knowledge and skills in new or unfamiliar situations, including executing procedures and solving multi-step problems.
4. **Analysis:** involves breaking information into component parts, identifying relationships, and distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant elements.
5. **Evaluation:** requires learners to make informed judgments based on established criteria, including critiquing ideas, identifying inconsistencies, and forming reasoned conclusions.
6. **Creation:** entails generating new ideas or products through planning, designing, and constructing original solutions or projects.

In addition to Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge framework provides a complementary lens for understanding the cognitive complexity of learning tasks. According to the Ministry of Education (2023), DoK focuses on the level of cognitive engagement required to complete a task rather than the difficulty of the content itself. The framework consists of four levels and supports educators in designing instruction and assessment that promote deeper thinking and meaningful problem-solving. By applying the DoK framework, teachers can better align learning activities with intended outcomes, differentiate instruction, and provide appropriate challenges to learners with varying levels of readiness.

1. **Level 1, Recall and Reproduction:** assessment focuses on basic knowledge acquisition, including recalling facts, definitions, and simple procedures. Learners respond to direct questions that initiate activities, exercises, or assessments.

2. **Level 2: Skills of Conceptual understanding** - extends beyond recall and requires learners to apply concepts, make connections, and use information to make decisions.
3. **Level 3: Strategic Reasoning** - learners engage in abstract and complex thinking, analysing and evaluating real-world problems with predictable outcomes. This level requires the application of logic, problem-solving strategies, and knowledge drawn from multiple subject areas.
4. **Level 4: Extended Critical Thinking and Reasoning** - involves sustained and sophisticated reasoning to address complex, authentic problems with unpredictable outcomes. Learners are expected to engage in creative thinking, monitor their progress, and evaluate the effectiveness of their solutions.

The primary distinction between the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and the DoK framework lies in what each measure. Bloom's Taxonomy focuses on the type of cognitive processes learners must demonstrate to show that learning has occurred, whereas DoK emphasises the context and complexity of the tasks through which learning is expressed. Bloom's Taxonomy provides a progression of cognitive skills that learners are expected to master sequentially, moving from lower- to higher-order thinking. In contrast, DoK allows learners to operate across multiple levels fluidly, depending on the nature of the task (MoE, 2023). This approach supports a shift from surface-level content coverage to deep learning, ensuring that learners can apply knowledge critically and flexibly in varied contexts.

Aligned with the National Pre-Tertiary Learning and Assessment Framework, the Secondary Education Assessment Guide (SEAG) requires classroom assessment to incorporate Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, and Assessment of Learning. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to integrate the Revised Bloom's

Taxonomy with the DoK framework when designing classroom assessments. Formative assessment strategies such as classroom discussions, project-based learning, and self-reflection activities are particularly important, as they provide opportunities to gather feedback and support learner growth. Engaging learners in feedback processes is also essential, as their perspectives offer valuable insights into their skill development (MoE, 2023). To effectively assess twenty-first-century skills and competencies, teachers should employ a balanced combination of formative and summative assessment methods. This process involves clearly identifying the skills to be assessed, aligning them with appropriate DoK levels, designing assessment tasks that reflect both the skills and cognitive demands, and collecting evidence of learning through assessment implementation. The DoK framework thus serves as a powerful tool for evaluating how deeply learners understand and apply knowledge, enabling teachers to identify strengths, address learning gaps, and improve instructional practice (MoE, 2023).

#### **2.4 The Concept of Assessment**

Assessment has long been a fundamental component of classroom instruction, serving as a key mechanism for determining whether learning has effectively occurred. According to Bekoe, Eshun, and Bordoh (2013), assessment “is a systematic process for gathering data about student achievement. It is also seen as an essential component of teaching.” In a similar vein, Annan-Brew (2022) defines assessment as the systematic collection of information about learners’ progress using available time, knowledge, expertise, and resources to guide decisions aimed at improving teaching and learning. This implies that data gathered whether through formal or informal means should be used by both teachers and learners to monitor and enhance learning progression.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA, 2020) further emphasises that assessment involves collecting and evaluating information about learners to make informed decisions for improving their learning outcomes. Consequently, assessment information is essential for determining students' learning abilities, appropriate placement levels, and overall achievement (Kankam et al., 2015). Ghaicha (2016) asserts that "the school must be able to meet national requirements for assessment," which involves assigning numerical or descriptive measures to students' performance to indicate the extent to which they possess specific characteristics or competencies. These measures serve as evidence of an individual student's knowledge, understanding, skills, and abilities. This highlights that assessment whether formative or summative captures students' understanding and performance across various instructional contexts.

According to Omer (2020) and Tontus (2020), assessment entails gathering and analyzing information from diverse sources and activities to develop a comprehensive understanding of what students know, understand, and can apply as a result of their educational experiences. Omer (2020) further explains that assessment is a systematic field concerned with evaluating student development, program effectiveness, and the overall quality of educational activities. Similarly, Buyukkarcı and Şaahinkarakas (2021) describe assessment as "the process of collecting information on students' achievement and performance and also as the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs." These collected data provide the basis for making informed decisions about teaching and learning (Alderson, Brunfaut, & Harding, 2017). This indicates that assessment documentation provides stakeholders in education with evidence of teaching and learning that can help inform decisions on learning and pedagogy. In the context of this research,

assessment is operationally defined as the process of collecting relevant information on students' learning, teachers' pedagogies, and other educational activities to inform stakeholders on the progress learners have made in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes through diverse instruction strategies.

Educational assessment is guided by the objectives, applications, and functions for which it is conducted. It performs several key roles, including motivating learners, enhancing learning processes, providing feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses, offering pathways for improvement, and supplying instructors with insights into learners' comprehension and attainment of learning outcomes (Zou, 2008; Idun, 2020). The foundational principles governing assessment include validity, reliability, effectiveness, comparability, consistency, equity and diversity, practicability and efficiency, transparency, and attribution (Annan-Brew, 2022).

Assessment serves multiple purposes, providing information for decision-making concerning students, curricula, programmes, and educational policy. These purposes encompass instructional management, selection and placement, counselling and guidance, and certification decisions (Anane, 2023). In alignment with this, the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2018) outlined five major purposes of assessment: planning and organising instruction (diagnostic), managing instruction (formative), grading learners (summative and evaluative), guiding learners (formative and diagnostic), and making certification decisions (summative). This implies that, for assessment to achieve its full course, its principles and purposes are crucial and critical parts of classroom instruction, which inform teachers of their pedagogy and students of their learning outcomes.

Ghaicha (2016) posits that assessments enable evaluators to obtain informative insights into three essential functions: selection, monitoring, and accountability. Similarly, Vingsle (2014) asserts that assessment provides feedback to students by measuring their progress, helping them understand their level of mastery of taught content, and assisting instructors in grouping students for behavioural, social, or instructional purposes. In consonance with these perspectives, Bordoh et al. (2022) argue that assessment enables teachers to determine whether learners have comprehended the material presented, while also informing students about the extent to which they are progressing toward their learning goals. This implies that, educational assessment plays a crucial role in curriculum implementation by providing relevant information to stakeholders on the progress and areas of the programme that need improvement. An effective curriculum needs practical assessment, so formative assessment should be prioritised. This is because of its vital role in assessment and its principles, purposes, and functions.

#### **2.4.1 Assessment in Senior High Schools of Ghana**

Assessment is obtaining information to make decisions about students, schools, curricula, programmes, and educational policies. It includes the full range of procedures such as tests, observations, interviews, viva voce, laboratory work or quizzes used to gain information about student learning (Anane, 2023). Classroom assessment is critical in promoting quality education and has become the pivot of various educational improvement efforts (Oduro, 2015). Large-scale and classroom assessments serve different purposes and have different goals. Large-scale assessment informs systems. It is often used for system monitoring, to evaluate programs, or to make student placements. (Wilson & Kenney, 2003; Idun, 2020). Classroom assessment is used to inform teaching and learning during instruction.

In Ghana, assessment in the National Pre-Tertiary Education Curriculum Framework should take the following forms in schools:

#### **2.4.1.1 Continuous Assessment**

In order to capture the full range and levels of competence, a variety of formal and informal continuous assessment situations are necessary to provide a complete picture of the learner's progress and achievements in all subjects. Continuous assessment must be clear, simple, manageable, and anchored in learner-centered principles and practice. Teachers must elicit reliable and valid information about the learner's performance in the basic competencies. The data collected regarding learners' progress and accomplishments should be utilised to provide feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, identifying areas of proficiency and the reasons for such, as well as areas requiring improvement, the methods for enhancement, and the rationale behind them. Parents should be consistently apprised of their child's development across all disciplines, encouraged to acknowledge achievements, and provided with recommendations on facilitating their learning activities. The student's advancement and accomplishments in all disciplines must be communicated to parents in the school report (MoE, 2018). This implies that teachers are to teach and learners are to learn. Assessment informs stakeholders about students' progress, pedagogy, and the curriculum.

#### **2.4.1.2 School-based-Assessment**

School-Based Assessment (SBA), also known as Continuous Assessment, is endorsed for implementation in Ghana as part of the Educational Reforms initiated in September 2008. SBA is an exceptionally efficient approach to education when used

correctly. The new SBA system aims to furnish schools with an internal evaluation framework to facilitate the following objectives:

- Standardise the implementation of internal school-based assessments throughout all educational institutions nationwide.
- Offer modified assessment tasks for each elementary school subject.
- Furnish educators with directives for generating assessment items/questions and other evaluative tasks.
- Establish achievement standards for each subject and class within the educational system.
- Provide direction on evaluating and scoring test items/questions and additional assessment assignments. Implement a moderation method to guarantee the precision and dependability of educators' assessments.
- Offer educators guidance on implementing remedial education for challenging curriculum sections to enhance student achievement (MoE, 2018).

The SBA marks should collectively represent the SBA component, graded out of 60%. The focus is on enhancing learners' performance by motivating them to achieve better standards. The SBA will therefore comprise:

- End-of-month/Strand assessments
- Homework and projects tailored explicitly for SBA
- Project or Initiative

The SBA system will have 12 assessments annually, in contrast to the 33 evaluations of the prior continuous assessment system. This will result in a 64% reduction in workload compared to the prior continuous evaluation system. In addition to the SBA,

educators must utilise class activities and homework to assess students' classroom performance and promote enhancements in learning outcomes. (MOE, 2018). This indicates that assessment is done for summative reasons and formatively to ascertain students' comprehension during teaching and learning.

#### **2.4.1.3 End-of-Term Examination**

The end-of-semester examination serves as a summative evaluation and must encompass a representative sample of the knowledge and abilities students have attained during the term. The Term 3 final examination must consist of items/questions aligned with the specific objectives covered across the three terms, employing a distinct weighting method to accurately represent the significance of the work accomplished in each term in suitable proportions (MoE, 2018; Idun, 2020). This shows that end-of-term examinations are crucial to ascertain whether students have grasped the subject content throughout teaching and learning and whether the objectives have been achieved.

#### **2.4.1.4 Informal and Formal Methods**

The educator must evaluate each student's proficiency in the fundamental competencies outlined in the subject syllabi to comprehensively understand the learner's overall progress. This can largely be accomplished informally through systematically observing each learner's progress during learning and practice scenarios as they explore, interpret phenomena and data, apply knowledge, communicate, make value judgements, and engage in general participation (MOE, 2018). During Years 10 (SHS 1) and 12 (SHS 2), mock examinations may be conducted to develop examination abilities and to pinpoint syllabus areas requiring additional focus. Mock tests are beneficial alone when utilised as a learning

opportunity for self-organisation, comprehension of the paper, interpretation and response to examination-style questions, and effective time management during assessments. This entails the teacher methodically reviewing the paper with the students upon the return of their replies (MoE, 2018). This implies that after teaching and learning have taken place in the classroom, the teacher must observe students outside the classroom to ascertain whether they can apply the skills and knowledge taught. This could also inform teachers about their teaching.

#### **2.4.1.5 Authentic Assessment**

Asante (2023) defines authentic assessment as the engagement with significant challenges or questions that require students to utilise knowledge to produce successful and creative performances. The exercises either replicate or resemble the types of challenges encountered by adult citizens, consumers, or experts in the field (Sridharan & Mustard, 2015; Asante, 2023). Hosnan (2014) posits that “authentic assessment is a substantial and meaningful evaluation of learners’ outcomes across the affective, psychomotor, and cognitive domains.” Similarly, MoE (2018) emphasised that “authentic assessment encompasses a range of performances that necessitate learners to produce rather than select a response.” The author asserts that “authentic assessment is a method that emphasises learning and cognition, particularly higher-order thinking such as problem-solving, rather than merely lower-order thinking.” In conducting such an examination, the child/student utilises their cognitive, artistic, physical, and social capabilities (Idun, 2020). Authentic assignments frequently emphasise intricate, chaotic real-world scenarios and their associated limitations; they may also engage a tangible audience of stakeholders or "clients." Instances of authentic or alternative assessment encompass: child observation, anecdotal records, checklists, oral interviews, and portfolios (MOE,

2018). This indicates that authentic/alternative assessment allows learners to use higher-order thinking skills and abilities in their learning to solve real-life related problems.

## **2.5 The Concept of Formative Assessment**

The concept of formative assessment originates from curriculum evaluation. In 1967, Michael Scriven introduced the concepts of formative and summative evaluation to delineate two separate functions of evaluation in curricular assessment. He asserted that formative evaluation emphasises the enhancement of an individual or program throughout an activity. Summative evaluation determines whether the individual or program has achieved the specified objectives (William, 2011; Sedigheh & Mohd, 2012). Ochour, Opoku-Afriyie, and Eshun (2022) assert that the notion of formative assessment was initially introduced in 1971 by Bloom, Hastings, and Maddaus. They officially proposed that assessment should not be only used for summative evaluations of student performance, contending that educators have to incorporate instances of formative assessment after instructional phases. The authors postulate that “during these episodes, teachers should provide students with feedback and correction to remediate student work. Most experts now consider formative assessment an ongoing part of the teaching and learning process.”

According to Bordoh, Bassaw and Eshun (2013:9) assert, “Formative assessment is the hands-on deck process of information on the student’s academic achievements in the classroom. It is the type of assessment which is ongoing or goes on in the course of instructional delivery.” Similarly, Cekic and Bakla (2021) defined formative assessment as the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for making substantively grounded decisions or judgments about the product of learning task in

order to decide whether learners are learning, where they need to go, and how best to go there. In line with this Ozan and Kincal (2018) postulate that formative assessment is a process wherein educators and learners exchange feedback throughout instruction to structure the educational experience, enhancing student performance. This indicates that formative assessment is the one in which the instructor must give an immediate response and/or feedback on students' learning or performance for the necessary remediation to be given.

In the lenses of Wuest & Fiset and Ozan & Kincal, “formative assessments inform teachers about whether the students have learned and they have an indicator qualification for how the teachers should plan their next lessons” (Wuest & Fiset, 2012; Ozan & Kincal, 2018). In support of this assertion Heck et al. (2013) postulate that formative assessment reflects students' learning and teaching process. In line with this, McCallum & Milner's (2021) assessment for learning, which is based on the aim behind using it, is assessing learners' progress. Therefore, educators typically apply different methods to achieve the objective of the particular lesson (Rao & Meo, 2016). According to Enu (2021), formative assessment “is those activities undertaken by the teacher or students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities they engage in”.

According to Manzoor et al (2023), formative assessment “is a continuous process that accumulates evidence of student learning through both informal and formal techniques and delivers data to the teacher and the student”. Similarly, Mellati and Khademi (2018) conceive formative assessment “as a process in which the teacher controls both content and assessment procedures and can adjust their instructional activities by the evidence gathered in the classroom”. The definitions of the various

authors attest that formative assessment is an ongoing instruction that seeks to improve student learning by providing appropriate feedback to students and to improve teachers' pedagogies. Formative assessment is a way to gauge what students know versus what is unknown. Formative assessment “gives teachers information to inform their teaching and improve student learning while it is in progress and while the race's outcome can still be influenced” (Greenstein, 2010, p. 2; Husiman, 2018).

Writers stated that “literature provides a metaphorical framework to elucidate the function of assessment in facilitating students' attainment of learning objectives” (Sadler, 1989; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Idun, 2020). Bordoh, Bassaw, and Eshun (2013) assert that if one end of the gap signifies student learning objectives (point B) and the other indicates the students' current status regarding those objectives (point A), the interval between points A and B constitutes a gap that requires bridging. To ascertain the magnitude of the disparity between points A and B, the instructor must render the students' cognitive processes observable, enabling a comparison of their comprehension to the objective. This may involve stimulating students' cognition through verbal or written cues, examining students' notebooks or assignments, or observing small group discussions (Bordoh et al., 2013).

The writers further bemoaned that “in many conversations about assessment, the focus stops with an inference concerning student understanding (point A), and at times includes how much it falls short of point B or the goals. While the gap metaphor lacks the complexity inherent in any classroom activity, it does capture the possibility of how assessment can provide teachers and students with information that can inform actions that bridge the gap. The optimum gap size is hypothesised to be not too large or too small, to create sufficient determination for the student to adopt and reach the

goal and the process that connects the teachers' goals or criteria with the student's current state of understanding that is, the process that closes the gap, is the "feedback loop" or the process of the teacher providing feedback to students" (Bordoh, Bassaw & Eshun, 2013). This shows that "formative assessment provides the teacher with a bridge between assessment and teaching as it is an essential way of creating independent, reflective learners who can plan and assess their progress" (Bordoh et al., 2013, p. 9). The writers further emphasise that "this gives students time to process new information, guide their learning, with the teacher providing help where necessary or appropriate."

A writer posits that "formative assessment is an essential element in the learning process as it provides information on learners' strengths and weaknesses about their progression. Thus, teachers can use it in planning what to do next to enhance learning and teaching. As the main purpose of formative assessment is to provide feedback from teachers and students, and to both of them in the learning process, information can be drawn for summative purposes" (Black, 1993). William and Idun concur that there are four primary components of formative assessment (William, 2011; Idun, 2020): (i) Articulating learning objectives and success criteria; (ii) enhancing the quality of inquiry and dialogue; (iii) improving the quality of assessment, feedback, and record-keeping; and (iv) implementing self and peer evaluation. Heritage (2009) asserts that goals and criteria inform students about the content and purpose of their learning, facilitating their engagement in what could otherwise be a passive educational experience. The writer further indicated that "when a new topic is introduced, students must share their goals, needs and criteria to get good results."

Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison (2011) espoused that from the beginning of the lesson, students are given the responsibility for their learning, giving each one a chance to create their knowledge of the subject, to work together with their peers and their teachers, to expand their framework and to move toward more complex knowledge and understanding. This assertion is supported by Moss & Brookhart (2009) that “One of the benefits of sharing learning goals with learners is that they are given tasks in alignment with the goals.” This indicates that, for students to be active participants in formative assessment, classroom teachers are to share the criteria for success with students to align them to their learning by acquiring new information needed to increase their knowledge and improve their performance.

The study of Cowie and Bell (1999) cited in Idun (2020) indicated that two types of formative assessment were identified: planned and interactive formative assessment. The writers further posit that “in their view when formative assessment is planned, the phases of formative assessment are typically generated from the teachers' initiative. In interactive formative assessment on the other hand, the information is noticed by the teacher during student talk or student questions and tends to be carried out with some individual students or small groups.” This is in line with Popham (2011) seem to agree outlined two types of formative assessment as pre-assessment and ongoing assessment. The writer further revealed that “pre-assessment is a type of formative assessment that occurs before a unit of study begins. They are purely diagnostic. Teachers attempt to discover what students already know, understand, and can do regarding the upcoming learning. Ongoing assessment is what most people think of as formative assessment. It occurs at various intervals throughout the learning process, and it is purposed to find out the degree to which students are "with" the teacher in

terms of meeting learning goals, so classroom content, process, and products can be adjusted to facilitate student growth better” (Popham, 2011).

A writer indicated that “the main goal of formative assessment is developmental (Petty, 2004; Idun, 2020). This is supported by Parmiigiani (2024, p. 02), who postulates that “essentially, formative assessment is intended to assist students in diagnosing and monitoring their progress by identifying their strengths and weaknesses and spending their efforts on trying to improve their learning processes.” This means that the effective use of assessment for learning technically assists students in achieving the learning goals, whereby students can assess their learning to put themselves on a learning scale.

The Ministry of Education (2018) asserts that formative assessment in Ghanaian classrooms should be regarded as Assessment for Learning (Afl). This assessment method delineates strategies for the formative objectives of the assessment. The Ministry of Education further specified that formative assessment:

- can derive from diverse information sources (e.g., portfolios, ongoing work, teacher observations, discussions);
- involves providing verbal or written feedback that is predominantly descriptive, highlighting strengths, identifying challenges, and guiding students towards subsequent steps;
- requires teachers to evaluate learners’ comprehension and modify their instruction to ensure progress;
- involves the absence of grades or scores, with record-keeping that is chiefly anecdotal and descriptive; and

- takes place throughout the learning process, from the beginning of the course to the point of summative assessment (MOE, 2018). This implies that formative assessment is not necessary for grading students, but for informing teaching and learning by identifying areas of improvement and achievement.

The definition by Bordoh, Bassaw, and Eshun (2013:9) is the definitional stance taken by the researcher because it clearly captures the core purpose and nature of formative assessment in this study. The definition emphasises key aspect that align with scholarly inquiry and educational assessment: process-oriented nature of the definition “hands-on deck process” highlight that formative assessment is not a one-time event but a continuous and participatory process. This perspective fit well in my thesis, where processes of learning, teaching, and assessment are examined systematically. Also, the ongoing assessment during instruction clarifies that formative assessment “goes on in the course of instructional delivery” underlines its diagnostic and development role, distinguishing it from summative assessment. This ongoing nature make it highly relevant for studies examining how feedback, teaching strategies, and learning interactions evolve over time.

### **2.5.1 Teacher Knowledge and Skills in Formative Assessment**

Heritage (2007). proposes the knowledge and skills required by teachers who implement formative assessment. The author elaborates on “four fundamental components of teacher knowledge (encompassing various skills) and additionally, four particular skills related to pedagogical content knowledge that are not considered basic within her framework.” (Heritage, 2007; Idun, 2020). The fundamental components of teacher knowledge are:

*Expertise in a specific field.* This encompasses concepts, knowledge, and skills pertinent to the subject matter, including the ability to delineate learning advancement, which may be used to elucidate success criteria and furnish substantial feedback (Heritage, 2007). Heritage further asserts that “teachers’ comprehension of students’ metacognition pertains to assessment and students’ motivational beliefs within the domain of knowledge.” Heritage and Idun concur with the concept of domain knowledge as analogous to the definition of subject matter knowledge posited by Ball and colleagues (Ball et al., 2008; Heritage, 2007; Idun, 2020). This indicates that teachers must possess the requisite knowledge and skills in the subject area to teach effectively according to students' understanding.

*Pedagogical content knowledge:* According to Heritage (2007), pedagogical content knowledge encompasses understanding several teaching models that can tailor instruction to student learning. The author asserts that this knowledge base encompasses educators' understanding of various theories of metacognitive processes and self-assessment competencies (Heritage, 2007). This indicates that teachers must possess knowledge of the appropriate techniques or strategies to teach specific subject information effectively. Educators are expected to employ diverse classroom tactics to elevate instruction and learning quality, enhancing students' comprehension.

*Students' Prior Learning:* This encompasses educators' understanding of pupils' knowledge and ability levels in the subject matter. It also encompasses understanding students' evolving attitudes towards the subject and their degree of linguistic ability (Heritage, 2007; Idun, 2020). This implies that teachers must know the student's understanding of the subject content to help them develop metacognition.

*Assessment knowledge:* A writer stressed “including expertise in formative assessment procedures to extract information and understanding of aligning formative assessment with teaching objectives (Heritage, 2007; Idun, 2020). The writer stated that “teachers must know that there are multiple sources of evidence on student learning, for example, from student or peer assessment” (Heritage, 2007). This indicates that teachers must assess students’ knowledge level to know the kind of formative assessment practices to use, which could align with the instructional goals to be achieved during instruction.

According to Heritage (2007), the four specific skills are all defined as pedagogical knowledge. Heritage further emphasises that “The specific abilities required for teachers to implement formative assessment effectively include;

- establishing conducive settings for formative practice,
- utilising student self-evaluation,
- interpreting evidence of student learning, and
- aligning instruction with identified gaps (Heritage, 2007; Idun, 2020).

However, as Brookhart (2011) noted, the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students must be updated due to formative assessment. These standards were developed to guide teacher educators, develop teacher education programs, and workshop instructors, as well as function as an impetus for educational measurement instructors to conceptualise student assessment more broadly. In this light, Social Studies teachers need to teach the subject with specific acquired skills that can enhance and promote students' learning.

Koh et al. (2010) and Ozan et al. (2018) seem to agree in their write-up that “formative assessment contributes to teachers’ professional development as well as to

student learning by transferring professional development practices to the lesson plans.” Upon this, Ozan & Kincal (2018) assert that Educators employ many assessment activities and tactics in the classroom to understand student learning as part of formative assessment thoroughly. Alongside offering feedback to pupils, they evaluate the information, provide commentary, and utilise it to assess and structure instruction. The writers further bemoaned that “students are active information providers. They participate in learning and teaching activities and use assessment information to identify goals, make decisions about their development, and understand how qualified their work will be” (Ozan & Kincal, 2018). Formative assessment helps shape the teaching and learning process, attain instructional goals, and positively impact students’ grades obtained from summative assessment (Tsulaia & Adamia, 2020).

According to Amoako et al. (2019), the teacher’s competencies and the student’s attainment of educational objectives can be enhanced by refining activities such as instructional tactics, pedagogical procedures, and learning assessments. While general assessment identifies existing learning gaps, formative assessment concentrates on strategies to bridge those gaps. This assertion is supported by Trumbull and Lash (2013), who state that formative assessment can help bolster students’ ability to take ownership of their learning, but this occurs only when students fully understand that the goal of the assessment is to improve learning. Several studies indicate that teachers do not fully comprehend formative assessment (Clark, 2013), which may account for their apathetic attitudes (Amoako, et’al., 2019).

From the above assertions, it can be asserted that teachers’ comprehension of formative assessment, its principles, purpose and functions have a bearing on their

commitment to formative assessment. Teachers must use diverse teaching and learning strategies by aligning lesson goals with the attainment of instructional goals. It is seen that the primary purpose of formative assessment is to close the gap, that is, to know where students were and where they are now, and what ought to be done to close that space. It could also be maintained that teachers' understanding of formative assessment will help them organise the appropriate instructional strategy that will help close the gap to improve students' learning and teachers' pedagogy.

### **2.5.2 Social Studies Formative Assessment Practices in the Classrooms**

Ahmedi (2019) states, "Formative assessment is supported by active chain reactions that help the student's learning." Ahmed further asserts that "one of the most robust assumptions regarding the relationship between formative assessment and the student in the teaching/learning process has been posited by John Hattie (2008)." Ajogbeje (2013) asserted that the effective utilisation of formative assessment facilitates thorough student preparation for tests, and such frequent evaluations promote greater student engagement and commitment to the teaching-learning process, thereby enhancing academic performance. According to Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh (2013:28), "knowledge is constructed during the learning process and that a student discovers knowledge for him/herself, rather than receiving knowledge, and this inspires the notion of performance-based assessment." Bekoe et al. further posits, "It is increasingly apparent that formative assessment is a crucial element of the teaching and learning process. In line with this, Bordoh, Bassaw and Eshun (2013:9) assert that formative assessment is used to provide information on the likely performance of students; to describe strength or weakness and feedback given to students, telling them which items they got correct or wrong. Hence, formative assessment enhances the efficacy of instructional strategies for Social Studies tutors/teachers.

According to Brookhart (2011), formative assessment has dominated the educational discourse during recent decades, thus placing the attention towards the assessment practices that help learning, and it is believed to be very productive when applying the teaching practices that support the students' learning (Yan & Cheng, 2015). Likewise, research conducted by Lyon and Leusner (2008) confirms that when teachers offer their students reactions to foster their thinking, to identify the specific fields that need improvement, and to take time for the said improvement, students act based on those reactions to improve their work. This implies that it is essential for Social Studies teachers to utilise the teaching strategies and techniques that are key in formative assessment, which make learning more welcoming to students, not only to improve their learning but also to improve teachers' pedagogy.

In the book by Fisher and Frey (2014), the two authors explore standard formative assessment techniques in the classroom and the importance of such techniques for student learning. These two authors argue that while most classroom teachers check for student understanding with questions such as, "Did you all get that?" or "Does that make sense?" These methods are insufficient when assessing whether students reach the level of learning needed (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In Furtherance, Fisher and Frey (2014) lay a foundation in which a teacher understands the importance of establishing a comprehensive formative assessment system. This system has three parts: learning goals, student feedback, and the planning of student instruction based on identified weaknesses or errors. This indicates that, if constructive formative assessment is consistently used, teachers can diagnose students, identify their strengths, give appropriate feedback and remediate weaknesses to improve students' learning.

Black and William's research concerning the teachers' autonomy indicates that "each teacher should find his/her ways of incorporating assessment in his/her model of work in the classroom and the norms and cultural expectations of a special school community" (Black & William, 1998, p.143). Hence, teachers should create classroom structures that allow students to engage during the learning process. The change of methodology requires, in the first place, the change of what teachers believe to be their students' ways of learning and, in the second place, what teachers qualify as effective teaching strategies (Ahemdi, 2019). The main principles of formative assessment enable the identification of the weaknesses and strengths by increasing the students' motivation and metacognition, and by ensuring that the teaching/learning reactions inform them about their capacities for improving the learning. Both teachers and students can benefit from formative assessment, from receiving the teaching/learning data that may be used to support personalised teaching/learning (Ahemdi, 2019).

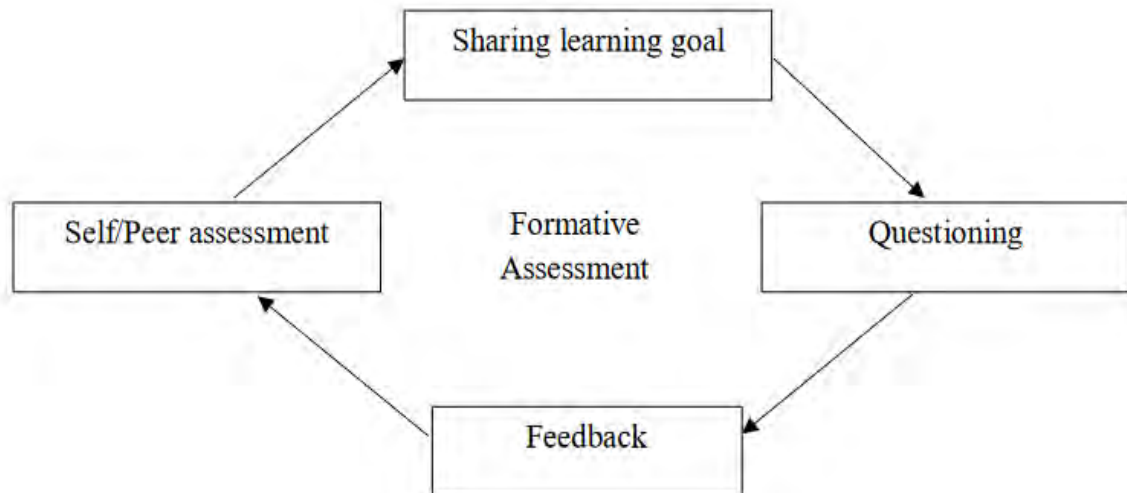
There is a considerable similarity between the terms of knowledge and beliefs in the concept of teachers' knowledge. In this light, Abell and Siegel (2011) and Enu (2021) conceived "teachers' assessment knowledge as the knowledge and skills needed to develop and practice in order to investigate what students know and can do, interpret the result of assessments, and use the result to decide how to improve students' learning and programme effectiveness". This means that teacher educators' assessment knowledge is valuable for practical and sound assessment practices (Oduro-Okyireh et al., 2015). Practical knowledge developed by Elbaz (2018) explains how a teacher knows or understands the situation in the classroom. Attitudes are important concepts in the teaching process, as well as actions in the classroom and the acceptance of change. Attitudes and actions in the classroom affect the teachers'

change process. Hence, they are important in understanding classroom practices, helping teachers develop critical thinking, and aiming for changes in practices within the process (Ahemdi, 2019).

Considering the teachers' attitudes are very important for the teaching/learning process, different authors have focused on studying the teachers' attitudes (Darling-Hammond, 2000) as the biggest polemic in the literature about the teachers' change is related to the difficulty of changing the attitudes and practices. Several researchers argue that the change is challenging, if not impossible. This apparent difficulty is often used to explain that teachers are unchangeable in their attitudes. However, some other researchers and teachers are optimistic that teachers and students can change; their attitudes and practices often change, and programmes can help them do this in an important and valuable way (Ahemdi, 2019).

This implies that teachers' attitude in the classroom significantly influences the teaching and learning process regarding formative assessment. A teacher's shift from the traditional way of teaching could eventually lead to a shift in students' learning, improving their attitude towards a particular subject and their academic performance (summative assessment). Formative assessment aims to optimise the measurement of students' intellectual abilities. They try to provide a more complete picture of a child's real and maturing cognitive structures and performance and, on this basis, advance the diagnosis of learning difficulties (Buyukkarci & Sahinkaraskas, 2021).

However, Black and William (1998a) set out four main headings for formative assessment practice: sharing learning goals, questioning, feedback and self/peer assessment (See the figure Below).



**Figure 1: Formative Assessment Practice**

Source: Black and William (1998)

### **2.5.2.1 The first principle is sharing learning Goals**

Learning opportunities are more likely to succeed if learners have a clear, specific understanding of what they are learning. According to Heritage (2008), goals and criteria enable students to know what and why they will learn so that they can become active participants in what otherwise can be a passive learning process. When introducing a new topic, students must share their goals, needs and criteria to get good results and notes (Lombard & Schneider, 2013). In support of that, sharing learning goals by teachers with students enables both parties in the classroom to have a successful end of a lesson where the predetermined objectives have been achieved.

### **2.5.2.2 The second principle is questioning.**

Effective questioning is an important element in formative assessment, and it includes matching the questions with the learning target, engaging the whole class and providing enough wait time for students to respond (Buyukkarci & Sahinkarakas, 2021). One of the primary elements of formative assessment is asking questions (Hodgson & Pyle, 2010). According to Borich (2014), fifty or more questions are

typically asked in elementary and secondary school classrooms during lesson time. Such intense focus on a single strategy shows both its suitability and perceived effectiveness. Besides, most teachers do not use classroom dialogues to help students learn (Black et al, 2003). Asking questions in formative assessment is crucial to obtaining information about students' learning and understanding. This objective can be achieved if the questions are active and effective at determining the learner's depth of knowledge (McMillan, 2014). This implies that asking questions during teaching and learning helps unearth students' hidden perceptions about the subject content and the topic, clarifies conflicting ideas, widens students' understanding and enhances teachers' teaching.

### **2.5.2.3 The third important principle is feedback.**

Constructive formative feedback is more effective when it gives detailed information about the student's responses, whether they are correct or incorrect. At the centre of formative assessment is feedback (Huisman, 2018). The impact of formative assessment arises from the strength of the feedback provided to students about their learning and teachers about their teaching (Andrade, Lui, Palma, & Heffernan, 2015). According to Smith & Lipnevich (2018), formative assessment is "any information about a performance that a learner can use to improve or grow in the general domain of the performance." Similarly, Luckett and Sutherland (2000) emphasise that feedback provided through formative assessment has significant benefits when motivating students, helping students improve their learning, reinforcing their work, and providing them with a learning profile. Teachers are not the only source of feedback. Self and peer assessments can be taught carefully, guiding learners in providing constructive and learning-oriented feedback (Andrade et al., 2015). This implies that feedback in classroom assessment is always necessary since it informs the

students on the areas of their learning that need improvement in further studies. Constructive formative feedback from teachers and peers helps guide students' learning and teachers' pedagogy to improve students' academic performance.

#### **2.5.2.4 The last principle is self/peer assessment.**

Harrison et al. (2015, p.76) state that "self and peer-assessment is a sustainable lifelong learning methodology." Thus, it provides feedback for the future adjustment of teaching and learning activities in which learners are engaged (Vogt, Tsgari, Csepes, Green, & Sifakis, 2020), and learners take ownership of their learning and see themselves as partners in the teaching-learning process (Buyukkarci & Sahinkarakas, 2021). Self-assessment is an excellent formative assessment strategy that provides students immediate feedback on their performance according to established standards and criteria. It gives them information about how to make adjustments to improve what they learn and how they learn (Buyukkarci & Sahinkarakas, 2021). Peer review is influential in creating a more participatory learning culture within the learning environment (Kollar & Fischer, 2010). Peer assessment allows students to comment on other students' work and give feedback for improvement. This implies that self/peer assessment is vital when a well-designed formative assessment provides clear expectations and opportunities for students to self-monitor their learning and receive feedback from their peers.

#### **2.6 Formative Assessment Tools/Alternative Assessment Tools in Social Studies**

According to Anane (2023), assessment is the purposeful, systematic, and ongoing collection of information as evidence for use in making judgments of students' learning, curriculum, and programmes. According to Shermis and Di Vesta (2011), assessment should be viewed as an "intrinsic part" of teaching, not as a "separate

attachment" from teaching (p. 83). Bordoh et al. (2013, p. 2) assert that Social Studies is an issue-centred curriculum. Therefore, learners must acquire knowledge, demonstrate skills, and develop values. Good Social Studies teachers develop various assessment tools to assess students' learning. Some of the tools could be traditional forms, such as short-answer questions, selective and essay responses, and the newer forms of formative assessment, such as performance or authentic assessment, which have been developed in response to recent knowledge about teaching and learning (Idun, 2020). Social Studies teachers must use various assessment tools in teaching and learning if they want students to demonstrate mastery of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, attitudes and values.

Traditional assessment refers to conventional methods of evaluating student learning, typically through standardised tests, quizzes, written exams, and assignments. These assessments are usually structured, graded, and used to measure a student's knowledge, skills, and understanding based on a predetermined objective. These traditional assessment methods include multiple-choice tests, fill-in-the-blanks, short-answer questions, and essay exams.

### **2.6.1 Selected- response tests**

Selected-response tests are composed of questions with typically one best answer. They are sometimes referred to as objective assessments (Suskie, 2018). Some commonly used selected-response tests include multiple choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank items. Nilson (2016, p.291) notes that these tests assess students' ability to remember and understand course concepts and materials, but cannot "measure students' ability to create, organise, communicate, define the problem or conduct research." In true/false tests, data is quickly collected on a range of

knowledge targets, such as generalisations with little demand for reading ability. One of its limitations is the strong possibility of guessing and the difficulty of designing items beyond the factual knowledge level. Fill-in tests work for outcomes such as vocabulary understanding and do not promote guessing. Multiple choice items can be used effectively in testing items that demand low cognitive effort, such as recalling previously memorised knowledge. However, items that require students to use higher-order thinking skills, such as analysing and synthesising, are more challenging to produce (Simonson et al., 2000). This implies that using a selected-response test is not always appropriate because it creates a deficiency in some aspects of students' reasoning and tends not to benefit some students.

### **2.6.2 Extended or Essay Response Tests**

An essay response test is a test that gives freedom to the respondent to compose their responses using their own words. The tests consist of relatively few items, each demanding an extended response (Anane, 2023). Essay response tests are a fundamental tool in academic assessment, measuring students' ability to express, argue, and structure their thoughts on a given subject through written words. Moreover, subjectivity might be an issue in scoring. Creating a rubric is helpful to grade the essays (Simonson et al., 2000). Essay response tests eliminate guessing on the part of the respondent and are best suited for testing higher-order behaviours and mental processes such as analysis, synthesis/creativity, and evaluation. Some of its limitations are susceptible to the halo effect, where the scoring is influenced by extraneous factors like the relationship between scorer and respondent and time-consuming (Anane, 2023). Unlike conventional exams, this indicates that items delve deeper into a student's critical thinking and writing skills. Extended or essay response

tests are practical assessment tools since the questions are flexible and assess higher-order learning skills.

Authentic or alternative assessments are particular forms of formative assessment in social studies. Students must perform a real-life activity, and an assessment is made based on that activity (Idun, 2020). Diagnostic assessment is also seen as an alternative form of formative assessment. Although some authors view diagnostic assessment separately from formative assessment, the intention is that diagnostic assessments are used for formative purposes (Bekoe et al., 2013, p.22). Diagnostic or pre-assessment collects data for planning instruction and acknowledging learners' needs (Idun, 2020). Bekoe et al. (2013, p.22) assert pre-assessment “includes checks of prior knowledge and skill levels and surveys of interest or learning-style preference”. This implies that diagnostic assessment is used to pre-evaluate learners to determine their strengths, weaknesses, prior knowledge, and skill levels before instruction begins. This allows facilitators to tailor their teaching strategies to effectively meet students' learning needs and remove misconceptions and learning difficulties.

Herrera et al. (2007) include formative and summative assessments along with other types of authentic assessment, such as performance-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, interview-based assessment, play-based assessment, cooperative groups assessment, dialogue, journal, and scaffold assessment.

### **2.6.3 Performance Assessment**

Performance assessment commonly refers to substantive activities, either short-term, on-demand tasks or curriculum-embedded, project-based tasks that yield reliable and valid scores. Products can be extended writing, research reports, presentations, works

of art, performances, and more (Kahl & Hofman, 2013, p. 1). In support of Kahl and Hofman, the Vermont Agency of Education (2023) add that “performance assessments are any teacher- or student-designed learning activity or investigation in which students demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and/or skills through a performance task. The writer further posits that “performance assessments engage students in meaningful learning in authentic contexts, show genuine applications of knowledge, and yield a tangible product and/or performance that serves as evidence of learning (Vermont Agency of Education, 2023).

Similarly, Herrera et al. (2007) contend that the idea that knowledge is constructed during the learning process and that a student discovers knowledge for him/herself, rather than receiving knowledge, inspires the notion of performance-based assessment. The writer further emphasises that “this approach facilitates both the way students take information and the way they store and apply this information to deal with novel situations” (Herrera et al., 2007). According to Bekoe et al. (2013), performance-based assessment is an opportunity that "taps into the depth and breadth of students' learning. This implies that performance-based assessment allows students to construct their knowledge in real-world situations in alignment with the success criteria, this assessment form allows students to analyse, synthesise, and evaluate their understanding of a situation. Performance-based assessments ideally reflect critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and analytical skills that Social Studies seeks to achieve in promoting civic competence among students.

#### **2.6.4 Portfolio assessment**

Simon and Forgette-Giroux (2000, p.36) define a “portfolio as a cumulative and ongoing collection of entries that are selected and commented on by the student, the

teacher and/or peers, to assess the student's progress in the development of a competency". Similarly, Muller (2012) says a portfolio is a collection of a student's work specifically selected to tell a particular story about the student. With this, a portfolio means a collection of work produced by a student or group of students in a specific study area. Student portfolios have been inspired by professionals such as photographers and architects as a means of keeping a record of their accomplishments to show to others. Portfolio development is not a new concept in the history of education. Portfolios originated with artists' collections of their works and have long been used to demonstrate competencies (Bekoe et al., 2013).

According to William and Thompson (2008), gathering purposeful examples of students' work demonstrating their effort, progress, and understanding over time comprises the portfolio's main features. They must also justify the selected portfolio items concerning the course objectives (Bekoe et al., 2013). Osman and Adnan's (2007) portfolio is described as a systematic and purposeful collection of evidence reflecting the students' success, performance, and efforts in one or more areas over time. In line with this, the MoE (2023) portfolio assessment establishes various cognitive achievements and practical competencies. This indicates that a portfolio helps assess students' progress over time by exhibiting specific competencies or skills to inform the efficiency of teachers' pedagogy, help students with self/peer assessment and determine the student's weak points to remedy the learning process.

### **2.6.5 Scaffold assessment**

According to Bekoe et al (2013) defined scaffolding instruction as the “role of teachers and others in supporting the learner’s development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level.” In line with this, MoE (2023) scaffolding

in education refers to various instructional techniques aimed at moving learners progressively towards stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process. It involves breaking up the learning task, experience or concepts into smaller parts and providing learners with the support they need to learn each part. This is especially useful when assessing content information because it reduces the stress of students who may assume, they will have to answer questions in an essay format (Idun, 2020). The scaffolds facilitate students' ability to build on prior knowledge and internalise new information. As the learner's abilities increase, the scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable other is progressively withdrawn (Bekoe et al., 2013).

Finally, the learner can complete the task or master the concepts independently (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002:7). Therefore, the goal of the educator when using the scaffolding teaching strategy is for the student to become an independent and self-regulating learner and problem solver (Bekoe, Eshun & Bordoh, 2013, p. 24). Scaffold assessment can result in meaningful learning when students build new knowledge prior to the already existing knowledge after a task has been given. Scaffold assessment allows students to engage in critical, analytical, and problem-solving processes in which they integrate, elaborate and evaluate their understanding in new ways.

#### **2.6.6 Interview-Based Assessment**

Interview-based assessment is another form of alternative formative assessment that teachers use to gather data about students' experiences, interests, backgrounds, thoughts, beliefs, activities, etc. Teacher-student interviews vary from highly structured to informal conversations (Bekoe, Eshun & Bordoh, 2013, p. 24). Herrera

et al (2007) agree that unstructured, detailed interviews with students help teachers adapt the lesson based on student information. This implies that interview-based assessment evaluates students' skills, abilities, and knowledge to determine if they have grasped the content taught and how well their skills match the needed requirements and expectations. These allow students to unearth all their challenges regarding teaching and learning, for teachers to adequately adjust their teaching strategies to arouse students' interest in lesson presentations and enhance their class participation and academic performance.

### **2.6.7 Play-based assessment**

Play-based assessment is also a valuable assessment form that teachers can use at different grade levels. Examples include preschool children learning the names of objects, language learners who can barely explain things in the new language, and upper-grade levels who role-play or dramatise concepts from literature, history, concurrent life situations, and politics (Herrera et al., 2007). Similarly, Idun (2020) agree that “authentic assessment begins with teachers making it their business to purposefully watch, listen to, talk with, and think about the children in their classrooms”. Some teachers reflect on who these children are, the extent of what they know, and the way they will learn based on the evidence that they observe in the role-play (Bekoe et al., 2013). It can be asserted that, with play-based assessment, the learning environment is tailored to the learners and directed or supported by the teacher by involving them in various activities that enable them to learn in imaginative and independent ways. These activities help teachers make informed decisions about learners' emotional and behavioural development and decide whether to introduce new concepts to stimulate their curiosity during teaching and learning.

### **2.6.8 Cooperative Group Assessment or Collaborative Testing**

Cooperative group assessment is seen as an alternative form of formative assessment. The concept of group work or teamwork varies, depending on the context. Recent recognition of collaboration or teamwork is increasing in education, realising that the strengths and skills of some students are well-defined when they are engaged in group activities such as cooperative learning or assessment (Bekoe, Eshun & Bordoh, 2013, p. 24). However, Herrera et al. (2007:38) observe that collaborative or group activities often culminate in projects or experiments that may or may not require oral or written reporting. Teachers often document the thoughts and actions of individual students in performing an activity as they learn from cooperative activities and the dialogue that occurs among the students (Bekoe et al., 2013). This indicates that cooperative assessment facilitates careful monitoring and intervention by checking all groups' and individuals' progress. This will indicate that students are prepared with valuable lessons learned, compared to their unprepared counterparts with lower-quality output. This will allow the teacher to give students feedback on their understanding of a task's content, concept, and application.

### **2.6.9 Self-assessment**

According to Panadero et al. (2015) defined self-assessment as an activity through which students can explain and underline the "qualities of their learning processes and products" (p. 804). As specified by Andrade (2019), it is always important to clarify the purpose of formative assessment: in this study, self-assessment was not aimed at giving a grade. However, Wanner and Palmer (2018) describe that "the activity was intended to support students' reflection on their learning processes, to improve student learning and, in particular, develop students' capacities for giving feedback to themselves or others." Herrera et al., and Bekoe et al., assert that "for example, when

students are engaged in assessing their work, they try to learn the criteria for high-quality performance, and they experience a willingness to apply those criteria” (Herrera et al., 2007; Bekoe et al., 2013). In line with this, Ying-Li and Chen (2016) postulate that “self-assessment involves students, guided by the teacher, who decide what the appropriate assessment criteria are, and then sees how well they have met the criteria.”

Bourke & Mentis (2011, p. 854) maintain that “Self-assessment not only enhances student engagement in their education but also offers suitable learning opportunities for all students by including them in decisions regarding their learning.” This is consistent with what Ndoye (2017) reported, “in self-assessment, the intention is to engage the learner as an active participant in their learning. In the longer term, it might impact self-management of learning and tuning of learning by the learner rather than waiting for others to intervene.” It is against this background that Wanner and Palmer (2018) postulate that “the learner uses the information to self-assess and improve her/his learning by utilising the available resources. However, agreements exist among educators, in which they recognise the value of self and peer-assessment which helps students exert control over their learning (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004). Bekoe, Eshun, and Bordoh (2013) observed that “initially, some teachers provide rubrics for students so that they can assess their progress”.

Atkins, Black, and Coffey (2001) illustrate that a feature of alternative assessment that asks learners to ask three questions as they assess themselves: “Where am I trying to go? Where am I now; and how do I close the gap” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2004, p. 43). This implies that self-assessment is process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. Self-assessments encourage students to take responsibility for learning and better

understand their learning process. Self-assessment allows students to take responsibility for their learning by helping them develop learning strategies to fill identified learning gaps and improve their performance.

#### **2.6.10 Peer-assessment**

Reinholz (2016, p.1) defined peer assessment as a set of activities through which individuals make judgments about the work of others (p.1). Similarly, Ying Li and Chen (2016) postulate that peer assessment involves students judging or commenting upon each other's work. However, Bekoe, Eshun, and Bordoh (2013) assert that "in peer assessment, students often assess other students' work compared to the criteria developed by the instructor, or both students and the class instructor. The writers further revealed that "an important aspect of peer assessment is that it engages students in dialogue with their classmates, commenting on each other's work rather than a one-way feedback system from instructor to student" (Bekoe, Eshun & Bordoh, 2013). To enrich peer-assessment and use it productively Bekoe et al, (2013), Black and William (1998) propose that "students be trained to assess their peers purposefully, to improve learning. As students comment on their peers' work, they use informal language which they better understand. In other words, it allows learners to take responsibility for analysing, monitoring and evaluating aspects of their peers' learning process and product." According to Idun (2020), research studies examining this mode of assessment have revealed that it can work towards developing students' higher-order reasoning and higher-level cognitive thought, helping to nurture student-centred learning among undergraduate learners, encouraging active and flexible learning and facilitating a deep approach to learning rather than a surface approach. In a Similarly sentiment, Planas-Liado and Colleague (2013) indicated "a higher level of

motivation, sense of confidence in personal abilities and engagement as the result of students' attitudes changes due to peer assessment.”

This indicates that peer assessment encourages students to assess the extent of their effort and the quality of their outcome by comparing their achievement with their peers. This helps students criticise their work and make meaningful contributions to improve their learning and attitudes towards learning. Peer assessment allows students to gain more insight into their learning when they get detailed feedback from their peers, which is more than what the teacher can give to demonstrate their understanding of a concept or content taught.

## **2.7 Challenges of the Use of Formative Assessment by Teachers in the Classrooms**

According to Remesal (2011), various studies conducted on assessment have mentioned several factors that affect the assessment practices of academic staff. Senior high school teachers face various challenges in formative assessment in their classrooms. Studies have revealed several such challenges, some of which are:

### **2.7.1 Time-consuming**

Instructional time is widely recognised as a critical factor influencing teachers' instructional methods and assessment practices. Research indicates that limited teaching hours often constrain teachers' ability to implement learner-centred strategies and formative assessment. Hill and Grossman (2013) argue that insufficient instructional time compels teachers to prioritise syllabus coverage over effective instructional methods. From this perspective, time functions as a structural constraint that limits pedagogical flexibility. In contrast, Salia (2022) maintains that instructional time is systematically designed within the syllabus to support students' learning

throughout their school life. However, empirical studies challenge this policy-level assumption by demonstrating that teachers frequently experience time as inadequate in practice. Factors such as large class sizes, heavy workloads, and assessment demands reduce the effective use of allocated instructional time, creating a gap between curriculum design and classroom realities.

The challenge of instructional time is intensified by changing pedagogical expectations. Darling-Hammond (2015) notes that contemporary teaching requires continuous assessment, feedback, and instructional adjustment, making teaching more complex than in the past. This shift places additional pressure on teachers' time, particularly with the increasing emphasis on formative assessment. Formative assessment theory supports this view by conceptualising assessment as an ongoing process embedded within instruction (Sadler, 1989), which demands sustained instructional time. Empirical evidence consistently identifies time as a major barrier to formative assessment. Cisse et al. (2021) report that time constraints often prevent teachers from conducting formative assessment and providing timely feedback. Delays in assessment and feedback disrupt instructional progress and hinder students' understanding of foundational concepts. Similarly, Enu (2021) argues that addressing students' misconceptions through formative assessment is time-consuming, especially in large classrooms. Quyen and Khairani (2016) further highlight time demand and increased workload as key reasons for teachers' reluctance to integrate formative assessment into daily instruction. Concerns about completing course outlines also influence instructional decisions, as teachers may avoid interactive assessment practices to prevent delays in syllabus coverage (Eshun et al., 2014). Consequently, teachers often prioritise efficiency over instructional depth. This implies that time is a very measurable factor in formative assessment because it involves ample time for its

practice, and teachers should be allocated with enough time to integrate teaching strategies that ensure the effective practice of formative assessment.

### **2.7.2 Teachers' knowledge and understanding/Examination-oriented culture**

Several studies have revealed that "there are many challenges facing teachers' assessment practices in general, and specifically formative assessment, that need to be understood and addressed for better learning outcomes. Social Studies teachers fail to use innovation and conduct social experiments because such competencies are lacking" (Yalley, 2017). According to Ho (2015), formative assessment is "seldom used in the classroom." Similarly, Leahy et al. (2005) posit that teachers may be aware of formative assessment and its strategies. However, they do not use it in their classrooms. Quyen and Khairani (2016) opined that, in most reviewed studies, teachers do not understand the concept of formative assessment or how to implement it. A study by Amoako, Asamoah, and Bortey (2019) postulates that "teachers possess but little knowledge of formative assessment practices, there is more likelihood that classroom assessment for learning is merely rigged with flaws which eventually deviate from its targeted purpose." This indicate that, teachers' comprehension of formative assessment is very vital for using the appropriate alternative assessment tools during their instructional periods.

A study conducted by Bekoe (2023) posit that teachers who are the principal implementers of this curriculum, mentioned the demands and contents of the external assessment (WASSCE) as the main influencer of all their curriculum implementation/delivery decisions and actions. That is, what and how they should teach and assess in the classroom are driven by the nature of the high-stakes assessment. In line with this Asamoah et al., (2024) postulate that national education

context is a high-stake environment that judges students' competencies based on a pass in a one-shot external examination. Since this national policy forced their schools to meet high-stake goals, teachers were also influenced by the climates of their schools that supported a summative-driven assessment. Asamoah et al., (2024) further indicated that the education and assessment climates compelled them to be gatekeepers and implementors of a highly marketised and politicised assessment and education systems which hinder lifelong learning. This implies that, current education and assessment deny the teacher to use the preferred assessment practices to enhanced students' practical comprehension of knowledge for living.

### **2.7.3 Large class size**

Class size refers to the number of students a teacher teaches in one class (Salia, 2022). Class size sparks heated debate among educators (Moluayonge & Park, 2017). The study by Quyen and Khairani (2016) claims that "large class size does not diminish effective teaching in Asia". However, as noted by Pham (2014), large class sizes do interfere with the efforts of teachers to implement educational innovations, such as collaborative teaching. Formative assessment focuses on improving individual student learning based on relevant feedback from different student needs. A larger number of students per classroom would make it more difficult for the teacher to implement formative assessment. This is supported by a study conducted by Cisse, Ndinga, and Sane (2021), which revealed that the problem of overcrowding, which is increasingly noticed in classes, does not favour the individual follow-up of the students. Teachers must spend more time and attention to provide feedback (Quyen & Khairani, 2016).

Similarly, the study of Enu (2021) showed that "overcrowded classrooms impede teacher educators' implementation of formative assessment strategies and that

teacher-student engagement was limited as a result of large class size.” It was indicated by both Ayeni et al. (2016) and Salia (2022) that, “the issue of large class size has risen because of the increase in the population, the quest for higher education and better conditions of life, and also the introduction of some social interventions policies by the government such as the free educational policy.” In line with this, Izci (2016) asserts that the challenge of large classroom sizes and the lack of material resources have been found to impede effective formative assessment practices. In furtherance to this, Cisse, Ndinga, and Sane (2021) assert that if the number of students is too high, the teacher will not be able to offer a variety of exercises. And then, in formative evaluation, sometimes, it is necessary to follow each student, to identify the gaps and to find remedies. They further assert that “if the number of students is too high, it is certain that this will limit the teacher’s action.”

In a similar sentiment, Moluayonge and Park (2017) postulate that “in a large environment, they might be more prone to rowdiness or disruptive behaviour that distract them from what is being taught. Students in a smaller class, on the other hand, are more likely to bond with one another and collaborate when learning and studying”. This implies that large class size affects formative assessment, making it more difficult for teachers to set and enforce behavioural expectations, monitor students, and provide high-quality constructive feedback to a large group of students, eventually affecting students' learning.

#### **2.7.4 Instructional resources**

Instructional resources and students’ engagement/learning are other challenging factors affecting the effective practice of formative assessment during instruction in SHS. According to Das (2019), teaching materials are objects or devices that help the

teacher make learning meaningful to learners. In furtherance of this, Ashaver et al. and Salia seem to agree that "instructional materials are those materials that teachers need to incorporate into the teaching-learning process, to help the students benefit maximally from the learning experience" (Ashaver & Igyuve, 2013; Salia, 2022). Teaching and learning in secondary school can only be effective by using different types of materials that guide the teacher in explaining topics to the students effectively and efficiently (Almuntasheri et al., 2016; Stronge, 2018). The writers further assert that "these materials could be different forms which include printed, graphic, objects, audio-visual, boards and local materials. Instructional materials must be used meaningfully and effectively and must meet characteristics such as variety, economy, adaptability and accuracy."

According to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2014), meaningful mathematics learning requires useful mathematical tools or manipulatives, such as algebra tiles, geoboard, counters, etc. The study of Enu (2021) showed that "the absence of instructional materials hinders the implementation of various assessment strategies and that the absence of or inadequate learning resources will have a detrimental effect on teachers' pedagogy and students' learning." This assertion is supported by Figa & Tarekegne (2020) that formative assessment implementation may not always require complex technology to be effective but, productive learning could be supported through equipment and conducive physical conditions. Given this, Chen and Singh (2025) advocate integrating digital technologies into teaching and learning to address resource limitations. They emphasise the necessity for government-led initiatives and collaborations to ensure equitable access to digital resources in educational settings. This implies that, in formative assessment, classroom instructional materials can be linked to student engagement. Connecting

learning objectives with instructional materials to real-world situations can ensure an interactive lesson where students engage with the content and control their learning.

### **2.7.5 Students' engagement and learning**

The study by Cisse et al. (2021) indicated that teachers wonder how to make students feel responsible for their learning, and the problem is linked to the lack of commitment of the learners, which could undermine their actions. In furtherance of this, Quyen & Khairani (2016) and Lam's (2013) study "aimed to use the Formative Use of Summative Test (FUST) technique to improve students' learning by self-assessment. However, low-achieving students did not experience the same noticeable effect as high-achieving students. They had a less serious attitude towards this technique in comparison to teacher assessment, and a less confident in preparing their test." It is upon this that, Black (2015) opined that students were often confused on how to do self-assessment and peer-assessment; it seems difficult to compare their work with that of their peers. This in line with Chen et al, (2014) assertion that "students are somewhat motivated to do peer-assessment due to the reduced pressure and stressed compared to teacher assessment, they still favour teacher feedback as they feel it more accurate and detailed than peer-assessment."

Yalley (2017) highlighted that "Social Studies, as a core subject in the school curriculum by nature, requires learning and the knowledge of the students should not be put into a watertight compartment, and that students learning, phenomenon and social issues be discussed in a multi-dimensional approach." Yalley further asserted that "this will help reconstruct the teaching and learning of Social Studies to be more active learning, student-centered, more real-world learning (competence-based) to understand real-world issues and dynamics better." This implies that, for teachers to

practice formative assessment effectively, students' engagement and learning are an integral part. In a more technical sense, students' engagement and responses lead to more interactive instruction. Teachers can assess their students and provide them with appropriate, constructive and timely feedback even when teaching and learning are ongoing.

## **2.8 Empirical Review**

Empirical evidence constitutes the cornerstone of credible and rigorous research. In this work, it provides the factual and observable basis upon which argument, interpretation, and conclusions are established. The empirical review was organised under three themes; Teacher knowledge gaps; Assessment tool usage; Implementation challenges.

### **2.8.1 Teacher Knowledge Gaps**

Across the reviewed studies, a consistent pattern of inadequate teacher knowledge and conceptual understanding of formative and authentic assessment was identified. Bekoe, Eshun, and Bordoh (2013) found that Social Studies tutors in Ghanaian Colleges of Education emphasised the cognitive domain in assessments while neglecting the affective and psychomotor domains, indicating limited understanding of holistic assessment frameworks. Similarly, Amoako, Asamoah, and Bortey (2019) revealed that most senior high school Mathematics teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis exhibited low knowledge in formative assessment, likely due to insufficient training during teacher education programmes. Moreover, Songnalle (2019) and Adam, Bekoe, and Poatob (2019) confirmed this knowledge deficiency, noting that while teachers theoretically understood formative assessment, their practical comprehension and implementation were shallow. The gap between

theoretical awareness and actual pedagogical application reflects what Ahmed (2019) described as a disjunction between attitude and practice. Teachers in Kosovo expressed positive dispositions toward formative assessment but failed to operationalise these beliefs in classroom contexts.

Further, Ochoy, Opoku-Afryie, and Eshun (2022) observed that many Junior High School teachers demonstrated partial or superficial conceptions of formative assessment, often mistaking summative assessments for formative processes. Bordoh et al. (2022) deepened this insight by showing that teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) had a statistically significant relationship with their formative assessment practices, suggesting that pedagogical and technological fluency directly shapes assessment competence. Collectively, these studies infer that insufficient pre-service and in-service training results in fragmented understanding, limiting teachers' ability to translate assessment theory into effective pedagogical practice. Deducing from this, teachers' limited conceptual grasp of formative assessment principles and weak TPACK competencies directly undermine effective assessment practices.

### **2.8.2 Assessment Tool Usage**

Evidence across multiple contexts revealed limited and inconsistent use of formative and authentic assessment tools. Bekoe et al. (2013) reported that Social Studies tutors rarely employed rubrics, concept maps, scaffolding, or portfolios, instead relying on familiar, traditional tools that fail to address attitudinal and skill-based learning outcomes. Likewise, Eshun et al. (2014) found that while teachers valued formative assessment for enhancing classroom relationships and motivation, most did not employ concrete evaluation feedback mechanisms or tools that encouraged learner participation. Authentic assessment practices were also constrained. Kankam et al.

(2015) and Asante et al. (2023) noted that although teachers recognised the value of authentic assessment strategies such as case studies, oral presentations, and live performances but these were infrequently used due to inadequate methodological familiarity and external constraints. The studies suggest a conceptual-practical gap: teachers' awareness of assessment diversity does not translate into tool diversity.

Further reinforcing this, Songnalle (2019) identified oral questioning and formative feedback as the dominant assessment techniques among SHS teachers, indicating minimal innovation in assessment tool usage. This pattern implies that teachers' limited repertoire of tools restricts the formative potential of assessments and perpetuates reliance on summative, exam-oriented practices. This identifies that, most teachers theoretical and practically use traditional assessment approaches to the neglect of authentic/alternative assessment tools which compromise curriculum goals and primarily equips students for examinations rather than for lifelong learning. Also, teachers tend to rely on limited and traditional assessment methods due to low confidence and lack of exposure to diverse tools.

### **2.8.3 Implementation Challenges**

All reviewed studies converge on the presence of systemic and contextual barriers that hinder effective formative assessment implementation. Critical among these are large class sizes, time constraints, resource limitations, and exam-driven educational cultures. Songnalle (2019) and Enu (2021) highlighted that teacher frequently cited workload, lack of materials, and pressure to prepare students for high-stakes exams (e.g., WASSCE) as impediments to meaningful formative assessment. Eshun et al. (2014) provided a nuanced perspective, noting that teachers avoided involving students in formative tasks out of fear of delaying syllabus completion, revealing

institutional and attitudinal resistance to student-centered assessment practices. Likewise, Kankam et al. (2015) found that policy constraints and resource deficiencies limited authentic assessment adoption at the senior high school level.

In higher education contexts, Bekoe et al. (2013) and Enu (2021) underscored institutional inefficiencies such as lack of transparency in assessment and minimal administrative support, which demotivate tutors from implementing comprehensive formative assessment strategies. Finally, Asante et al. (2023) reiterated that logistical inadequacies, lack of motivation, and rigid traditional assessment systems pose substantial obstacles to authentic assessment integration. Inductively, these findings suggest that effective implementation of formative assessment is not solely a matter of teacher will or knowledge, but rather a systemic issue intertwined with institutional culture, policy structures, and resourcing priorities. Deductively, Systemic factors such as exam-oriented curricula, inadequate training, and lack of institutional support perpetuate superficial assessment practices that privilege cognitive recall over holistic learning. By and large, the collective body of research reveals that addressing formative assessment challenges in Ghana and similar contexts requires an integrated intervention such as strengthening teacher training curricula, institutional policies, and classroom-level support systems to ensure that knowledge, tools, and structures align for sustainable assessment reform.

The reviewed literature reveals that, although teachers possess a theoretical awareness of formative assessment, they continue to demonstrate significant gaps in its practical application. This suggests that teachers' perceptions of formative assessment strongly shape their willingness and commitment to implement related strategies in classroom contexts. Many educators tend to regard formative assessment as a routine task rather

than a deliberate process for tracking student progress and refining instructional practices. Existing studies, such as those by Bordoh et al. (2022), Idun (2020), Adam et al. (2019), Eshun et al. (2014), and Bekoe et al. (2013), have explored aspects of formative assessment in Social Studies; however, it appears no study have been done to examine the extent to which SHS Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools in classroom practice. Furthermore, there is an evident scarcity of qualitative investigations focusing specifically on how SHS Social Studies teachers implement formative assessment practices in the Awutu-Senya West District, where no empirical studies have yet been conducted. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this identified gap in the literature.

## **2.9 Summary of Literature Review**

The Social Constructivist Theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky serves as the theoretical framework for the investigation. The influence of formative assessment on student learning and teachers' instructional practices has been a topic of study among numerous scholars. Formative assessment is acknowledged as a means by which students collaboratively develop knowledge using various instructional approaches employed by the teacher and the feedback provided by the facilitator during the educational process. The Social Studies curriculum for SHS in Ghana mandates that teachers assess students on their application of knowledge (critical thinking and problem-solving skills). According to the literature, the implementation of formative assessment can facilitate the attainment of the goals and objectives of Social Studies when educators employ formative assessment methodologies in their instruction.

Despite the differing perspectives among researchers in the Social Studies subject, the goals and objectives remain consistent and can be partially attained if formative

assessment is prioritised, particularly in SHS. It was noted that most of these studies predominantly focused on tutors and trainee teachers in Ghana's institutes of education, with few addressing Junior high schools. The reviewed literature revealed a study gap; however, literature reveals a content and methodologically gaps on Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices at the SHS level in Ghana; examine the extent to which SHS Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools in classroom practice. From this perspective, employing a qualitative approach to investigate how Social Studies teachers implement formative assessment in SHS is highly advantageous.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the various methods and procedures used to gather data to answer the research questions that guided the study. It discusses the methodological procedures used, which comprise the research paradigm, research approach, research design, the study area, the study population, the sample and sampling procedure, the research instruments, trustworthiness, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis procedure.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The study adopted interpretivism as a research philosophical world paradigm. This paradigm is well-suited for examining the understanding and experiences of senior high school Social Studies teachers in practicing formative assessment in the Awutu-Senya West District. The interpretivist is rooted in the belief that reality is subjective and socially constructed, the interpretivist paradigm emphasises understanding and the meanings individuals attach to their experiences based on their unique contexts, beliefs, and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm was chosen because it outlines those multiple realities, which are difficult to measure, can change. It further posits that knowledge comes from many “realities” rather than one “reality” and that knowledge is value-laden and actual objective knowledge is difficult or even impossible to accomplish (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Kuranchie, 2021, pp. 48-49). This paradigm was particularly appropriate for the study because it aligned with the aim of capturing the perception, experience, and understanding of teachers, allowing the researcher to delve into the nuanced ways Social Studies teachers conceptualise and

navigate their challenges (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This underpinning helped deepen my understanding of formative assessment as complex and highly contextual, making it necessary to explore the lived experiences of teachers and contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective education. By employing an interpretivist approach, the study seeks to provide a detailed understanding of various alternative formative assessment tools in assessing students. The emphasis is on subjective meaning, allowing participants to share their insight on their own.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which underpins the qualitative research approach. The study employed the qualitative research approach, which is most suitable for exploring the experiences, strategies, and perspectives of individuals within their specific contexts. A qualitative research approach was employed because the study aims to generate an in-depth understanding of the meanings, lived experiences, classroom enactments, contextual influences, and belief systems that shape Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in SHS within the Awutu-Senya West District. Formative assessment constitutes a complex, context-dependent, and socially constructed pedagogical process embedded in everyday classroom interactions. As such, it cannot be adequately reduced to quantifiable variables or numerical indicators. The qualitative research approach allows the researcher to examine these interactive processes in real time. Therefore, it demands an active role of the researcher in data collection and interpretation in a subjective way which provide the depth, contextual sensitivity, and interpretive richness required to generate meaningful and locally relevant insights into Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in the study area.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study adopted the exploratory research design to examine senior high school Social Studies teachers' conception and practices of formative assessment during instruction. The researcher chose this design because exploratory research design is very useful in a study that seeks to find out what is happening, seek a new insight and assess a phenomenon in a new light (Robson, 2002; Kyei and Tachin, 2022). In a similar sentiment, Idun (2020) added that the exploratory research design is proper when the researchers know little about the phenomena or issue. This design allows the researcher to gain more insight into the current status of the phenomenon under study regarding the variables in a given condition or situation. Again, the choice of this design afforded the researcher an opportunity to conduct an in-depth study through one-on-one interviews and observation in order to explore the extent senior high school Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools when assessing their students. According to Kothari (2022), a research design refers to the conceptual structure and decisions regarding what, how much, when, where, and by what means a research study will be conducted.

### **3.4 Study Area**

The research was conducted in the Awutu-Senya West District of the Central Region of Ghana. Awutu-Senya West District was selected as the study area for this research because it provides a relevant and appropriate context for examining formative assessment practices among Social Studies teachers in senior high schools. The district has a mix of public senior high schools with diverse student populations, making it suitable for investigating how formative assessment strategies are implemented across varying classroom contexts. The Awutu-Senya West District

represents a typical Ghanaian context where these practices are often under-researched, and understanding these gaps could help improve educational outcomes.

Also, no study has focused on the Awutu-Senya West District, leaving a geographic and contextual gap this research seeks to address by focusing on Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices at the Senior High School level. Social Studies is a core subject in the Ghanaian senior high school curriculum, designed to equip learners with relevant knowledge, critical thinking skills, and positive social values (MoE, 2010). The district's proximity and accessibility enhanced the feasibility of data collection within the time and resource constraints of the study. The researcher's familiarity with the district's educational environment also facilitated access to schools and respondents, thereby improving data credibility and relevance.

### **3.5 Population**

The total population for the study comprised all senior high school teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District. The study's target population were all teachers directly involved in teaching Social Studies in Senior High Schools in the study area. The accessible population for this study were those with experience and had taught the subject for a long time and are available and willing to participate in this study. Out of the 18 total population of Social Studies teachers in the district, a sample size of ten (10) Social Studies teachers were purposively and conveniently selected to be interviewed and observed from the 5 public senior high schools. Hence, two (2) Social Studies teachers from each of the schools in the district were selected for the study. Taking the same number of participants from each school ensures that no single school disproportionately influences the findings, reducing sampling bias and balanced representation. These teachers were selected for two reasons. First, they

have been teaching for a long time and have four or more years of experience. Second, teachers are selected based on their ability to share their ideas and experiences about using formative assessment strategies in their lesson delivery. Additionally, other teachers were not considered because of their brief teaching experience (1-2 years).

Research population may be defined as the total number of units (individuals, dyads, groups, organisations, events, objects, or items) from which samples are selected for measurement” (Kindy et al., 2016). Target population is “the specific, conceptually bounded group of potential participants to whom the researcher may have access that represents the nature of the population of interest” (Kindy et al., 2016). The accessible population is whom researchers can apply their findings. The target population is the subset of this population. Researchers take samples from the available population (Asiamah et al., 2017).

### **3.6 Sample and Sampling Procedure**

In this study on Social Studies teachers’ formative assessment practices in SHS in the Awutu-Senya West District, the schools were chosen using census sampling. Given that, the five schools in the district was limited and accessible, census sampling was employed to include all Senior High Schools. All SHS in the district were included due to the manageable population size, the need for comprehensive district representation, and the desire to minimise institutional bias. This strengthened contextual credibility and transferability, as findings reflected practices across the entire district rather than a subset of schools. This technique was employed because including all schools ensured that findings reflected formative assessment practices across the entire district rather than a subset of institutions. Similarly, Stratton, (2021)

indicated that census sampling is appropriate in district-level educational studies where the number of schools is manageable and institutional variation is important.

Taking into account the qualitative research method, purposive sampling, a non-probability technique, was used to choose 10 participants from the 5 SHS in the study area because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select Social Studies teachers who met specific criteria: being a current social studies teacher in the study area with four years of teaching experiences; experience in implementing formative assessment; and to provide detailed, reflective insight into classroom practices. This offered in-depth insights into how formative assessment is practiced by teachers in the study area. This ensured direct engagement with the phenomenon and facilitated detailed accounts of instructional strategies, feedback practices, questioning techniques, assessment tools, and learner engagement. Also, the purposive sampling was chosen because it is carried out to select respondents with concepts, expertise, information, and experience regarding the subject being studied (Boateng, 2016). This technique ensured that the selected participants were directly relevant to the research objectives and could provide meaningful data (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### **3.7 Data Collection Instruments**

Interview guide and observation checklist were the two-instrument used to gather data for the study.

#### **3.7.1 Interview guide**

Semi-structured interview guide was adopted to interview participants in the selected schools. Semi-structured interview was chosen because “by their nature, interviewees are allowed to develop their idea and speak more widely on the issue raised by the interviewer” (Denscombe, 2007; Idun, 2020, p.85). Also, it allows the researcher to

do follow-up questions to probe further into the issue of interest and gather enough data to address the research problem. For this study, the researcher used an open-ended questions comprising twenty-one (21) interview questions derived from the study objectives. These are characterised by precise wording and a sequence of predetermined questions. The open-ended questions allowed participants to share their perspectives in detail, addressing the study's focus on teachers' conception of formative assessment, utilisation of alternative formative assessment tools, and challenges in practicing the concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher conducted the interview face-to-face with the participants.

### **3.7.2 Observation Guide**

Another tool used for data collection was the observation checklist protocol. A structured observation checklist was employed to investigate how Social Studies teachers implement formative assessment in their teaching. Structured observation refers to an organised approach to gathering data in which researchers systematically watch and document particular behaviours or events based on a predetermined checklist. The structured observation was chosen because the observational checklist contains certain traits and behaviours the researcher intends to observe that are relevant to the study's objectives. McLeod (2023) emphasises that structured observation is often used in classroom research to examine specific teaching strategies, student engagement, or learning interactions. This was to obtain firsthand data of the degree to which Social Studies teachers practice formative assessment in their lessons, to confirm that their statements from the interview parts are consistent. McMillian (2016) noted that observation enable researchers to describe teaching and learning behaviours as they naturally occur.

The researcher designed an observation checklist comprising 17 structured classroom checklists to guide the study's data collection. The observation protocol was designed based on the assessment levels where the researcher conducted a document analysis of the curriculum to extract core competencies and expected learner behaviours. These were operationalised into observable indicators that could be noted during classroom teaching and learning activities. Classroom lessons were observed from the beginning to the end. The observations were aimed at: teachers' conception of formative assessment, the types of assessment tools teachers use to evaluate their students, and challenges the teachers face in using formative assessment. Although two participants were not observed due to scheduling conflict, thematic patterns had already reached saturation across the remaining data sources. With that of trustworthiness, while two participants were not observed, detailed field note, interview triangulation, and member checking supported the dependability and credibility of findings.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

Loh (2013) asserts that trustworthiness comprises four elements: (a), dependability (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability. Enu (2021) and Loh (2013) elucidated that "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative study." The following outlines the application of the four elements of trustworthiness in this research.

#### **3.8.1 Credibility**

In this study, credibility was established mainly through member checking. The participants were made to review the data and transcript to confirm that the interpretations accurately reflect their opinions experiences. Also, the preliminary findings and interpretations were shared with the teachers to verify their accuracy and

relevance. This practice not only strengthened the trustworthiness of the data but also empowered participants to correct any inaccuracies or clarify their viewpoints, and to guarantee the authenticity of the information representation and minimise bias of the researcher. Prolonged engagement with the research site enhanced credibility. In order to build trust with participants and have a better grasp of the context, the researcher spent a lot of time with them in the study settings. This made it easier for the researcher to gain a thorough grasp of the participants realities.

By applying triangulation, the researcher creates reliable foundation that supported both the findings and their contribution to knowledge. I employed data source triangulation, which entails utilising many data sources; hence, I utilised an interview and observation guide. This enhance confidence that the result are not the product of single source or researcher bias. Anney (2014) asserts that triangulation aids researchers in reducing bias and verifying the integrity of participants' responses. Credibility is the assessment of the study findings' conceptual interpretation of the data derived from the participants' original data (Poatob, 2015).

### **3.8.2 Dependability**

To ensure dependability in this research, firstly, the researcher maintained a comprehensive audit trail. All phases of the research process, including the creation of interview and observation guides, choices made during data collecting, and the analytical procedures used to analyse the data was opened and thoroughly documented. This ensured that others can follow and evaluate where procedures were applied consistently and systematically (Creswell, 2013). To resolve the reliability concerns in the study, the researcher conducted an inquiry audit by providing the interview questions and observation checklist to the supervisor to evaluate the process

and outcome of the study. The transcribing of interviews and the verification of codes by many expert colleagues in qualitative research ensured inter-rater reliability. This ensured dependability by providing external verification of the study's methodological rigor and consistency. The degree shows that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. According to the Farnsworth Group (2022), Dependability is the extent to which research findings are consistent and reliable over time. It is the qualitative equivalent of reliability in quantitative research (Poatob, 2015:186).

### **3.8.3 Transferability**

To ensure transferability, this study employed thick description by presenting detailed contextual information such as research settings, participants sample, sampling methods, and extract from the interview and observation checklist. To guarantee transferability, I employed verbatim data transcription to represent participants genuine emotions and perspectives accurately. Inclusion of direct quotes from participants strengthens transferability by showing authentic voices and lived realities. Amankwaa (2016) asserted that 'thick description' is achieved by providing a meticulous and comprehensive account of the phenomenon under investigation, thereby allowing the findings to be applicable across various context, settings, population, and timeframe. Similarly, Anney (2014) aligning with Enu (2021) emphasised that thick description entails offering an in-depth narrative of the entire research process, from the study's design and methodology to the presentation of the final report, enabling other researchers to replicate the study within comparable context. Transferability is the degree of a study's result that can be applied in another context or group (Polit & Beck, 2012).

### **3.8.4 Confirmability**

In this study, confirmability was established through reflexivity. With reflexivity, I engaged in critical self-reflection to recognise and control personal biases, values, or preconception that may influence data interpretation. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study, recording his assumptions, prejudice, and choices throughout the study. This practice helped the researcher remain aware of how his perspectives might influence data collection and analysis. By continuously reflecting on the researcher role, the researcher minimised the impact of personal biases on the findings. Additionally, the findings were supported by direct quotes from participants. For this reason, I clearly stated the words and quotations from the participants' transcribed text. Concepts were associated with the data through a quote to validate the relationship between the results and the data and enhance the data's richness. Cope (2014) described that confirmability is attained when researchers demonstrate that the information accurately reflect participants viewpoints and are free from researcher prejudice. According to Kuranchie (2021, p.165), confirmability involves ensuring that the data and the interpretations of the researcher's creativity yet are unmistakably grounded in the evidence collected.

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedure**

The interview process began with an introduction letter issued by the Department of Social Studies Education at the University of Education, Winneba. This letter was presented to the Heads of the five (5) Senior High Schools in the Awutu-Senya West District. Presentation of the introductory letter facilitated the researcher's ability to obtain approval from the school authorities to collect data from the teachers. The selected teachers were informed of the study's purpose, and their anonymity and confidentiality were assured. With the permission of the heads, the researcher

conducted interactions with teachers in the selected schools. Social Studies teachers were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview guide. Following each interview, a classroom lesson observation was carried out using a structured observation checklist to document teaching practices. This was done in order to verify the opinions of the interviewees. The classroom observations allowed me to validate or contrast what teachers said with what they actually did during instruction.

The observation focuses on whether the teachers use alternative formative assessment tools to evaluate their students and what difficulties they face. They also examine whether the teachers base their evaluations on the lesson objectives, pertinent questions, and feedback they provide during the lesson delivery. The combination of interview and observation provided a comprehensive assessment of the practice of formative assessment by Social Studies teachers at the Awutu-Senya West District. Using both instruments allowed for a more holistic understanding of the challenges, successes and overall effectiveness of formative assessment from the teachers' perspective. This triangulation enhanced the credibility of the findings.

### **3.10 Data Presentation and Analysis**

The data were analysed using a thematic approach, guided by themes identified during data collection. Audio recordings of participant responses were used to address the research questions that directed the study. These recordings were repeatedly reviewed and transcribed to facilitate thorough analysis. Each interview was transcribed verbatim immediately after completion to minimise researcher bias. Notable participant expressions were quoted verbatim to emphasise that the researcher's interpretations were not influenced by personal perspectives or

positionality. Data processing and analysis adhered to the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013), six-phase thematic analysis process:

(1) Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts: The first phase involved immersing oneself in the dataset to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' viewpoint. The researcher repeatedly listened to the audio recordings and read through the verbatim transcripts. Notes and preliminary observations were made to identify potential ideas and recurring issues relevant to the research objectives. This process enabled the researcher to become intimately familiar with the content and context of participants' responses.

(2) Generation of initial codes: After becoming familiar with the data, the researcher began coding significant features across the dataset. Coding was done through automated (computer-assisted), highlighting key words, phrases, or sentences that captured essential meanings. Each segment of the data was assigned a code that reflected its content. The coding process was inductive, driven by the data rather than pre-existing theoretical concepts, ensuring that the analysis reflected participants' authentic experiences and perspectives.

(3) Searching for themes: In this phase, the researcher examined the codes to identify patterns and relationships among them. Related codes were collated and grouped into potential themes that captured broader meanings and underlying ideas within the data. This process involved organising the data under thematic categories that represented different aspects of the participants lived experiences.

(4) Reviewing themes: The researcher then reviewed and refined the initial themes to verify that they precisely reflected both the coded information and the full dataset. Some themes were merged, separated, or discarded based on their coherence and

relevance to the research questions. During this iterative process, the researcher verified that the themes were internally consistent and externally distinct, ensuring that they reflected the depth and diversity of the participants' narratives.

(5) Defining and naming themes: After establishing a satisfactory thematic framework, each theme was carefully defined and given appropriate name. The researcher described the core meaning of every theme, specifying how it contributed to understanding the research problem. Definitions were supported by relevant quotations from participants to ensure transparency and authenticity in the interpretation process.

(6) Producing the final report: With the final phase, the researcher synthesised the findings into a coherent narrative. The report integrated the themes, sub-themes, and illustrative quotes to demonstrate how participants' experiences aligned with the study's research objectives. The analytical narrative went beyond description to offer meaningful interpretation, linking the findings to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Observational data were further analysed to identify patterns consistent with themes emerging from the interviews. By integrating data samples from participants' narratives and personal observations, the researcher synthesised similar patterns into sub-themes, thereby achieving a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the participants' experiences.

The chosen methodology aligns closely with the aim of examining formative assessment that foster critical thinking by prioritising process-oriented, reflective, and iterative data collection. By employing methods such as classroom observations, analysis of alternative formative assessment tools and teacher interviews, the study systematically examines how assessment practices prompt analysis, evaluation, and

metacognitive reflection, a core component of critical thinking. These methods allow for close examination of how formative assessment is practice thereby revealing the mechanisms through which formative assessment supports higher-order thinking rather than rote performance.

### **3.11 Research Positionality and Reflexivity**

Holmes (2020) emphasises that positionality is central to qualitative inquiry because it shapes the power relations between researcher and participants, influencing trust, access, and interpretation. As a Social Studies educator and researcher, I occupy a dual role as both an insider and reflective observer in this study. My teaching experience in a Senior High School grants me practical insight into the realities of formative assessment, including the challenges. However, this insider perspective also risks bias, as my empathy for teachers might lead to overly sympathetic interpretations. To address this, I adopted a critically reflexive approach by keeping a reflexive journal, engaging in member checking with participants, and continuously questioning how my assumptions shaped my interpretations. My insider status aided access and rapport with teachers, fostering open dialogue, but I remained vigilant about maintaining ethical boundaries and respecting participants' autonomy. Ultimately, by openly acknowledging my positionality, I strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, balancing insider understanding with analytical objectivity to ensure teachers' authentic voices drive the interpretation of formative assessment practices in the study area. Berger (2015) argues that being aware of one's position enhances research quality by allowing the researcher to navigate the tension between involvement and distance. Bourke (2014) describes positionality as a way of "situating the self" in research, helping others understand how findings emerge from the researcher's worldview.

### **3.12 Ethical consideration**

This study adhered to qualitative research ethics as established by De Costa (2014), who emphasised that ethical considerations are integral to qualitative inquiry, particularly because respondents aim to elucidate the specific origins or effects of a given phenomenon. According to Creswell (2016), informed consent and approval from all participants were obtained prior to their participation. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to participants to ensure their understanding of its objectives, and they were reminded that participation was entirely voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality were safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms in interview and observation guides, as well as in the analysis, discussion, and presentation of findings. Participants were assured that all information collected would be treated with strict confidentiality. All cited authors were duly acknowledged in the reference section.

### **3.13 Limitation**

The sample size and approach made it difficult to generalise the result to the whole population of teachers in schools in Ghana. However, the results are generalisable among schools within the study area. Also, some participants were not readily available at the time scheduled for observation.

### **3.14 Summary**

The research design used for the study was exploratory. Ten SHS Social Studies teachers from five SHS in the Awutu-Senya West District were chosen using purposive sample methods. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and structured observations. The data was analysed using a thematic technique derived from the themes identified throughout the study's data collection.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings derived from the data analysis for the study. The study aimed to evaluate the formative assessment practices of Senior High School Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District. This chapter presents the findings and discussion derived from the data obtained through interviews and observations in this study. The obtained data were distilled into themes to facilitate analysis and interpretation, supported by existing literature and a theory. Census sampling technique was used for the 5 SHS and purposive sampling techniques was employed to select 10 Social Studies teachers from the SHS in the district. To ensure the participants anonymity, the researcher labelled participants with pseudonym. The research questions guiding the data collection were: How do SHS Social Studies teachers in Awutu-Senya West conceptualise formative assessment; to what extent do SHS Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools when assessing their students; and what challenges do they face in implementing formative assessment in their classrooms?

#### **4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

This study assessed the participants' socio-demographic characteristics, including professional qualifications, years of experience teaching Social Studies, and the number of in-service assessment training courses attended. These factors were essential for elucidating the type of teachers participating in the study concerning their teaching experience, educational qualifications, and attendance at in-service courses. The characteristics of the participants were provided in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The first

item of the interview guide aimed to extract participants' professional qualifications. Data on this characteristic is presented in Table 1.

#### 4.1.1 Professional qualification of participants

*Table 1: Professional Qualifications of Participants*

Professional qualification	Number	Percentage (%)
B. A Social Studies Education	7	70
B. Ed Social Science	3	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **Field work data (2025)**

The professional qualifications of Social Studies teachers significantly shape their pedagogical approaches, particularly in formative assessment. All ten teachers in the study possessed at least degree-level qualifications, meeting Adjei's (2016) criterion for senior high school teaching. However, a disparity exists: seven teachers (70%) held Bachelor of Arts degrees in Social Studies Education, while three (30%) had Bachelor of Education degrees in Social Science without specialised training in Social Studies pedagogy. This gap is critical because specialised training equips teachers with stronger pedagogical content knowledge, enabling them to design formative assessments that promote higher-order thinking and problem-solving. In contrast, teachers with general Social Science backgrounds often rely on content knowledge, reducing formative assessment to factual recall. Bekoe and Eshun (2013) affirm that training backgrounds influence pedagogical choices, while Bordoh et al. (2018) argue that content knowledge alone is insufficient for cultivating civic competence and critical thinking through formative assessment. The absence of specialised training among some teachers limits their ability to employ formative assessment as a diagnostic and instructional tool. Bruce (2018) further notes that effective formative

assessment depends on both understanding and confidence in its value. Chappuis and Chappuis (2008) emphasise the need for continuous professional development to prevent stagnation in assessment practices. While all teachers meet minimum qualification standards, the quality and relevance of their training directly affect formative assessment practices.

Interview guide item 2 was to elicit teachers' experiences. It reads: *How long have you been teaching Social Studies?* Table 2 shows participants' teaching experiences regarding how many years they have taught Social Studies.

#### 4.1.2 Data on the teaching experience of participants

*Table 2: Teaching Experience of Participants*

Length of Experience	Years of teaching Social Studies	Percentage (%)
4-5	4	40
6-10	4	40
11-14	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **Fieldwork data (2025)**

The teaching experience of the Social Studies educators in this study provides a solid foundation for their formative assessment practices. All ten participants had between four and fourteen years of classroom experience, with four teachers in the 4–5 years range, four in the 6–10 years range, and two in the 11–14 years range. This demonstrate that every teacher had moved beyond the novice stage into professional maturity, accumulating sufficient exposure to classroom realities to inform formative assessment strategies with depth and reflection. Their longevity suggests they operate at a stage of reflective competence, critically evaluating and refining instructional methods in response to assessment outcomes. Ocansey (2021) notes that extended

professional engagement improves efficiency, confidence, and performance, enabling teachers to implement assessment strategies with precision. Ditchfield et al. (2024) emphasise that sustained experience fosters collective pedagogical norms, strengthening consistency in formative assessment practices. Moore et al. (2017) add that experienced teachers are more adept at managing classroom diversity and adapting pedagogy, for effective formative assessment practices. This indicates that the participants' years of experience enhance their ability to link formative assessment results with instructional improvement, thereby deepening their pedagogical practice. Experience is very expedient to the development of one's profession to enhance continuum where an individual gathers more skills and knowledge for better execution of duty.

Interview guide item 3 was to elicit the number of in-service courses in assessment attended by the participants. It reads: *Do you often attend in-service courses in assessment practices?* Table 3 shows the number of in-service courses in assessment practices attended by the participants in Social Studies.

#### 4.1.3 Data on the number of in-service assessment training courses attended

*Table 3: Number of In-Service Training Assessment Courses Attended by Participants*

Attendance in in-service Assessment courses attended	Number of in-services	Percentage (%)
0 times	1	10
1 – 3 times	7	70
4 – 5 times	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Fieldwork Data (2025)

From Table 3, it is indicated that most of the participants have attended in-service training on assessment practices at least once in their teaching profession, except one

who has not had any in-service training on assessment practices and only one with the highest attendance of five. This means that the 70% participants involved in the study are very familiar with the practice of formative assessment during instruction. In response to interview guide item 3, participants had this to say: Mr. Abeiku stated:

*I do attend in-service training, not the one organised by GES because they seldom organise something like that, but I do attend one online, "COURSERA and EDX" .....I have attended one this year, i.e. "Best Assessment Practices.*

Miss Akosua stated:

*The professional learning community (PLC), has come to reinforce us to exhibit the best practices of formative assessment during teaching and learning. It has come to help...sometimes there are certain things I know. I am not putting it into practice....like probably some of the things I need to do before the actual teaching.*

Mr. Nana Yaw added:

*Even the introduction of PLC was a result of the new educational reforms because someone like me in my whole life of teaching Social Studies has attended just one in-service training on assessment practices which was a programme I had to attend on behave of the department.*

The words of these participants indicate that there have not been enough in-service training programmes organised by educational authorities to improve the knowledge, skills and competencies of Social Studies teachers in the SHS in the study area. This implies that in-service training is essential in keeping teachers abreast of the dynamic nature of the educational system and improving their professional growth and development to build their capacity to teach Social Studies effectively. According to Kanda (2012), "teaching is a specialised work and teachers (Social Studies teachers) as developing professionals should reach their maturity both in the context and level of their profession through lifelong learning and exploring". This aligns with Jiang et al. (2024), who states that an effective teacher professional development programme should prioritise content focus. This implies that even the in-service training should

focus on specialised subject content to improve the knowledge and skills of the respective subject teachers (Social Studies).

It was also indicated that all the Social Studies teachers involved in the study believed that in-service training is essential in their teaching profession. This confirms Idun's (2020) view that "the desire for improvement is the most important aspect of a Social Studies teacher's professional education". This is supported by Shittu and Oanite (2015) that "teachers with good professional competence and interpersonal skills are more effective in their classrooms in terms of students' behaviour, better understanding of concepts by students and disposition of positive and mental alertness by learners."

#### **4.2 Conceptualisation of Formative Assessment in the Awutu-Senya West**

##### **District**

This section aimed to delineate the status of formative assessment procedures among Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District. The primary objective is to determine whether Social Studies teachers actually comprehend formative assessment and its significance, since it goes a long way in influencing their instructional methods. The theme above was employed to derive responses to Research Question 1.

##### ***How do senior high school Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District conceptualise formative assessment?***

Research Question 1 is discussed under one main broad theme "teachers' conception of formative assessment" with three sub-themes: *formative assessment as an ongoing and continuous learning process, formative assessment as a feedback mechanism, and formative assessment as a diagnostic tool.*

#### **4.2.1 Teachers' conception of formative assessment**

The conception of formative assessment varies among Social Studies teachers in the study area. However, Idun (2020) emphasised that “definitions of concepts are necessary because they state the precise nature, distinction or delineation of the phenomenon being so defined so that the relevance of whatsoever is said or written in the name of the phenomena may be accurate and correctly assessed.” Therefore, teachers' conception of formative assessment largely determines how they go about their instruction in teaching Social Studies and how they assess their students. To delve deeper, the researcher initially gathered comments from teachers regarding their comprehension of formative assessment to evaluate the state of such practices in the study area. Interview question 4 states: What is your understanding of formative assessment? Following the interview with the ten participants, it was evident that teachers possess varying conceptions of formative assessment. The results of RQ1 were categorised into the subsequent sub-themes: *formative assessment as an ongoing and continuous learning process, formative assessment as a feedback mechanism, and formative assessment as a diagnostic tool.*

##### **4.2.1.1 Formative assessment as an ongoing and continuous learning process**

A major theme emerging from both the interview and observation data is that teachers largely perceive formative assessment as an ongoing and continuous learning process rather than a one-off event. Interview data revealed that most teachers conceptualised formative assessment as an integral part of everyday instruction. For instance, Mr. Nana Yaw emphasised that:

*For me, formative assessment has to do with while teaching, you need to assess your student to find out their weaknesses and where their strength lies so that you can make adjustments. Knowing how much the student understands the content is crucial, as it can guide you in defining your*

*strategy during the teaching process. It helps create an interactive and supportive learning environment.*

In consonance with this, Miss Adwoa stated:

*Formative assessment deals with assessing your students while teaching and learning is ongoing. Moreover, I think it is important because some students have different abilities. So, including formative assessment will help assess your students even without the final assessment and allows you to adjust immediately during instruction.*

Similarly, Mr. Abeiku who has taught for 10 years, had this to say:

*My understanding of formative assessment is that it occurs during instruction, using questions and answers to gauge students' understanding and adjust teaching approaches accordingly.*

Mr. Akwasi put it as this:

*Concerning formative assessment, it is a form of assessment that helps both the facilitator, the teacher and the learner in teaching and learning. Formative assessment is helping in lesson delivery, helping students to build on their strengths and then work on their weaknesses.*

Mr. Kwame gave a similar view:

*Formative assessment, to the best of my knowledge, has to do with the evaluation that we engage the students after maybe a topic or after a discussion of a subject. So, this one is within, for example, a class exercise, a class test, etc. It gives you feedback about what we have taught the students and whether they have understood the topic; it is always an ongoing process.*

Observation data largely confirmed this understanding. Teachers were often seen using question-and-answer techniques to gauge understanding, consistent with their descriptions in interviews. Observation checklist item 5 revealed that most teachers actively used questioning during lessons, a core element of formative assessment. The classroom setups also generally allowed for interactive activities, supporting formative assessment practices. Despite teachers' conceptual clarity, observational evidence indicated a gap between understanding and practice. Checklist item 7 revealed that only two out of ten teachers consistently used ongoing assessment to

monitor learner progress. While interviews suggested that all teachers believed formative assessment helps track progress, their actual classroom behavior reflected limited application. Similarly, checklist item 6 showed that none of the teachers adjusted their instructional strategies based on students' responses during lessons, contradicting their stated belief that formative assessment guides instructional decisions.

This divergence suggests that although teachers intellectually embrace formative assessment as a continuous learning process, they do not fully operationalise it in practice. This echoes findings by Bordoh et al. (2022), who reported that teachers' assessment practices in Social Studies were only average. The findings align with Bordoh, Bassaw, and Eshun (2013), who defined formative assessment as an ongoing process, and with Shabana et al. (2023), who noted that it allows teachers to adjust teaching strategies and students to reflect on their learning. Within the Social Constructivist Theory, this understanding reflects partial application of the principle that knowledge is co-constructed through continuous interaction between teachers, learners, and the environment (Kapur, 2018).

#### **4.2.1.2 Formative Assessment as a Feedback Mechanism**

Another recurring theme from the data concerns teachers' recognition of formative assessment as a feedback mechanism in education enables teachers and students to track progress, address learning gaps, and enhances teaching and learning. Miss Efua stated:

*Formative assessment is mainly about giving students timely feedback. This helps the students correct their mistakes and improve their learning strategies. Students need timely, constructive feedback during teaching and learning to improve their performance before summative assessments. I often use one-on-one feedback sessions to address students' concerns on their exercises and quizzes rather than just giving them grades.*

Mr. Kwadwo who has taught for nine years with a similar view, espoused that:

*For me, formative assessment is a powerful feedback tool that helps teachers and students track progress, identify learning gaps, and improve instruction. The feedback I give enable students to reflect, correct mistakes, and make real-time improvement. Effective formative assessment provides immediate, clear, and actionable feedback to guide student learning.*

Mr. Kwabena who has also taught for 12 years, had this to say on formative assessment:

*Formative assessment is a practical strategy for giving feedback to students on to help understanding of a concept. Formative assessment feedback helps students reflect on their progress, and to develop self-regulation skills. Formative assessment is not just about teachers giving feedback; it is about students learning to evaluate their progress and take responsibility for improvement.*

Observation data provided partial support for this perception. Checklist item 4 confirmed that teachers provided timely verbal feedback during lessons, often through question-and-answer exchanges. This suggests that in practice, teachers do incorporate feedback loops within instruction, aligning with their interview assertions. However, while teachers claimed to provide ongoing feedback, observations showed that written feedback was largely absent from students' exercise books. Teachers rarely used feedback to document or track students' progress, indicating a superficial engagement with feedback mechanisms. Moreover, although teachers mentioned that feedback guides teaching adjustments, checklist item 6 revealed minimal evidence of teachers modifying instructional strategies based on feedback.

This discrepancy highlights a partial convergence between teachers' conceptual understanding and classroom practice. Teachers recognise the importance of feedback but limit its scope to immediate verbal exchanges rather than using it for sustained instructional planning. These findings corroborate Huisman (2018), who argues that the strength of formative assessment lies in constructive, detailed feedback, and

Andrade et al. (2015), who emphasise that its impact depends on the quality of feedback provided. From a Social Constructivist perspective, feedback serves as a dialogic process between teacher and learner that supports meaning-making (Saleem et al., 2021; Singh & Yaduvanshi, 2015). The findings, however, indicate that while feedback occurs, it is not systematically leveraged to foster reflective learning.

#### **4.2.1.3 Formative Assessment as a Diagnostic Tool**

A third theme identified in both data sets is teachers' view of formative assessment as a diagnostic tool for identifying students' learning needs and adjusting instruction accordingly. Mr. Kofi articulated varied conceptions of formative assessment.

*It is a way to diagnose my students' learning gaps by using quizzes, exercises, and class discussions to meet their needs. If I do not diagnose learning gaps early, my students will struggle for the rest of the semester. Formative assessment helps me intervene before it is too late. Formative assessment is a tool for detecting learning gaps among students early, before they affect students' overall performance in summative assessment.*

Mr. Akosua see formative assessment as a diagnostic tool. He came out that;

*Formative assessment serves as a diagnostic tool in the sense that it helps teachers like me to identify learning gaps among my learners. I often use pre-assessments before introducing a new topic to gauge students' prior knowledge by using brainstorming to assess prior knowledge of my learners and adjust lesson plans based on students' responses.*

These views align with Ozan and Kincal (2018), who describe formative assessment as a diagnostic process that informs subsequent teaching decisions. Observation data partly supported these claims. Checklist item 5 revealed that teachers frequently used questioning and oral quizzes, confirming their use of diagnostic tools in class. Additionally, classroom setups were observed to be conducive to interactive activities, reinforcing the potential for diagnostic engagement.

Despite this, checklist items 1 and 2 revealed that teachers rarely shared learning goals or explicitly connected diagnostic findings to instructional adjustments. This gap suggests that while teachers identify learning gaps, they seldom use these insights to tailor instruction. Only a few teachers demonstrated active diagnostic intervention by modifying teaching approaches in response to student needs. These findings indicate that teachers conceptually understand the diagnostic purpose of formative assessment but fail to apply it consistently. Idun (2020) and Bekoe et al. (2013) emphasise that diagnostic assessment should guide planning and respond to students' prior knowledge, an aspect largely missing in observed practice. The findings resonate with the Social Constructivist framework, which posits that effective diagnosis requires integrating learners' prior knowledge into new learning experiences (Singh & Yaduvanshi, 2015).

In conclusion, the interview data demonstrate that teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District possess a sound conceptual understanding of formative assessment as a continuous process, a feedback mechanism, and a diagnostic tool. However, observation data reveal a performance gap, teachers' practices remain examination-oriented and confined to traditional assessment techniques, primarily questioning. Convergence between interview and observation data lies in the recognition of formative assessment's purposes, monitoring progress, providing feedback, and diagnosing learning needs. Divergence arises in the limited translation of theory into practice, as most teachers do not adjust teaching strategies, document feedback, or share learning goals effectively.

However, while Social Studies teachers demonstrate awareness of formative assessment consistent with Social Constructivist Theory, their classroom practices

indicate a partial and inconsistent implementation. This suggests a need for targeted professional development focused on translating theoretical knowledge into sustained, reflective, and adaptive assessment practices

To further understand teachers' conception of formative assessment, participants were asked to share their opinion on the difference between formative and summative assessment; in your experience and best of knowledge, what are the key features of formative assessment? Hence, the participants were asked: Item 5 of the interview guide reads: *In your opinion, how do you differentiate between formative and summative assessment?* Mr. Akwasi put it as this:

*Concerning formative assessment, it is a form of assessment that helps both the facilitator, that is, the teacher and the learner in the process of teaching and learning, but summative assessment is not only for improving learning and checking students' strengths and weaknesses, but also to grade and then for student placement in other fields of study.*

Mr. Kwamena gave a similar view

*So, the summative is more or less like the semester exams, maybe the WASSCE, that the students write at the end of their course or programme, and then the formative is when the teacher engages the student in a form of assessment during teaching and learning.*

Miss Adwoa added:

*Well, formative assessment is being built upon, but summative assessment is the end product.*

Mr. Nana Yaw explained:

*You see, summative assessment has to do with overall assessment, that is, the end-of-semester examination, and formative assessment is seen in the course of teaching. You do that to find out their weaknesses.*

Mr. Abeiku stated:

*Well, formative, as I said, during the instructional process, but summative normally occurs at the end of a course or a program. To measure the overall*

*knowledge that learners have acquired during a particular period of a course or a programme.*

The participants' differentiation between formative and summative assessment reveals that Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District possess a surface yet accurate conceptual understanding of the two assessment types. Their descriptions consistently emphasise that formative assessment occurs during instruction to support learning, while summative assessment happens after instruction to evaluate achievement. This understanding aligns with Black and Wiliam (1998a), who define formative assessment as the process of using evidence about student learning to adapt teaching to meet learner needs, and with Ochour, Opoku-Afriyie, and Eshun (2022), who argue that assessment should be integrated within teaching rather than reserved for end-of-term evaluations.

On the question, "In your experience and best of knowledge, what are the key principles of formative assessment?" The participants were of the view that:

Mr. Kwabena mentioned:

*Okay, in fact, the features of formative assessment, I would say I know of only feedback and then questioning, that is the only features that I know of formative assessment.*

Miss. Akosua stated:

*Well, I may be wrong, but it is about getting feedback from what you have taught the student.*

Mr. Abeiku had this to say:

*Formative assessment, well, the key features, one that I can say is that it should elicit feedback from the learners, that is the only feature I know.*

However, the participants' responses, particularly regarding the key features of formative assessment reveals a narrow and partial conception. While a few

participants identified feedback and questioning as central elements, none mentioned sharing learning goals or engaging students in self- or peer-assessment, which are integral dimensions according to Black and Wiliam's (1998a) four pillars of formative assessment. This indicates that teachers' understanding is largely procedural (focused on classroom questioning) rather than conceptual (understanding the formative purpose of assessment as part of learning design). From a Social Constructivist perspective, this finding highlights a disconnection between teachers' theoretical understanding and their enactment of constructivist principles in the classroom. According to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism and later interpretations by Kapur (2018), learning occurs through interaction, collaboration, and feedback within a social context. Effective formative assessment, therefore, should create opportunities for learners to actively participate in their own evaluation, reflect on feedback, and co-construct understanding with the teacher and peers. The teachers' limited mention of self- and peer-assessment suggests that classroom assessment practices remain teacher-dominated, with limited student agency in knowledge construction. This interpretation resonates with Idun (2020) and Bordoh et al. (2022), who found that while Ghanaian teachers acknowledge the value of formative assessment, its implementation is hindered by a focus on summative and examination-oriented practices. The absence of goal-sharing and reflective assessment in teachers' responses implies a continuation of traditional transmission-based pedagogy, contradicting the collaborative ethos of social constructivism. Moreover, the fact that only feedback and questioning were mentioned as formative features implies that teachers view assessment primarily as a monitoring and corrective process, not as a dialogic interaction aimed at learner empowerment. This reflects what Sadler (1989) describes as "a deficit model" of feedback, where teachers provide information for

correction rather than engaging learners in understanding and acting upon that feedback. Consequently, the transformative potential of formative assessment, as envisaged in constructivist pedagogy, remains underutilised.

In conclusion, while teachers' conceptualisations of formative assessment correctly distinguish it from summative assessment, their limited understanding of its principles constrains effective classroom application. Within the Social Constructivist framework, formative assessment should function as a shared process of meaning-making where both teacher and learner contribute to assessing understanding and guiding future learning. The study's findings, therefore, expose a theory–practice gap: teachers recognise formative assessment's importance but lack the pedagogical competence to embed it within interactive and reflective teaching practices. Although many Social Studies teachers understand and value formative assessment, their classroom practices often remain largely summative. This gap stems from three interrelated factors: teacher beliefs, systemic constraints, and professional development quality. Teachers' beliefs about assessment frequently emphasise grading and examination preparation rather than continuous feedback for learning.

Even when teachers express positive attitudes toward formative assessment, entrenched habits and exam-focused mindsets limit consistent implementation. Also, systemic constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, scarce resources, and high-stakes examinations discourage ongoing feedback, individual support, and interactive strategies. These structural pressures push teachers toward easier-to-manage tests and drills instead of formative practices. Professional development is often theoretical, short-term, and lacks follow-up coaching. Without sustained, classroom-based support, teachers struggle to translate assessment

knowledge into practice. The gap persists because knowledge alone is insufficient; effective formative assessment requires supportive beliefs, enabling school conditions, and continuous professional learning. These are essential for meaningful change (Yan et al., 2021; Asare and Afriyie, 2023)

#### **4.3 Social Studies Teachers' ability to demonstrate knowledge and utilise**

##### **Alternative Formative Assessment Tools to assess students**

The nature and goals of Social Studies account that teachers are to develop a dynamic pedagogical approach to teaching with alternative formative assessment tools to assess learners' understanding, since the subject deals with contemporary global issues. Oyibe and Nnamani (2014) admitted that "the ability to use various instructional methods for classroom interactions is often neglected by educators, thereby hindering the effective implementation of the Social Studies content." Then, since most instructional activities in the classroom are assessment-related, it is imperative to know the assessment tools used by teachers during instruction to assess their learners. Regarding the above, the researcher examined Social Studies teachers' comprehension of formative assessment tools and their ability to use them to evaluate their students. The above theme was used to elicit answers to Research Question 2:

*To what extent do senior high school Social Studies teachers demonstrate knowledge and utilise alternative formative assessment tools when assessing their students?*

To obtain answers to the research question, the researcher utilised specific items in the interview guide to collect responses from participants regarding the subject. The researcher utilised particular items from the classroom observation guide to evaluate the degree to which Social Studies teachers employ formative assessment techniques

to assess their students in the subject area. The interview guide and observation checklist were used to facilitate data triangulation. After meticulously analysing the collected data, the researcher identified three sub-themes in response to the research question. These are *Teachers' heavy reliance on tradition assessment methods, Student-centered formative assessment, and Collaborative and long-term progress monitoring.*

#### **4.3.1 Teachers' Heavy Reliance on Traditional assessment Methods**

The data from both interviews and classroom observations revealed that teachers' heavy reliance on traditional assessment methods remains the dominant mode of evaluating students in Social Studies classrooms. Teachers primarily relied on traditional methods such as question-and-answer, class tests, and written exercises, with limited understanding and application of authentic or alternative assessment strategies. Item 7 of the interview guide reads: *How do you differentiate between traditional and authentic assessment tools? And which of the two do you often use in assessing your learners?* Miss Adwoa mentioned:

*The traditional one is the normal questions and answers, and then the authentic one is the one that deals with newer forms of formative assessment, like portfolio and peer assessment. I often use the traditional method because of limited time on the timetable, and it does not form the basis for external exams.*

Mr. Abeiku stated:

*Traditional assessment is a method that complies with the old way of assessing students. However, we have the portfolios, scaffolds, etc., with the authentic assessment. I often use the traditional assessment even though authentic assessment is great.*

Interview responses indicated the participants clearly distinguished between traditional and authentic assessment in a surface-level sense. Interview responses from the participants consistently demonstrated that teachers favoured traditional

assessments due to time constraints and external examination pressures. This was corroborated by classroom observations, which revealed that teachers frequently used oral questioning and short written tests but rarely incorporated formative tools such as portfolios, self-assessment, or interviews. The observations confirmed that formative assessment practices were teacher-controlled rather than student-driven. Lessons emphasised rote recall and cognitive assessment, consistent with traditional assessment model. Participants showed a level perception of authentic assessment's value. While both teachers recognise its pedagogical importance their practice does not reflect this acknowledgment. This gap between belief and practice suggests a form of conceptual acceptance without pedagogical enactment. This finding resonates with Idun (2020), who highlighted that many Social Studies teachers assess learning to satisfy external examination requirements rather than disciplinary objectives. Conversely, the results contradict Kankam et al. (2015), who found that teachers demonstrated a "practical understanding of authentic assessment processes." The discrepancy may be explained by contextual factors, such as limited teacher training opportunities, curriculum rigidity, and examination-oriented educational cultures.

From a constructivist theoretical framework, particularly drawing on Vygotsky's social constructivism, authentic assessment aligns with the notion that learning is a socially mediated, context-dependent process. Authentic assessments tools such as portfolios, project-based learning, and peer evaluations, enable learners to apply knowledge in real-world contexts, reflecting higher-order thinking (DoK level 3-4) and collaborative learning. However, the current findings suggest that teachers' continued reliance on traditional assessment contradicts the constructivist goal of engaging students in authentic, meaningful tasks. Instead of assessing application and understanding, teachers assess memorization and recall.

Item 8 of the interview guide reads: *What formative assessment tools do you mostly use to assess learning, and why do you use them?*

Miss Akosua added:

*Class test to know whether students were able to grasp the content or the concept that I have taught them.*

Miss Adwoa stated:

*Questions and answers are important because they help me get feedback from them and their knowledge on the topic.*

Mr. Abeiku mentioned:

*Mostly, I use group work.....almost every lesson, I have a group activity for them. I use that to promote collaboration among the learners.*

Miss Efua said:

*Group work because it allows the students to share their understanding of what is taught.*

While some teachers claimed to use group work and collaborative tasks as part of formative assessment, observation data suggested that such activities were often procedural rather than diagnostic. Although group discussions were observed, there was little evidence of teachers using the outcomes of these discussions to inform subsequent instruction or to provide individualised feedback. This divergence suggests a superficial understanding of formative assessment principles. The findings align with Leahy et al. (2005), who observed that teachers, despite being aware of formative assessment principles, rarely implement them effectively in classroom practice. They also echo Quyen and Khairani (2016), who found that teachers are often reluctant to integrate formative assessment into daily lessons, either due to time constraints or lack of training. Furthermore, this study supports Asante et al. (2023), who emphasised that Social Studies teachers tend to rely on lower-level thinking (DoK level 1-2) tasks like factual recall and comprehension rather than authentic

assessments that encourage critical analysis and application. The absence of higher-order assessment activities suggests that current formative assessment practices do not fully support the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor goals of Social Studies education. The findings can be interpreted through the lens of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which positions learning as a socially mediated process where knowledge is constructed through interaction and feedback. However, the evidence here shows that teachers' practices remain teacher-centered, with minimal integration of learner-driven assessment activities.

Item 15 on the interview guide read: *How do you understand interview-based assessment? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* Mr. Kwabena explained:

*Interview-based assessment is maybe when there is a topic, you want to interview the student to see how they understand the topic.... because it helps both the teacher and the students to address the problems and how to address them.*

Miss Adwoa beamoned:

*Interview-based assessment, probably bringing a resource person to tell something more to the children about your lesson.....because they have a resource person, someone who is much more based in that field, to give them that information.*

The finding indicated a partial but fragmented understanding of interview-based assessment among teachers. Across the interviews and classroom observations, a mixed understanding of interview-based assessment emerged. The mixed interpretations align with what Bekoe, Eshun, and Bordoh (2013) describe as the flexible nature of interview-based assessment, ranging from structured questioning to informal dialogues that gather insights about students' experiences, interests, and learning challenges. Mr. Kwabem's view closely matches Herrera et al.'s (2007)

notion of unstructured, detailed interviews that allow teachers to adapt instruction based on learners' input. His approach embodies constructivist assessment principles, emphasizing learner-centered dialogue and formative feedback (Vygotsky, 1978; Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Interview guide item 12 reads: *How do you understand scaffold assessment? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* When asked about scaffold assessment, the Social Studies teachers generally showed limited understanding of the concept. This confusion was evident both in their verbal and observed classroom practices.

Miss Adwoa stated:

*I do not know much about that, but I think scaffold assessment will build upon each level of assessment.....because in scaffolding assessment, we are improving upon students' performance bit by bit. This allows for building knowledge from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking among students.*

The participant response showed an intuitive but incomplete grasp of scaffolding as a progressive support mechanism that aids learners' cognitive growth. However, classroom observations revealed that participant instructional strategies lacked structured scaffolding elements such as gradual task breakdown, guided practice, or withdrawal of support over time. This indicates a conceptual recognition without pedagogical enactment. This practical evidence supports the claim that many teachers struggle to operationalise scaffolding principles in classroom assessment. Across participants, there was a shared lack of conceptual clarity about scaffold assessment. This aligns with Idun's (2020) finding that Social Studies teachers generally lack knowledge of scaffolded authentic assessment. Similarly, Bekoe et al. (2013) emphasise that effective scaffold assessment planning enhances students' analytical and reflective capacities, an aspect missing in the observed classrooms. From social

constructivist, scaffolding is crucial in helping learners move through their zone of proximal development (ZPD), the gap between what they can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Sardareh and Saad (2012) elaborate that scaffolding enables learners to extend beyond their current competence through structured support, while Sarita (2017) stresses that teachers must time such support appropriately and gradually withdraw it as competence increases.

Interview guide item 17 reads: *How do you understand a selected-response test? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* Mr. Akwasi had this to say:

*This one, I would say, is a form of test that is used to assess students on a concept or a topic taught.....and this time around, it helps you to know, set questions at all levels of student understanding that is the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain of learning.*

To corroborate this, Mr. Nana Yaw stated:

*it is the multiply-choice questions we ask students to response during exams.....it is important because it allows students to select the best response and allows them to read wide.*

In consonance with this Mr. Abeiku added:

*it is where you give them multiply response test for them to select the best corresponding answers.....because, it gives learners the option to think critically. Students need to think critically before they choose one. It is important to assess cognitive and practical aspects of a concept.*

Further clarification was sought by asking, *don't you think that one promotes the ability to guess?*

Mr. Nana Yaw mentioned:

*No, not necessarily guessing, but you see some objective tests or multiple choice, it pays attention to the main content. So, if the student knows, he or she knows this is important to the lesson or the content.*

Similarly, Mr. Abeiku stated:

*No, it does not promote guessing in the sense that students have to read and understand the questions before you select the appropriate response.....it is*

*important because it allows students to read wide which helps in expanding their horizon and domains of learning.*

Across the interviews, teachers demonstrate a shared understanding that selected-response test are primarily used to assess students' understanding of key concepts taught during instruction. The observation data further substantiate these interpretations. Teachers were seen using selected-response items to gather data rapidly on students' knowledge across a broad range of content, typically focusing on recall and understanding (DoK level 1). The observed classroom practice revealed that, in reality, teachers' application of selected-response test remained largely within the cognitive domain, neglecting the affective and psychomotor domains. From a constructivist perspective, teachers' emphasis on these tools for assessing "understanding" and "critical thinking" reflects an orientation toward cognitive constructivism, where knowledge acquisition is measured through individual reasoning and recall. Yet, as Nilson (2016) cautions, while selected-response test effectively assesses memory and comprehension, they fall short in evaluating higher-order skills (DoK level 3-4) such as creation, synthesis, and application. Suskie (2018) similarly affirms that "objective assessments," provide efficiency and reliability but do not fully capture complex learning outcomes such as problem-solving or creativity. The teachers' preference for these tests, observed in their classroom practice, underscores an instrumentalist view of assessment, prioritising efficiency and coverage over authentic demonstration of learning outcomes.

Interview guide item 18 reads: *How do you understand the extended/essay response test? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* Miss Adwoa stated:

*It gives the students the ability to express themselves well on an item and also apply their understanding of the concept taught.... because, well, if not 100% at least, it will go a long way to do something little.*

In consonance with this, Mr. Abeiku added:

*essay response test, it gives room for the learners to explore and tell their opinions.....that one promotes more of the creativity and deeper understanding of social studies concept.*

Mr. Kwadwo stated:

*it is where we assess students on test items that demand in-depth understanding of concepts.....student will answer questions in detail, this will inform you that they understand what you have discussed with them.*

With the interviews, there was a clear consensus among teachers that extended or essay response tests allow students to demonstrate deeper comprehension, creativity, and the ability to apply knowledge to real-life situations. However, while teachers consistently praised essay response tests for their ability to assess understanding, observations also revealed a limited diversity in assessment practices. Most teachers relied on essay tests and seldom incorporated alternative assessments that could capture affective or behavioral dimensions of learning. Thus, although teachers value essay tests for promoting depth and application, their assessment scope remains cognitively centered, overlooking other learning domains. The study thus confirms prior research (Simonson et al., 2000; Bordoh et al., 2022) indicating that teachers' assessment practices are still cognitively dominant, with limited movement toward authentic assessment consistent with constructivist and holistic learning paradigms. The teachers' shared perceptions of essay response tests as tools for assessing depth of understanding, creativity, and real-world application align with principles from social constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through active engagement and meaningful reflection (Vygotsky, 1978).

### 4.3.2 Student-centered formative assessment

The student-centered formative assessment was also one of the themes that emerged from the analysis in answering RQ2, which sought to identify the formative assessment tools used by Social Studies teachers to assess their students. Item 9 of the interview guide reads: *How do you understand self-assessment? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* Most of the teachers were confused when asked about the meaning of self-assessment.

Miss Akosua stated:

*Self-assessment, I believe that one has to do with the individual students in assessing their learning weakness and strength..... if a student can assess him or herself personally to know the areas he or she is good at and areas he or she can improve on. It makes you the teachers to achieve learning objectives in the sense that you will be able to move to the next topic.*

The findings reveal that participants held a surface-level understanding of self-assessment, perceiving it mainly as a tool for guiding lesson progression rather than fostering students' metacognitive skills. Observation data reinforced this view, there were no self-assessment tools or strategies (such as rubrics, reflective journals, checklists, or success criteria) were evident in lesson records. Instead, assessment remained teacher-directed and summative, indicating that self-assessment is not embedded within teachers' pedagogical routines. From a social constructivist perspective, this disconnect reflects a gap between theoretical principles and classroom practice. Social constructivism posits that learning is an active, participatory process involving reflection, dialogue, and self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978; Saleem et al., 2021). This implies that, self-assessment serves as a metacognitive mechanism through which learners internalise goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies, processes largely absent in the observed classrooms. This aligns

with Bekoe et al. (2013), who argue that engaging students in evaluating their own work enhances understanding of quality criteria and motivation to improve. Similarly, Panadero et al. (2015) emphasise that self-assessment helps students clarify and appraise their learning processes and outcomes. The absence of such practices suggests that teachers' limited conceptual grasp constrains students' development of reflective and self-regulated learning, a key element of formative assessment. Andrade (2019) cautions that without clear understanding, self-assessment risks degenerating into superficial self-marking. Wanner and Palmer (2018) and Ndoye (2017) similarly assert that authentic self-assessment fosters autonomy, evaluative judgment, and continuous learning qualities yet not reflected in the observed classrooms, where assessment remains predominantly teacher-controlled.

Item 10 of the interview guide asks, “*How do you understand peer assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?*” Miss Adwoa had this to say:

*Peer assessment is a situation where colleagues or classmates share information and assess themselves to know where and what they did right and wrong.....because peer assessment, the other colleague teaching their friends will go a long way even to make them understand it better because they can explain it in their language.*

To corroborate with this, Mr. Nana Yaw mentioned:

*that is group assessment, where students assess their colleagues to adjust their learning.....because it helps other students who are high achievers to help the low achievers.*

Mr. Abeiku stated:

*Peer assessment, I understand it as the learners assessing themselves or their colleagues.....it helps because when the peers assess themselves, the one who is assessing the other peer himself will be learning from maybe the mistakes and the rights that the person did.*

Mr. Kofi explained:

*Peer assessment is where learners make a constructive criticism about their fellow students' work....in social studies, the classroom should be democratic to allow to accept divergent views from their colleagues.*

Mr. Kwadwo had this to say:

*peer assessment is an essential aspect of assessment since it allows students to assess their fellow students work.....you see for some reasons like large class size and time limit us to practice it effectively.*

Across interviews, Social Studies teachers demonstrated a shared understanding of peer assessment as a collaborative, learner-centered process in which students actively evaluate their own and others' work to enhance learning. This understanding was largely corroborated by classroom observations, where peer interactions, group discussions, and student-led explanations were evident during assessment-related activities, suggesting alignment between teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom practices. This view converges with observational data showing students frequently clarifying concepts to peers using informal language, reinforcing the idea that peer-to-peer explanation mediates understanding. Such practices reflect a shift from teacher-dominated instruction to student-mediated meaning-making. This supports Adam et al.'s (2018) assertion that Social Studies instruction becomes more effective when assessment is viewed as integral to the teaching–learning process rather than as an isolated evaluative activity. The findings further align with Idun (2020), who argues that peer assessment promotes higher-order reasoning (DoK level 3-4), deep learning, and student-centered engagement. Importantly, these results substantiate the core assumptions of Social Constructivist Theory, which posits that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and shared experiences (Akpan et al., 2020). Teachers' descriptions and their observed practices illustrate a clear shift in responsibility from teacher to learner, transforming students into active participants

and co-constructors of knowledge. This is consistent with Sardareh and Saad's (2012) view that learners construct personal meanings and refine them through comparison and dialogue with peers and teachers. This underscores Bekoe, Eshun, and Bordoh's (2013) argument that peer assessment requires deliberate structuring, clear criteria, and sustained dialogue to move beyond a one-way feedback model and fully realise its social constructivist potential.

Item 11 of the interview guide reads: *How do you understand performance assessment? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* Most teachers appeared confused and uncertain, indicating that they were unfamiliar with the concept. Findings from both the interviews and classroom observations revealed a convergence around teachers' limited understanding of performance assessment as an alternative formative assessment strategy. The findings suggest a significant gap between curriculum expectations and teachers' assessment literacy, regarding performance assessment. As Kahl and Hofman (2013) assert, performance assessment involves substantive, authentic tasks, whether short-term or project-based, that yield valid and reliable evidence of learning. The teachers' inability to recognise or define such tasks indicates that performance assessment is neither well understood nor systematically embedded in their instructional practices. Similarly, Bekoe et al. (2013) conceptualises performance-based assessment as an approach that taps into the depth and breadth of students' learning, enabling learners to demonstrate understanding beyond surface-level recall. The absence of such assessment practices in observed classrooms suggests that students are provided with limited opportunities to demonstrate higher-order thinking (DoK levels 3-4), problem-solving, and application of knowledge as key outcomes emphasised in Social Studies education. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings challenge the assumptions of Social

Constructivist Theory, which emphasises learner autonomy, active knowledge construction, and the application of learning in meaningful contexts (Akpan et al., 2020). Herrera et al. (2007) argue that performance assessment supports how learners process, store, and transfer knowledge to novel situations. The lack of performance-based assessment therefore implies that students are less engaged in authentic learning experiences where knowledge is constructed through action, reflection, and application.

Item 16 of the interview guide reads: *How do you understand cooperative group assessment? Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* The Social Studies interviewees were confused as to what a cooperative assessment is. Mr. Kwamena, however, *said,*

*Cooperative group assessment would mean that I will put the students into groups and then present their work, and later on, you also exchange materials among the groups, and you then ask the groups to exchange their work, but I do not understand.*

Data from interviews and classroom observations consistently indicate that Social Studies teachers have a limited understanding of cooperative group assessment as a formative strategy. Classroom observations corroborated interview data, revealed that, there was no evidence of cooperative assessment practices. Assessment practices remained predominantly individual and teacher-centered, confirming that cooperative group assessment is largely absent in practice rather than merely misunderstood. This suggest that a clear gap exists between teachers' instructional practices and the principles of cooperative group assessment. Bekoe et al. (2013) argue that cooperative group assessment encompasses collaborative dialogue, group tasks, and project-based activities that allow learning to be assessed through shared engagement. The absence of such practices suggests that teachers may undervalue or misunderstand the role of

cooperation in assessment. This limitation restricts their ability to capture learners' social, cognitive, and problem-solving competencies, which are often overlooked in traditional individual assessments. The findings also conflict with Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasises knowledge construction through social interaction (Akpan et al., 2020). Although cooperative and inquiry-based approaches are central to student-centered instruction (Gholam, 2019), teachers' limited understanding of cooperative group assessment constrains their ability to function as facilitators of learning. Moreover, the lack of documented evidence of students' collaborative processes indicates missed opportunities for formative feedback and reflective learning (Bekoe et al., 2013).

#### **4.3.3 Collaborative and long-term progress monitoring**

Another theme from the data analysis for answering RQ 2 was collaborative and long-term progress monitoring, which Social Studies teachers can use to assess their students in formative assessment classrooms. Item 11 of the interview guide reads: *How do you understand portfolio assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?* Mr. Kwabena had this to say:

*portfolio assessment is when at the end of the semester, or the two semesters, the students put all the work they have done, group work, group presentation together, and then assess them and see if what they did for the semester was in line, or was really good or not..... it helps the students to know if they did well or not, and that this semester they have to work hard so that they can put the best performance they want.*

To corroborate with this, Miss Adwoa explained:

*portfolio, building the assessment like exercise, class test, homework, group presentation etc. they have to keep it.....it sometimes serves a source of reference to track students' progress and for remedy purposes.*

Mr. Abeiku mentioned:

*portfolio is great....it helps you and the learners to collect progressions of the students, what they have done over the period.....put them together to give them a sort of motivation that over the period or semester or term, they have done great looking at the portfolios that they have been able to build.....it's a great tool but time consuming.*

The responses from the interviews corroborated with classroom observations, which showed that teachers who articulated a clear understanding of portfolio assessment also encouraged students to retain and organise their work across lessons. In such classrooms, student artifacts were occasionally revisited for feedback and reflection, reinforcing the formative purpose of portfolios. This suggests coherence between teachers' stated beliefs and, to some extent, their instructional practices. The study revealed the motivational value of portfolio assessment, noting that reviewing accumulated work helps both teachers and learners recognise growth over a term or semester. Observational data similarly revealed that when portfolios were used, students appeared more engaged and reflective, particularly when teachers explicitly drew attention to learning progression. This indicates that while teachers widely acknowledged the pedagogical value of portfolios, several viewed the approach as time-consuming, and minimally implemented or postponed in favour of syllabus coverage and examination-oriented instruction. However, the reported perception of portfolio assessment as time-intensive reveals a theory–practice gap. This finding is consistent with Eshun et al. (2014), who observed that teachers often fear that learner-centered and formative approaches may delay syllabus completion. In such contexts, assessment practices are shaped less by pedagogical beliefs and more by systemic pressures. Bekoe et al. (2013) argues that for formative assessment practices such as portfolios to be effective, teachers must deliberately shift the purpose of teaching toward empowering learners to engage in self-assessment. The present findings suggest that while teachers conceptually accept this shift, they struggle to

operationalise it within existing classroom constraints. From a social constructivist and assessment-for-learning perspective, portfolio assessment is intended to promote learner reflection, self-assessment, and continuous feedback, thereby aligning assessment with learning objectives rather than merely measuring outcomes. The teachers' descriptions resonate strongly with this theoretical position.

Item 14 of the interview guide reads: *How do you understand play-based assessment?*

*Why is it important to achieve learning objectives?* Mr. Kwamena bemoaned:

*It is where you engage the student in maybe a play to read their minds or you may engage them in a play to see or talk about the topic..... if the students can do it in line with what the topic under discussion is.....because it makes the students have that ability to remember how they acted upon the concept in the class.*

Miss Adowa had this to say

*Play-based assessment, such as role-play, helps students understand concept better and apply them to real-life situations. For example, role -playing road safety enables students to remember road signs and act safely when crossing roads, although the approach is time-consuming.*

The data revealed that only two participants demonstrated a meaningful understanding of play-based assessment. They described it as role-play aligned with lesson objectives and used to assess learners' understanding through active participation. However, among the ten teachers interviewed, most displayed little or no knowledge of play-based assessment, and classroom observations confirmed the absence of play or role-play as an assessment strategy. Teachers also perceived play-based assessment as time-consuming, a concern reflected in their reliance on traditional written exercises and tests. Consequently, although a few teachers recognised its pedagogical value, play-based assessment remains largely marginalised due to time constraints and pressures to cover the curriculum. From a constructivist perspective, learning occurs through active engagement and experience, making play-based assessment,

particularly role-play aligned well with this approach. The limited understanding demonstrated by most teachers suggests that formative assessment practices in Social Studies are underdeveloped and overshadowed by summative, examination-driven methods. This finding supports Idun (2020), who argues that authentic assessment requires intentional observation, interaction, and reflection on learners' classroom actions. The limited use of play-based assessment observed in this study indicated that most teachers have not yet embraced this reflective and learner-centered stance. However, the results contradict Bekoe et al. (2013), who contend that role-play enables meaningful assessment of learners' identities, knowledge, and learning processes. This contradiction highlights a gap between theoretical recommendations and classroom practice, driven by limited assessment literacy and systemic constraints.

In conclusion, Social Studies teachers demonstrated an average level of knowledge of alternative formative assessment tools; however, classroom observations revealed reliance on traditional assessment methods only. Teachers were unable to clearly explain how alternative formative assessments support lesson objectives, and many viewed them as time-consuming, using them only when time permitted. The integration of interview and observation data under these themes highlights a paradox: while teachers value formative assessment conceptually, their classroom practices remain deeply rooted in traditional paradigms. Theoretically, this disconnect reflects an underutilization of social constructivist strategies, which emphasise collaboration, reflection, and co-construction of knowledge. The findings indicate that teaching and assessment are largely examination-driven rather than focused on achieving meaningful learning outcomes. Consequently, alternative formative assessment tools are rarely used. As Idun (2020) notes, such practices limit learners' opportunities to

demonstrate understanding, emphasising exam performance over learning. Social Constructivist Learning Theory emphasises that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction, guided discussion, and teacher-facilitated collaboration (Kiraly, 2014). In line with this perspective, Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District need to strengthen their use of formative assessment tools to inform instructional decisions and support learners' progress. Doing so will shift teaching and learning beyond examination orientation toward deeper understanding and lifelong learning.

#### **4.4 Challenges faced by SHS Social Studies Teachers in using Formative**

##### **Assessment**

The practical implementation of formative assessment and carefully selecting and utilising different alternative formative assessment tools would benefit teachers and students. To effectively evaluate learning in Social Studies, it is incumbent upon Social Studies teachers to comprehend the conceptual framework, utilise appropriate assessment tools, and implement ways to address forthcoming issues. In the pursuit of identifying suitable alternative formative assessment tools for instruction, teachers encounter numerous problems. Thus, the last research question of this study was to identify the problems the selected Social Studies teachers encountered in employing formative assessment during instruction. It examines the challenges teachers encounter when using formative assessment. The overarching theme was employed to derive responses to Research Question 3:

***What challenges do SHS Social Studies teachers face in using formative assessment in their classrooms?***

To elicit answers to this research question, the researcher used some items in the interview guide and observation checklist to gather responses from participants on the

issue. After carefully analysing the data gathered, the researcher developed five sub-themes to answer the research question. These are large class sizes, time constraints, examination-oriented culture, insufficient resources, and students' engagement and learning abilities.

#### **4.4.1 Large Class Size**

Large class size emerged as the primary challenge teachers face in practicing formative assessment, as revealed by both interviews and classroom observations. The issue manifested in two interconnected ways: first, assessing students individually is difficult due to sheer numbers; second, providing timely feedback is hindered by the high student-to-teacher ratio. This aligns with Moluayonge and Park (2017), who assert that “class size sparks heated debate among educators,” particularly regarding effective teaching and assessment strategies. All selected Social Studies teachers revealed that their classes ranged between 55 and 70 students, which consistently made formative assessment challenging. For instance, Mr. Abeiku stated:

*Well, the difficulty in my situation is mostly the class size. Sometimes, you go to a class with about 70 students, and the classroom sizes are petite; grouping students becomes difficult. If you have to use discussions, it becomes tough. Also, the seating arrangement in the class if the size is large, it is tough to create a conducive atmosphere for group discussion.*

Mr. Kwamena noted that:

*the classes are so large making it unfavourable to practice formative assessment effectively.....for example, we are marking about 65 student exercises and then other classes, 65 times 6, it becomes challenging for you and also to give timely feedback on their performance.*

Similarly, Mr. Akwasi stated,

*In fact, the impact on my ability is a worry....it is a worry because if you have a large class size, it is tough to attend to every one of the students in the class. So, effectiveness may be complicated to achieve one way or the other, yet we try our best to do what is important or needed.*

Miss Akosua had this to say:

*Social studies classroom must be tolerative in nature where students criticise their colleague's work or presentation, but due to large class size we are unable to do so....because the class will be rowdy with most of them not concentrating....and this always force me not even to attempt any of the formative assessment practices because it will delay my lesson.*

Observational data confirmed the challenges reported by teachers. Classes contained 55–70 students, and limited classroom space restricted movement, group interaction, and individualised attention. Teachers could not circulate freely to redirect focus or engage each student during formative assessment. Both interviews and observations highlight that large class sizes hinder individual assessment, timely feedback, and effective classroom management. Space constraints and high student numbers reduce the feasibility of group activities and interactive formative assessment strategies. From a constructivist perspective, formative assessment relies on ongoing teacher-student interactions to scaffold learning and provide timely corrective feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The large classes observed limited these interactions, reducing opportunities for personalised feedback and peer-mediated peer-mediated learning. This aligns with Salia (2022), who noted that overcrowding prevents teachers from guiding learners effectively, and Cisse, Ndinga, and Sane (2021), who found that high student numbers constrain the variety of exercises teachers can implement. Similarly, Quyen and Khairani (2017) argue that meaningful feedback requires time and attention, both restricted in overcrowded classrooms. The findings indicate that the challenge is not only temporal but also spatial and relational: large class sizes impede teacher engagement and student participation in formative assessment. Factors such as population growth, expanded access to education, and government policies contribute to persistently large classes (Ayeni et al., 2016; Salia,

2022). This structural context positions large class sizes as an enduring systemic barrier, echoing Enu's (2021) findings on their negative impact on teacher-student engagement.

#### 4.4.2 Time Constraints

Time constraints emerged as another challenge affecting Social Studies teachers' ability to practise formative assessment effectively. Data from interviews and classroom observation showed that limited instructional time, compounded by large class sizes and inadequate resources, significantly constrained teachers' assessment practices. Across the cases, teachers perceived formative assessment as desirable but impractical within the rigid time structures imposed by school timetables and syllabus demands. Interview data revealed a strong shared concern about insufficient contact hours. For instance, Miss. Efua stated:

*The time problem is complicated because I have just two hours weekly. How do I practically practice formative assessment effectively? Often resorting to lectures and note-taking to cover enough before their final exams. Also, you must move on with other topics to complete the scheme of work.....you cannot just concentrate on formative assessment without teaching your next topic because we are sitting on a time bomb.*

In consonance with this, Mr. Nana Yaw stated:

*With the issue of time constraint, we teach according to periods, and the period/time on the timetable is limited to even use formative assessment practices. We are scheduled in a manner that we have to follow a certain syllabus, so, for us to beat time, we sometimes have to forgo some of these formative assessment practices.*

Miss Adwoa had this to say:

*With time it is always not enough because, for instance, you are showing a video of about 30 minutes, and then you do not have the resource available to project it or the class is not in a condition to be able to project it for them, you would have to waste time and then show it to them in groups..... by the time you finished your time has elapsed without teaching anything.*

Mr. Kofi bemoaned:

*The time allocated on the timetable for Social Studies is minimal; I only have just two hours a week for each class I am handling. This makes attributing formative assessment practices like collaborative learning during teaching difficult.*

The participant's metaphor of "sitting on a time bomb" captures the urgency and anxiety teachers experience in balancing formative assessment with curricular accountability. These accounts portray time not merely as a logistical limitation but as a structural constraint that shapes pedagogical decision-making, often in ways that undermine formative assessment principles. The classroom observations corroborated these interview findings, revealed a predominance of lecture-based instruction with limited opportunities for questioning, peer interaction, and feedback. These findings align with social-constructivist perspectives that emphasise continuous feedback, learner engagement, and instructional responsiveness (Vygotsky, 1968). Formative assessment requires time to elicit evidence of learning, diagnose misconceptions, and provide feedback; when instructional time is compressed, these processes are compromised, resulting in surface-level coverage rather than deep learning. The tendency to revert to lecture-based methods reflects a well-documented tension between curriculum coverage and pedagogical quality. Consistent with this, previous studies identify time as a persistent barrier to formative assessment, particularly in overloaded curricula (Cisse et al., 2021; Enu, 2021; Quyen & Khairani, 2016; Eshun et al., 2014). This implies that, teachers' limited use of formative assessment stems less from a lack of knowledge or willingness and more from systemic constraints related to time allocation, curriculum demands, and resource availability, highlighting the need for policy and curricular reforms that allow greater instructional flexibility.

#### 4.4.3 Examination-Oriented Culture

Another challenge identified by the researcher was dominance of examination-oriented culture. This theme examines how a dominant examination-oriented culture, particularly the high-stakes nature of the WASSCE, shapes Social Studies teachers' instructional and assessment practices, constraining the enactment of formative assessment. Both interview and classroom observation data revealed that assessment decisions are largely driven by summative imperatives, with limited space for formative, learner-centered practices. For instance, Mr. Kwadwo stated:

*Everything we do, from the way we plan our lessons to how we assess students, is largely informed by the final exams. The pressure is intense both on teachers and students. We are always reminded that what matters most is how well students perform in the WASSCE. So, we focus more on preparing them for the exams, often through past questions, and mock.*

In consonance with this, Mr. Akwasi added:

*Well, from my experience over the years, our education system is highly examination-oriented. Almost everything revolves around preparing students to pass their final exams, especially the WASSCE. You see, we are under constant pressure to produce good results because that's what parents, school heads, the district office uses to judge our performance.*

Mr. Nana Yaw stated:

*There's a strong focus on teaching students with past questions, organizing mock exams, and rushing through the syllabus just to make sure every examinable topic is covered. There's very little time left to actually reflect on whether students understand the content or can apply it in real-life situations.*

Miss Adwoa explained:

*Sometimes, we are more focused on helping them memorise facts than helping them think critically. And even when you try to introduce interactive or project-based learning, the reaction is, 'Sir, is this coming in the exam?' So, we are operating in an exam-driven environment, and it shapes how we teach, and how students learn.*

The interview and observation data showed that teachers' pedagogy and assessment are dominated by external examination demands, with professional worth largely judged by WASSCE result. Instruction is centered on past questions and mock test, with limited formative assessment, creating pressure that contribute to students' anxiety and teacher burnout. Although teachers recognise the limitation of examination-driven teaching, particularly its negative effects on critical thinking and real-life application. This systemic accountability constraints prevent this awareness from shaping practice, revealing a theory-practice gap. This gap reflects not a lack of pedagogical knowledge, but constraints imposed by systemic accountability pressures. From a social constructivist perspective, these findings highlight a misalignment between formative assessment principles and the prevailing assessment culture. Black and Wiliam (2018) emphasise that formative assessment is most effective when embedded in everyday classroom practice. However, within an examination-oriented context, assessment functions primarily as assessment of learning, oriented towards certification rather than learning improvement.

The current study's findings are consistent with a study conducted by Asamoah et al. (2024), teachers' tendency to "teach to the test" emerges less as a pedagogical preference than as a survival strategy within a high-accountability system. This is reinforced by performance contracts, school ranking practices, and societal expectations that equate educational quality with examination success. Similarly, Bekoe (2023) shows that the demands of the WASSCE, time constraints, and the familiarity of traditional assessment modes collectively shape teachers' instructional and assessment decisions. As Eshun, Ochour, and Bordoh (2024) argue, the dominance of external examinations constrains teachers' professional agency, promoting compliance-oriented rather than inquiry-oriented pedagogy. Consequently,

classrooms become sites of examination rehearsal rather than meaningful knowledge construction. This implies that, teachers feel compelled to teach using past questions and mock exams, leaving little room for learner-centered approaches. Our education system has been reduced to credentialism, where the focus is on obtaining certificates rather than developing competencies for life and work.

#### **4.4.4 Insufficient Resources**

Insufficient resources emerged as another critical challenge influencing Social Studies teachers' ability to practise formative assessment effectively. Evidence from both interviews and classroom observations converged to show that material inadequacy, when compounded by large class sizes and time constraints, significantly constrained teachers' pedagogical choices and assessment practices. For example, Mr. Abeiku explained:

*In the issue of resources, for this class, for example, I have combined two classes. We have only one projector, so I have combined the two classes at the dining hall because the other teachers are waiting to use the same projector. The lesson needs a projector to enhance students' understanding because it is a concept that needs visualisation.*

Miss Akosua mentioned:

*The resources are not available. Sometimes, I have to go around with my phone and laptop to show them pictures and videos on the topic. The students do not even have textbooks for the new curriculum. I am using the teacher manual provided by GES and NTC. If I want them to search for anything, I have to search for them or give them phones to search.*

Mr. Kwabena stated:

*Last week, I had to show a 10-minute video. The T-Tel people came around and told me I had to use my phone to show the video to the groups. I have six groups in my class; every group will watch the video for 10 minutes, meaning 60 minutes for a period is gone. How can I ask them questions about the video? Moreover, that would not allow you enough time to perform some formative assessment I have captured in my lesson plan.*

Mr. Kwadwo further illustrated how he sometimes manages to deal with the challenge. He illustrated:

*I Sometimes, use my own money to print materials or buy sticky notes for activities when there is no projector or electricity, but I have stopped because it becomes too costly.*

Across interviews, teachers consistently reported that the lack of instructional resources such as projectors, textbooks, printed materials, and reliable internet access limited their capacity to engage learners actively and assess understanding during lessons. These claims were strongly supported by classroom observations, which revealed improvised instructional practices, overcrowded learning spaces, and minimal learner–teacher interaction during assessment moments. The insufficiency of resources limits teachers’ ability to apply Social Constructivist principles, which depend on interaction, visualization, and active engagement (Al-Qaysi et al., 2021). The findings suggest that insufficient resources disrupt all three conditions. The absence of student textbooks under the new curriculum further weakens formative assessment by limiting learners’ autonomy and opportunities for self-assessment which is a core element of assessment for learning.

This aligns with Enu’s (2021) finding that inadequate instructional materials obstruct the implementation of diverse assessment strategies and negatively affect both pedagogy and learning outcomes. The results also resonate with Stronge’s (2018) assertion that effective teaching requires the strategic use of varied instructional materials to clarify concepts and support learner engagement. In the current study, teachers’ inability to access such materials led to predominantly teacher-centered lessons, thereby reducing opportunities for dialogic assessment and feedback. Similarly, Asante et al. (2023) emphasise that appropriate materials and specialised learning spaces such as Social Studies rooms and museums to support practical

assessment approaches. The lack of such facilities in the observed schools limited experiential learning, which is critical for assessing higher-order thinking (DoK level 3-4) and conceptual understanding in Social Studies. The current study's findings contradict Figa and Tarekegne (2020), who corroborated that formative assessment implementation may not always require complex technology to be effective. However, productive learning could be supported through equipment and conducive physical conditions. Although drawn from mathematics education, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' (2014) assertion regarding the importance of manipulatives reinforces the broader pedagogical principle that learning tools mediate understanding across disciplines. In Social Studies, the absence of visual and interactive resources similarly constrains students' ability to construct meaning and teachers' capacity to assess learning formatively.

#### **4.4.5 Students' Engagement and Learning Abilities**

In responding to Research Question 3, students' engagement and learning abilities emerged as a critical theme shaping Social Studies teachers' experiences in practising formative assessment. Analysis of both interview and observational data revealed a mixed pattern of student responsiveness, characterised by active participation among some learners and passivity, disengagement, or low confidence among others. These variations significantly influenced teachers' capacity to identify learning gaps and to provide differentiated formative feedback. For instance, Mr. Abeiku stated:

*They respond positively....they get excited to answer more questions that you pose and the task you gave them to answer.*

Miss Efua had this to say

*Yes, they do respond positively....they show some level of interest in it, especially group work or collaboration and presentation of work where they ask their colleagues questions....because it makes me to notice the high*

*achievers and low achievers in the class to inform me on the kind of strategies to use to teach the next class and the mode of assessment to be conducted.*

Mr. Kwamena added:

*They are pleased when we engage them with questions and answers in the class. Most of them want to know their performance. So, they are pleased about that.*

Miss Adwoa argued that students' responses are not too effective and that students' engagement is minimal. She noted that:

*Well, they respond effectively to it. Some are good and respond to it with enthusiasm. Others just sit in the class aloof or unconcerned..... for the classes taught, I will rate it 60% effectiveness of students' responsiveness in using formative assessment.*

Interview data indicated that most teachers perceived formative assessment strategies, particularly questioning, group work, and collaborative activities, as effective in stimulating students' interest and participation. This reflects the diagnostic role of formative assessment within the assessment-for-learning framework and aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasises knowledge construction through interaction and feedback. Teachers further noted that students expressed satisfaction when engaged through questions and showed interest in understanding their performance, consistent with feedback theory, which posits that timely feedback enhances motivation, self-awareness, and learner ownership (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Classroom observations largely corroborated these accounts. Responses to Item 13 of the observation checklist ("Are students engaged and responsive during formative assessment activities?") showed that most students were actively involved during formative assessment activities, indicating convergence between reported and observed practices. This suggests that when formative assessment is intentionally embedded in instruction, it promotes student-centered learning and collaborative engagement, consistent with social constructivist perspectives.

However, observations also revealed variability in student engagement, with some learners exhibiting shyness, low confidence, and reluctance to participate, particularly during oral questioning. This divergence highlights the tension between policy expectations of universal engagement and the realities of heterogeneous classrooms, where students differ in confidence, learning abilities, and readiness to participate. These findings echo Cisse et al. (2021), who noted challenges in fostering student accountability and commitment to learning. From a theoretical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of learner readiness and scaffolding in formative assessment. While assessment supports instructional decision-making by identifying learners' needs (Eshun, 2013), its effectiveness is constrained when students lack confidence or engagement. Similarly, although formative assessment can enhance self-regulated learning skills such as goal setting and reflection (Panadero et al., 2018), partial disengagement suggests that these competencies may be underdeveloped. Consistent with Black (2015), students' difficulties with self- and peer-assessment point to the need for clearer expectations, explicit modelling, and supportive classroom environments. Although this contrasts with earlier findings of minimal student involvement (Eshun et al., 2014), it suggests incremental but uneven progress in formative assessment practices.

In conclusion, the Social Constructivist Theory, which, according to Al-Qaysi et al. (2021), social constructivism is a teaching technique that emphasises student participation, discussion, and sharing. This teaching technique allows for several groupings and interactive tactics. This indicates that in Social Constructivist Theory, time, space, and resources must be sufficient, and students must be more involved and active in the instruction process. It is based upon the idea that learning is an active and collaborative process in which learners co-construct new knowledge or understand

concepts through human experience, communication, and comprehensive reality. If Social Studies is to be taught to prepare students to acquire the relevant knowledge, values, attitudes and requisite skills needed to solve contemporary personal and societal challenges, then the involvement of students during teaching and learning must make use of formative assessment practices to assist students in a practical way in dealing with problems of the society as they unfold. Too often, Social Studies lessons are described as dull, uninteresting, and challenging. This negative and uninspiring state can be turned around through formative assessment by identifying, collecting, preparing, and utilising instructional materials and resources (Aliyu, 2019).

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter dealt with the analysis and discussion of the study through the data gathered during the interview and observation session. The analysis and discussion of the results were done in line with the themes arrived at during the data collection. Data from the interview indicate that teachers with different features in terms of subject and experience, as well as those with less experience, were seen teaching Social Studies. The data also showed that Social Studies teachers have basic theoretical knowledge and understanding of formative assessment and do not realise it practically during instruction. The study shows that Social Studies teachers do not use alternative formative assessment tools to assess their students, other than traditional assessment tools. Data from the interview and observation indicate some challenges teachers face in using formative assessment activities during instruction, such as large class sizes, time constraints, examination-oriented culture, and insufficient resources. Data from the observation indicate that almost all the teachers' formative assessment practices conflicted with the interview data gathered. This means a noticeable gap exists between teachers' knowledge of formative assessment and its practice.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the study, the key findings of the study, the conclusions drawn from the findings, recommendations, and suggestions for further studies. The conclusions contain all the findings grounded on the research objectives.

#### **5.1 Summary of the study**

The study aimed to investigate Senior High School (SHS) Social Studies teachers' formative assessment practices in the Awutu-Senya West District. The study specifically aimed to find out how Social Studies teachers effectively practice formative assessment in the schools within the district. The study was again aimed at assessing Social Studies teachers' conception of formative assessment and their ability to demonstrate and utilise alternative formative assessment tools to evaluate their students. It further explored the challenges Social Studies teachers face in practising formative assessment. To achieve the purpose and objectives of the study, the qualitative research approach that employed an explorative design was chosen. Ten participants were chosen for the study via purposive sampling procedures. Interview guide and an observation checklist were the two-instrument used collect data. The data was analysed thematically based on the themes arrived at during the data gathering.

#### **5.2 Key Findings**

The study revealed the following:

The study found that Social Studies teachers view formative assessment in three ways: as a continuous and ongoing learning process, a feedback mechanism, and a

diagnostic tool. This made it easier to achieve the first research goal: to find out how the Social Studies teachers at SHS in the Awutu-Senya West District conceptualise about formative assessment. Again, the study revealed that Social Studies teachers have basic theoretical knowledge and understanding of formative assessment and do not realise it practically during instruction. Again, the study revealed that some teachers do not share learning goal and self-peer assessment with their students which indicate procedural rather than conceptual grasp of formative assessment's pedagogical purpose. The study found that teachers agreed and believed that feedback is crucial in instruction and learning, as it indicates teachers' pedagogy and students' understanding. Also, the study established that none of the Social Studies teachers adjusted their lessons after eliciting students' responses during instruction, and only a few teachers used ongoing assessment practices to monitor learners' progress.

Regarding research objective two, which explored the extent to which SHS Social Studies teachers use alternative formative assessment tools to assess their students, the study revealed that Social Studies teachers did not know the alternative formative assessment tools used in assessing students. However, it was revealed that teachers resort more to traditional assessment tools than any other assessment approach, like alternative formative assessment tools, in assessing students' learning. Also, among the teachers interviewed and observed, the study found that none understood alternative formative assessment tools except for a few who exhibited some level of knowledge and understanding of peer, portfolio, and play-based assessments. Findings from this study pointed out that questions asked by teachers do not demand students to have higher thinking skills (Dok levels 3-4) but rather measure the students' lower-order thinking skills (Dok levels 1-2) such as recall and comprehension with limited focus on higher-thinking (DoK levels 3-4) task such as

analysis, evaluation, and application. The findings show a clear mismatch between the 2023 SHS Social Studies curriculum's emphasis on continuous, competency-based formative assessment and teacher's largely summative, examination-oriented practices.

The third objective was identifying SHS Social Studies teachers' challenges in practising formative assessment. The study determined that large class sizes and time constraints were inadequate and inseparable factors that affect Social Studies teachers' effective formative assessment practice. The study also revealed that the dominance of examination-oriented environment informs teachers to often "teach to the test", emphasizing exam-focused content at the expense of broader curriculum goals. Again, the study revealed that instructional resources are crucial and aid in teaching and learning, but they are inadequate, forcing teachers to combine their classes. Findings from the study pointed out that students actively engage and are responsive to formative activities during instruction.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the research, the following conclusions have been reached:

Social Studies teachers in the Awutu-Senya West District who participated in this study possess narrow and partial theoretical conception of formative assessment by exhibiting limited practical application of its core principles in classroom practice. Teachers primarily conceptualised as questioning and feedback while other component such as sharing learning goal and self/peer assessment are underutilised. However, there is a gap in its practice, since teachers lack a deep pedagogical understanding of formative assessment. Social Studies teachers in SHS believe that formative assessment is an essential and better teaching and learning strategy that

satisfies the demands of teaching and learning in the modern world. However, teachers raise concerns about its demands (workload); therefore, there is a need for professional development, practical, continuous training, and support from educational stakeholders to enhance its effective practice.

Even though Social Studies teachers at the Awutu-Senya West District do not conform to alternative formative assessment practices, teachers agree that varying assessment practices using formative assessment tools to assess students' learning promote good learning outcomes. Teachers recognise that questioning and descriptive feedback help monitor students' progress and appropriately adjust instructional strategies. With the help of a learner-centred approach, alternative formative assessment tools are mainly used to assess students' higher-order thinking skills (DoK levels) such as analysis, evaluation, and application. Thus, evaluating students using authentic formative assessment tools allows them to demonstrate what they learned by engaging in hands-on desk activities and applying the acquired knowledge and skills to enhance a more profound understanding and application of Social Studies concepts. However, teachers do not use authentic formative assessment tools; they prefer traditional ones.

The study concludes that Social Studies teachers in the study area encounter crucial issues such as large class sizes, time constraints, and insufficient resources. Some classes handled by teachers exceed 60 students, with either little or no available resources to aid teaching and learning, and inadequate time to complete the syllabus. The dominance of examination-oriented culture (high-stake testing like WASSCE) leaves no room for teachers to practice formative assessment by taking decisions and actions that foster lifelong learning rather than to teach to the test. This puts teachers

under undue pressure to always improvise, impeding the effective practice of formative assessment.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made to policymakers and practitioners:

It is recommended that teachers should move from having a conceptual understanding of formative assessment to a daily classroom practice. Building teachers' capacity through continuous, practical, collaborative training, reflective teaching practice, and supportive leadership will ensure that effective use of formative assessment becomes a natural and effective component of Social Studies instruction to enhance learning outcomes. The Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with the heads of schools, must ensure that only professional and trained Social Studies teachers are allowed to teach the subject to enhance effective instruction and learning.

It is recommended that teachers should continuously explore and employ various alternative formative assessment tools to assess students, promoting learner engagement and a deeper understanding of concepts in Social Studies. The Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, and National Teaching Council must intensify the professional learning community by focusing on specific subject areas and innovative alternative formative assessment in Social Studies, ensuring both teacher empowerment and sharpen their skill set for effective formative assessment practices and improved students learning outcomes. The Ministry of Education should mandate and fund PLCs as part of teachers' professional development frameworks. Schools should schedule bi-weekly structured sessions, supported by digital collaboration tools and expert mentorship from universities. The Ministry of

Education should strengthen PLCs to enable teachers to design assessments aligned with the 2023 SHS Social Studies DoK levels. Through mentorship and digital collaboration, teachers can guide learners from recall (DoK 1) to real-world application (DoK 4), ensuring deeper learning and curriculum alignment.

In response to the identified challenges, it is recommended that the Ghana Education Service (GES) and school management authorities adopt a systematic approach to improving formative assessment practice in Senior High School Social Studies. Specifically, class sizes should be capped in line with national standards, or alternatively, schools with large enrolments should be provided with additional teachers to reduce the learner–teacher ratio. To address time constraints, curriculum planners should review the Social Studies syllabus to allow greater flexibility for teachers to integrate formative assessment activities without compromising syllabus coverage. Furthermore, assessment policy should be re-oriented to reduce excessive emphasis on high-stakes examinations such as WASSCE by formally integrating school-based formative assessment outcomes into student evaluation. This policy shift would legitimise formative assessment as a core instructional practice rather than an optional add-on. Additionally, the provision of adequate learning and teaching resources should be prioritised to reduce teachers’ reliance on improvisation, thereby enabling more consistent monitoring of learners’ progress.

## **5.5 The study’s Findings Applicability of Social Constructivism to Assessment Practices in the Ghanaian Context**

The findings of this study affirm the relevance and applicability of social constructivism as a guiding theoretical framework for assessment practices in the Ghanaian Social Studies classroom. Social constructivism emphasises that learning is

an active, collaborative process where learners construct meaning through interaction, reflection, and shared experiences. Within this framework, assessment is not merely a measurement of learning outcomes but a continuous, dialogic process that supports learners in constructing and applying knowledge in meaningful contexts. The study reveals that Ghanaian Social Studies teachers increasingly recognise the value of formative assessment as a learning process rather than an end product, aligning with constructivist ideals. Teachers who employ peer assessment, self-evaluation, and collaborative project work enable students to actively engage in their learning, co-construct knowledge, and reflect on their progress. This reflects a gradual but significant shift from teacher-centered assessment traditions toward learner-centered, participatory assessment cultures.

However, the study also identifies contextual challenges that influence the full realization of constructivist assessment principles. Large class sizes, limited instructional time, and high-stakes examination pressures often constrain teachers from implementing interactive, formative approaches that require dialogue, reflection, and feedback. Consequently, while teachers conceptually appreciate the constructivist philosophy, practical barriers limit its consistent application. This finding contributes to knowledge by highlighting the tension between policy intentions and classroom realities within Ghana's assessment reform agenda.

### **5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies**

Future researchers should replicate this study using a larger and more representative sample drawn from multiply regions across Ghana to enhance the external validity and generatability of the findings. Again, future researchers should conduct a longitudinal mixed-methods design to examine changes over time while mitigating

scheduling constraints through phased data collection. Integrating digital or video-assisted observation method to reduce participant unavailability and enhance data completeness. Future studies could focus on assessing teachers' ability to design formative assessment task that promote higher-order thinking skills aligned with higher Depth of Knowledge (DoK) levels.

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## **APPENDIX A**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION**

**SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

**IN THE AWUTU-SENYA WEST DISTRICT**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

This interview aims to collect data from Social Studies teachers on the above topic as part of the data required to complete a thesis for the award of a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree in Social Studies education by the University of Education, Winneba. Please respond to the items genuinely to the best of your knowledge. The information you give will be used only for this study, and confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured. Thank you for your cooperation.

#### **Demographic Information**

1. What professional qualifications do you have?
2. How long have you been teaching Social Studies?
3. Do you often attend in-service courses in assessment practices? If yes, how many of these courses have you attended?

#### **SECTION A: Teachers' Conception of Formative Assessment**

4. What is your understanding of formative assessment?
5. In your opinion, how do you differentiate between formative and summative assessment?
6. In your experience and best of knowledge, what are the key principles of formative assessment?

**SECTION B: Use of Formative Assessment tools to assess Social Studies Students**

7. How do you differentiate between traditional assessment and authentic assessment?
8. Which formative assessment tools do you mainly use to assess learning, and why do you use them?
9. How do you understand self-assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
10. How do you understand peer assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
11. How do you understand portfolio assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
12. How do you understand scaffold assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
13. How do you understand performance assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
14. How do you understand play-based assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
15. How do you understand interview-based assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
16. How do you understand co-operative assessment? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
17. How do you understand a selected-response test? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?
18. How do you understand the extended/essay response test? Why is it important in achieving learning objectives?

**SECTION C: Challenges of the Use of Formative Assessment Practices**

19. In your years of teaching, what challenges do you face in using formative assessment in your classroom?
20. How do these challenges (class size, time constraint, examination-oriented, and culture resource availability) impact your effective use of formative assessment?
21. How do students generally respond to formative assessment methods during instruction?

## APPENDIX B

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION**

**SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

**IN THE AWUTU-SENYA WEST DISTRICT**

### CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

This classroom observation aims to collect data from Social Studies teachers on the above topic as part of the data required for completing a thesis for the award of a Master of Philosophy (M. Phil) degree in Social Studies Education by the University of Education, Winneba. The information gathered will be used only for the purpose of this study, and confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured to the utmost. Thank you for your cooperation.

School: .....

Class: ..... Teacher: .....

Date: .....

Topic of lesson observed: .....

Time of observation: ..... Start: .....

End: .....

#### **SECTION A: How Teachers Conceptualise Formative Assessment**

Statement	Yes	No	Not observed	Comment
4. Does the teacher demonstrate a clear understanding of formative assessment?				
5. Does the teacher formulate and communicate learning objectives or goals of the lesson to students				
6. Classroom setup that allows for interactive and assessment for learning activities.				
7. The teacher provides timely and constructive feedback to students during				

lessons for improvement.				
8. The teacher uses question-and-answer techniques to gauge students' understanding.				
9. The teacher adjusts teaching strategies based on students' lesson responses.				
10. Teacher usage of ongoing assessment to monitor learner progress.				

**SECTION B: Teachers Demonstrate Knowledge and Utilise Formative Assessment tools to assess Social Studies students**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Observed</b>	<b>Comment</b>
11. Teacher's use of diagnostic assessment at the start of the lesson.				
12. Evidence of assessment for learning tools (eg, quizzes, students' feedback form, questions, etc).				
13. Teacher engages students in group discussions, think-pair and share and assesses students in groups.				
14. Teacher designs and uses a variety of formative assessment tools to assess students (self/peer assessment, portfolio, scaffold, performance, interview, co-operative, play-based assessment, etc)				
15. Does the assessment task involve higher-order thinking skills (DoK levels) by using verbs like explain, apply, evaluate, analyse, etc				

**SECTION D: Challenges of Formative Assessment Practices**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not Observed</b>	<b>Comment</b>
16. Are students engaged and responsive during formative assessment activities?				
17. Is there evidence of time constraint as a challenge to the				

implementation of formative assessment?				
18. Is there evidence of large class size as a challenge to the effectiveness of formative assessment practices?				
19. Is examination-oriented culture affecting the successful implementation of formative assessment activities?				
20. Is the lack of teaching resources affecting the successful implementation of formative assessment activities?				

**Thank you**

## Appendix C: Example of Coding Process

### Raw Data (Excerpt from Interview Transcript)

Mr. Parker stated:

*“My understanding of formative assessment is the kind of assessment during the instructional period. So, as we teach Social Studies, for example, we normally use questions and answers to quiz the learners’ minds on what they already know. This helps the teacher know whether the learners follow what they are teaching. It is also a way of informing you whether the approach you are using is going down well with the learners, or it is not going down well, to make the necessary adjustments.”*

#### Initial Codes (Line-by-Line Coding)

<b>Transcript Excerpt</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
“Assessment during the instructional period”	Ongoing; Continuous assessment
“Use questions and answers”	Questioning; Interactive technique
“Quiz the learners’ minds on what they already know	Prior knowledge assessment; Diagnostic assessment
“Helps the teacher know whether the learners follow what they are teaching”	Monitoring understanding; Feedback to teacher
“Informing you whether the approach you is going down well”	Self-evaluation of teaching; using Reflection on teaching methods

#### Focused (Axial) Coding

Codes are grouped into conceptually similar categories showing early meaning clusters.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Related Initial Codes</b>
Nature of Formative Assessment	Ongoing assessment; Continuous assessment
Strategies for Formative Assessment	Questioning; Checking prior knowledge
Functions of Formative Assessment	Monitoring learning; Providing feedback
Instructional Implications	Adjust instruction; Improving teaching

## Emergent Themes

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Formative Assessment as an Ongoing Process	Teachers view formative assessment as continuous and integrated into daily instruction.
Questioning as a Core Strategy	Teachers rely on questioning to assess learners' understanding and prior knowledge.
Formative Assessment for Instructional Feedback	Teachers use assessment outcomes to evaluate their teaching effectiveness, and make necessary adjustments.

## APPENDIX D

### INTRODUCTORY LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA  
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25<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

*TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN*

Dear Sir/Madam,

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MR. ALBERT EFFUM (8230430028)**

We write to introduce Mr. Albert Effum to your outfit to assist him conduct his research. He is pursuing a Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) Degree in Social Studies Education at the Department of Social Studies Education of the University of Education, Winneba.

As part of the requirements for the award of M.Phil in Social Studies Education, he is undertaking a research on the topic "*Social Studies Teachers' Formative Assessment Practices in Senior High Schools in the Awutu-Senya West District*".

We would be very grateful if he could be offered any assistance he may need to enable him achieve the purpose of his study.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION  
WINNEBA  
Mr. Gideon Asare  
For: Ag. Head of Department



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