

# **APPLICATION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES AS AN INNOVATION IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS**

**HALIMAT UPE SALAU**

*Department of Social Studies,  
School of Arts and Social Sciences,  
Federal College of Education, Katsina,  
Katsina State*

## **Abstract**

*The introduction of social studies into the Nigerian School System is to among other reasons inculcate desirable social value of honesty, hard work, togetherness patriotism, discipline, humility, to mention but a few. However it is pertinent to note that decades after its introduction, the Nigerian society is still devoid of these social values. It is on the basis of the above, that the paper is of the opinion that the application of formative assessment strategy as an innovation into the teaching and learning of social studies will go a long way in the achievement of the objectives for which subject was introduced. The paper thus examined the importance of education to any nation, the present state of classroom interaction, meaning, strategies and major elements of formative assessment, the need for teachers to use formative assessment in the class and the reasons why teachers do not engage in it. The paper recommended the training of school teachers and students in self-assessment methods, the need to equate students' enrolment with human and material resources among others as the way forward.*

Key words: formative assessment, innovation, teaching and learning, social studies

Education is a means through which individuals receive external stimulus that will lead to a permanent change in behavior. Azikiwe in Ariya (2012) sees education as the instrument or bedrock upon which individuals and national development is based. Thus no society or individual can develop beyond her educational system. The system of education in practice in Nigeria as observed in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) is the 6-3-3-4 system of education which reflects a six years compulsory basic education where learners are exposed to general education. This is followed by three years junior secondary school from where students are expected to either proceed to the senior secondary school if they are intellectually capable or pick up a trade if they

are more endowed in that respect. Those who proceed to the senior secondary school spend three years and then proceed to the tertiary institution where they are expected to spend a minimum period of four years.

One of the core subjects in the primary and junior secondary schools as indicated in the National Policy on Education, (FRN, 2004) is social studies. This is because social studies as a school subject is capable of influencing the total way of life of an individual and the society in general. It is in recognition of this that Kazi (2008) described social studies as an effective tool for citizenship education, it is a subject that equip individuals with critical thinking and problem solving skills, that places a learner in a better position to tackle problems and issues that may arise in his/her social-economic life. Social studies tend to educate an individual in the context in which he or she lives. This explains Kissock (1981) definition which states that social studies is a programme of study which a society uses to instill in the pupils or students the knowledge, skills, attitude and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves.

In the same vein, Falade (2007) and Ogundare (2003) opine that social studies in the school curriculum helps all types of students at all levels to develop the ability to solve problems of relationships, interaction, and survival and to adapt to the ever changing environment in which the learner resides. Akintunde and Akinola (2006) also argue that social studies is interested in everything about man in relation to all aspects of his environment. The subject incorporates all aspects of reforms and innovations that are geared towards sustenance of man's environment.

From the above, it can be concluded that social studies as a subject is concerned with the all round development of an individual within his immediate environment to enable him to capture not only his surrounding but the universe as a whole. Social studies can therefore be said to be synonymous with socialization because it exposes the youths to their society in terms of the nature, problems and prospects of the society.

The importance of social studies cannot be underestimated in Nigeria. The main goal of social studies in Nigeria is to develop in the child, a capacity to acquire certain basic skills essential for forming sound judgment and to ensure the acquisition of relevant body of knowledge and information necessary for personal and societal development.(Okam, 2008). However, decades after its introduction into the school curriculum, its goal is yet to be achieved. It is therefore the opinion of this paper that the possibility of realizing the above goal of social studies is dependent on the quality of social studies instructions. Thus the need to apply formative assessment strategy in the teaching and learning of social studies education as an innovation in education and a means of addressing global challenges.

The trend of the under achievement of social studies objective in Nigeria appears to be general as observed from the researches carried out by scholars like Davis and Sorrel (1995), Adeyemi and Ajibade (2011) in Osun state, Ariya (2012) in Oke-Ogun Oyo state, Usulor (2012) in Ebonyi state, Ajiloni and Salaco (2013) in Abeokuta

Ogun state. From their studies, methodology of social studies education was faulted and thus suggested carefully planned instructional strategies in an attempt to improve student achievement in social studies. From their work they suggested a shift from the traditional or teachers centered approach to teaching and learning process to the learners centered approach which includes methods like co-operative learning, concept mapping, small group discussion, the use of simulation games among others.

Mezieobi (2003) in his recent study also advocated for the use of social studies teaching methods which include activity/interactional method, problem solving, innovative teaching method, role play, simulation games, dramatization, field trip/excursion, construction method, use of value clarification strategies, use of resource place and person, co-operative teaching, flexible scheduling, computer assisted instruction, mastery learning, advance organizer, concept mapping, future wheel, and problem solving method which leads to the development of behaviours like inquiry, discovery, questioning skills as well as to elicit the intended and best learning outcome. However, while Kennedy and Tay (1994) in their study, on the factors affecting students' performance in economics pointed out students' aptitude as the most important determinant of learning, White, (2000), Moreno (2004) and Mory (2004) are of the opinion that formative assessment and feedback is the major determinant of learner's performance.

There are many definitions of formative assessment, Marsh (2004: 51) states that "formative assessment provides data about instructional units in progress and students in action, they help to develop or form the final curriculum product and help students adjust to their learning tasks through the feedback they receive." Sutton (1992:3) states that formative assessment is an "ongoing process conducted both formally and informally, by which information and evidence about a child's learning is absorbed and used to plan the next step, or guide a given task."

Feedback is defined by Brown and Cocking (2000) as the overall dialogue or interaction between teacher and learner and not simply a one-way communication. To Race (2001), it is any information communicated to the learner as a result of a learning-oriented action. To him feedback is provided in response to students' work on formative assessment such as objective test, essays, assignments and projects. It is evaluation by brief tests used by teachers and students as aids in the learning process. It is an essential part of education and training programmes, that help learners to maximize their potential at different stages of education or training, it creates awareness for both teachers and learners on the strengths and areas for improvement, as well as identifies actions to be taken to improve performance. Feedback can be directive, which informs the learner of the aspects of performance that require correction, or facilitative, which helps the learner develop their practice.

Feedback has been recognized by Gibbs and Simpson, (2004), Joughin, (2010), as an important curriculum component and that the provision of effective and timely feedback on tasks can improve learning outcomes. Assessment tasks are often

considered to be either formative or summative, Wininger, (2005) asserted that assessment is considered formative otherwise known as task-level feedback or assessment for learning if it can help students to improve in subsequent assessment tasks. Summative feedback on the other hand has to do with final examination. It represents the demonstration of an integration of the learning outcomes for the unit (Williams & Wong, 2009). Feedback whether summative or formative can either help to reinforce, modify and improve behaviour or have negative, unintended consequences if it is not given or received in a safe and constructive way. Crooks (2001) specifically observed that findings from previous research indicate that students who receive formative assessment perform better on a variety of achievement indicators than their peers do. He observed that though many of these studies exhibit methodological limitations, he is of the opinion that the practice of assessment for learning shows promise in its ability to improve student performance.

Similarly, Huhta (2010) demonstrates that statement of learning objectives and assessment criteria improve students' self-assessment abilities and, as a result, improve learning outcomes. It is on the basis of the above assertions that the paper opines that the application of formative assessment strategy as an innovation in the teaching and learning of social studies will aid learners to achieve more in the subject.

### **Major Elements of Formative Assessment**

Various writers have linked "assessment for learning" with the term "formative assessment". That is, "formative assessment is part of instruction that informs and guides teachers as they make instructional decisions. Assessment should not merely be done to students; rather, it should also be done for students, to guide and enhance their learning" (Swearingen, 2002: 3). Swearingen (2002) also notes that in its purest form, formative tests are not graded and are used as an ongoing tool by the teacher. Formative assessment involves providing "useful" feedback on tests and homework. That is, rather than a grade, information is provided about specific errors and suggestions for improvement. As noted by Bangert-Drowns, Kulick, Morgan, 1991, this encourages students to focus their attention thoughtfully on the task rather than on simply getting the right answer. Also some of the feedback gleaned can come about through self-assessment by the student. To Fontana and Fernandes, (1994), students who have opportunities to reflect on their work show greater improvement than those who do not, supporting this, is Boston (2002) who also noted that students with learning disabilities who are taught to use self-monitoring strategies also show performance gains. Clarke (2001), using findings from Black and Wiliam's study (1998), suggests that the key elements of formative assessment include:

- (i) the provision of effective feedback to pupils
- (ii) the active involvement of students in their own learning
- (iii) adjusting teaching to take account of the result of assessment

- (iv) A recognition of the profound influence that assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of students and
- (v) the need for students to be able to assess themselves and to understand how to improve.

### **Current Practice in social studies classroom**

The overall picture of teachers' current practices in formative assessment in social studies classroom is one of weak practice. Key weaknesses are:

- (i) Evaluation practices in social studies classroom generally encourage rote learning, concentrating on recall of isolated details, usually items of knowledge which pupils soon forget.
- (ii) Teachers do not generally review the assessment questions that they use and do not discuss them critically with peers, so there is little reflection on what is being assessed.
- (iii) The grading function is over-emphasized and the learning function under-emphasized.
- (iv) There is a tendency to use a normative rather than a criterion approach, which emphasizes competition between pupils rather than personal improvement of each. The evidence is that with such practices the effect of feedback is to teach the weaker pupils that they lack ability, so that they are de-motivated and lose confidence in their own capacity to learn.
- (v) Teachers appear to be unaware of the assessment work of colleagues and do not trust or use their assessment results both in questioning and written work, teachers' assessment focuses on low-level aims, mainly recall. There is little focus on such outcomes as speculation and critical and students focus on getting through the tasks and resist attempts to engage in risky cognitive activities. (Wininger 2005)

### **Application of formative assessment strategies as an innovation in the teaching and learning of social studies in Nigerian schools:**

Application of formative assessment strategy in social studies classroom involves the division of concepts to be taught in social studies into units such that students are allowed to master a unit before moving into subsequent units. To ensure the achievement of stated objectives of a unit before proceeding to a subsequent unit, learners are given a test to determine the level of achievement of the stated objectives and then a remedial programme is offered where necessary to ensure that no child is left behind. This is in contrast to the traditional strategy of teaching social studies. This innovation into the teaching of social studies has been practiced in other fields of study with a lot of benefits as such the paper is of the opinion that if integrated into the teaching and learning of social studies classroom, a lot of advantages will be gained.

The benefits of formative assessment can be said to be valuable for both teachers and students. To the teachers, Formative assessment provides information to

them about how students are progressing and they can use this information to make the necessary instructional adjustments to their teaching and thus no student left behind philosophy is achieved. With regards to the Students, their gain from feedback obtained from formative assessment is its ability to help students realize where there are gaps in their desired goals and in their current knowledge and skills such that effort is made by them to fill the gap.

With respect to the method of teaching, formative assessment has the ability to:

- (i) Help with planning because it involves giving clear learning intentions to students,
- (ii) Ensures that pupils are focused on the purpose of the task and that they can become involved in their learning and can comment on it. That is, there is a sharing of learning intentions,
- (iii) Empowers the student to realize his or her own learning needs and to have control over future targets. Students are trained to evaluate their own achievements against the learning intentions in oral or written form,
- (iv) Formative assessment tracks progress diagnostically and informs a student of his or her successes and weaknesses,
- (v) Formative assessment ensures student motivation and involvement in progress. It raises achievement; it keeps teachers informed of individual needs. Additional benefit of formative assessment is its ability to correct the adverse or negative effect of summative assessment on students. Swearingen, (2002).

### **Reasons why formative assessment is infrequently used**

Irrespective of the above mentioned benefits of formative assessment to both teachers and the students, it is worrisome that this strategy is hardly used in the Nigerian classroom. Supporting this assertion is Fair test Examiner (1999) conclusion that the state of formative assessment in Nigeria is quite weak. Some of the reasons for this include:

- (i) Emphasis being placed by teachers and learners alike on how to score highly on high-stakes examinations. These values are difficult to change or correct as teachers are constantly bombarded in the media and by parents about the need for high student achievements as measured by summative assessments. Thus many teachers encourage rote learning because it is a well-known, traditional form of teaching.
- (ii) Class size is another factor inhibiting the application of formative assessment by the teachers. In Nigeria school today, the number of enrolment is on the increase without a correspondent increase in both human resources and improved facility for learning, this make it difficult for teachers to carry out frequent assessment of learners and given of feeding back to them for improvement.
- (iii) Another factor of a cultural nature may also be relevant. Many education systems offer awards and honours for students who do well academically. Almost without exception, these awards are based on high proficiency of students in summative examinations. Most cultures praise students who attain a "product" or "level" but they give scant recognition to the processes involved in getting there such as "perseverance",

"critical thinking", "problem- based learning", and "self -learning". It is these latter qualities which are so important in formative assessment activities.

(iv) A similar claim can also be made about curriculum planning documents used by teachers, namely syllabuses, frameworks and teachers' source books. Although some emphasis is given in these documents to processes of learning, the predominant focus is upon knowledge, concepts and skills, as measured by summative examinations.

(v) The limited time allotted on the school time table for each subject is another factor hindering the implementation of formative feedback in Nigerian classroom.

(vi) Another reason why formative assessment is infrequently used is lack of confidence on the part of the teacher in using formative assessment strategies.

### **The Way Forward**

Some of the solution to the reason why formative assessment is infrequently used in Nigerian classroom include among others as noted by Kennedy, Chan Kin Sang, Yu Wai-Ming and Ping Kwan Fok (2005) is (i) to give more attention to summative assessment and to consider ways in which it might be modified to have a less negative impact on students. For example, the use of internal forms (rather than external) of summative assessment where there might be less negative backwash, (ii) they are also of the opinion that school-based assessments, if well moderated, can be used successfully as a summative assessment tool. (ii) Again they also noted that system wide monitoring of test results allows schools to be provided with data to help them improve teaching (rather being used to rank schools). (iii) Student self-assessment is another area which could be progressed. The many computer - based programs enable students to work at their own pace and to receive instantaneous feedback on their efforts, (iv) Also to them, research studies have demonstrated that certain techniques associated with formative assessment can help students to learn more effectively. These include : higher- order questioning techniques, problem - solving techniques, peer assessment, feedback comments rather than grades, oral feedback from teachers, sharing assessment criteria, redrafting of work, developing communication skills, being more inclusive in teaching among others.

### **Conclusion**

Education is an instrument per excellence for the growth and development of any nation and social studies education is one of the core subjects that is believed to be of great help to the achievement of Nigerian educational goals and aspiration. For social studies to be able to effectively do this there is need for innovation in its classroom practices. One of such innovation as suggested by this paper is the application of formative assessment strategy in the teaching and learning of the subject.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the above, the following has been recommended

- (i) For the implementation of formative assessment there is the need for deep changes both in teachers' perceptions of their own role in relation to their students and in their classroom practice
- (ii) There is the need to change teaching and assessment practices if assessment for learning and formative assessment is to be progressed and at the same time, more attention needs to be given to developing forms of summative assessment which are more inclusive of the basic principles that are informing formative assessment
- (iii) There is the need for the training of teachers and students in self-assessment methods in order for them to develop the necessary confidence needed for formative assessment strategy.
- (iv) There is the need to equate students enrolment with the available human and material resources so as to take care of the issues of class size that hinders the implementation of formative assessment in the classroom.
- (v) More time should be allotted to school subjects especially those that are core subjects in the school curriculum like social studies education so as to offer classroom teacher's the opportunity of implementing formative assessment strategy.

### **References**

- Adeyemi, B.A., & Ajibade Y.A (2011). The comparative effects of simulation games and brainstorming instructional strategies on Junior Secondary School Students' achievement in social studies in Nigeria. African research review. *International multi – disciplinary Journal*. Ethiopia Vol. 5 (3) p 64 – 80.
- Ajiloni, S.O & Saiako, T (2013). Effect of cooperative learning and field trip strategies on Secondary School Students' knowledge of an Attitude to multicultural concepts in social studies in *Journal of Education and Practice* Vol. 4 (22) p 35 – 43
- Akintunde, S. A. & Akinola, O. O. (2006). *Strategies and techniques of teaching Social Studies topics*. Ibadan. Nigerian Social Studies Publication
- Ariya, D.A (2012). *Relative effects of concept – mapping instructions, strategies on Juniors school in Oke – Ogun, Nigeria*. A Ph. D thesis submitted to the Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education University of Ilorin - Kwara State.

- Bangert- Drowns,R.L. Kulick, J. A. Morgan,M.T. (1991). Instructional effect of feedback in test - like events. *Review of educational research*, 61 (2), 213 – 238
- Black, P. Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in education*, 5 (1), 7 - 74
- Boston, C.(2002) *The concept of formative assessment. Practical assessment, research and evaluation* 8(9)1 - 6. ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation.
- Clarke, S. ( 2001). *Unlocking formative assessment*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Crooks, T. (2001). *The Validity of Formative Assessments*. British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Leeds, September p 13–15.
- Davis D and Sorrell J (1995). *Mastery Learning in Public schools*. In educational psychology interactive, Valdosta, GA Valdosta State University Retrieved from <http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/files/mast/learn.html>
- Fair Test E xaminer (1999). The value of formative assessment, <http://www.fairtest.org/examarts/winter99/k-forma3.html>
- Falade, D. A. (2007). *Developing and implementing a participatory civic education package for Secondary Schools in Ondo State, Nigeria*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2004). National Policy on Education. Lagos:
- Fernandes, M. (1994). Improvements in mathematics performance as a consequence of self-assessment in Portuguese primary school pupils. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 64 (3), 407 -417
- Gibbs, G & Simpson, C. 2004. *Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning*. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (1).
- Huhta, Ari (2010). Diagnostic and Formative Assessment. In Spolsky, Bernard and Hult, Francis M. *The Handbook of Educational Linguistics*. Oxford, U K: Blackwell. pp. 469–482.

Joughin, I., B. Smith, I. Howat, T. Scambos, and T. Moon. (2010) *Greenland Flow Variability from Ice-Sheet-Wide velocity*.

Kazi, N. P (2008). *The scope of Social studies education*. Jos Wals Printing Press

Kennedy, K. J., Chan Kin Sang, Yu Wai-ming, Ping Kwan Fok, (2005) Assessment for productive learning: forms of assessment and their potential for enhancing learning, technical paper no.1, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong.

Kennedy, P., and Tay, R. (1994). *Students' performance in economics: Does the norm hold across....* Mpra.ub.uni-muechen.de/13621/

Kissock, C. (1981). *Curriculum Planning for Social Studies Teaching*. New York, John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Mezieobi, KA (2003). *Evaluation of the implementation of the Junior Secondary School Social Studies Curriculum in Abia State*. An unpublished Ph.D dissertation. Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria.

Moreno, R. (2004). *Decreasing cognitive load for novice students: Effects of explanatory versus corrective feedback in discovery-based multimedia*. Instructional Science, 32, 99-113.

Mory, E. H. (2004). *Feedback research review*. In D. Jonassen (Ed.), Handbook of research on educational communications and technology (pp. 745–783). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.

Ogundare, S.F., (2003). Foundations of Social Studies. *A handbook of Concepts and Principles of Social Studies*. Ibadan – SOSAN.

Okam C. C and Irimiya, R. (2008). Basic education as a curriculum design examined in the context of the challenge of the professional teachers in Nigeria primary schools, *Nigerian Journal of Teacher Education and Teaching*. Vol. 5 No. 1 97-104.

Sutton, R. (1992). *Assessment: A Framework for Teachers*. London: Routledge.

Swearingen, R. (2002). A Primer: Diagnostic, Formative and Summative Assessment. <http://www.mmrwsjr.com/assessment.htm>

Usulor. (2012). [www.erjournal.ru/pdf.html?n...pdf](http://www.erjournal.ru/pdf.html?n...pdf).

White, K. (2000). *Making sense of it all: Giving and getting online course feedback*. In K. W. White & B. H. Weight (Eds.), *The online teaching guide: A handbook of attitudes, strategies, and techniques for the virtual classroom* (p. 57-72).

Wiliam, D. (2006). "Formative assessment: getting the focus right". *Educational Assessment* **11**: 283–289. [doi:10.1080/10627197.2006.9652993](https://doi.org/10.1080/10627197.2006.9652993)

Wininger, S. R. (2005). *Using your test to teach formative summative assessment*. *Teaching of phsycology*. [People.wku.edu/...wininger/.../...](http://People.wku.edu/...wininger/.../...)