

# Social Studies Curriculum Through Time and Space: The Ghanaian Conceptual Perspectives of Appraised Scholarly Works

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## Abstract:

The objective of this article was to appraise scholarly works in the domain of social studies curriculum, prescribe the future social studies classroom and its relevance in national development. Qualitatively, this research is a scholarly analytical literature of authored and co-authored published works of Dr. Isaac Eshun from 2013 to 2019 and other seasoned authors cited in such publications. This study adopted the phenomenological design whereby content or documentary analyses were employed in collating facts, concepts and generalisations of literature reviewed in the social studies curriculum through time and space. The population for the study was purposively selected and included all the thirty-two first year 2019/2020 MPhil Social Studies students of the University of Education Winneba, Ghana. The study was delimited to the conceptions, definitions, scope, content, teaching and learning (classroom management and control, classroom instruction and classroom engagement), and the assessment practices of social studies through time and space. The compilation of salient contents from the themes selected were critically analysed. It was revealed that social studies has been conceived differently through time and space, but its ultimate aim has to do with the solving of contemporary burning issues that are impinging on individual and societal progress. The different conceptions have also led to the varying definitions and scope of content given to the subject through time and space. It is, therefore, recommended that since social studies is seen as a positive attitude building subject through time and space, the Ghanaian school curriculum should be enhanced with the current happenings in the society to help develop the 21<sup>st</sup> century youth who will be well resourced to selflessly help the country to its developmental path.

## Keywords:

Assessment, Feedback, Ghana, Social Studies Conception, Social Studies Curriculum, Social Studies Definition, Supervision, Teaching and Learning

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## 1. Conceptions of Social Studies through Time and Space

Bordoh, Eshun, Kwarteng, Osman, Brew and Bakar argue that the growing concern of education across the globe is to build students on the concepts of solving national problems. In order to achieve these societal aspirations, education given to the learners should provide them with the relevant knowledge and skills to solve personal and societal problems [1]. This could be realised if learners clearly understand the concepts that are taught in the classroom. On this note, Bordoh et al assert that social studies is an integrated discipline which is full of concepts which required a resourceful teacher to handle it [1].

Social studies as a subject has been conceptualised differently by its practitioners since its inception. According to Quashigah, Kankam, Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh, there have been emerging issues and changing conceptions of teaching and learning of social studies over the years with regards to its meaning, scope, nature, objectives and even the way assessment tools are selected in teaching it. Social Studies is viewed as the teaching of geographical concepts, citizenship, global citizenship, multicultural, human rights, political, economic, moral and peace education [2]. This views show the varied conceptions of social studies in Ghana.

The conception of social studies has always been in a constant state of flux since its inception. Consequently, educators have always argue about the conception of social studies. Thus, there has not been a consensus among social studies scholars as to what the term social studies mean since it was coined by Thomas Jesse Jones in 1905 in the United States of America. Some educators have never agreed on common conception, that is 'whether the subject uses a singular verb 'is' or a plural verb 'are' [3]. Zevin further indicates that a professional usage demonstrates convincingly that the term "social studies" is properly regarded as a 'plural verb'. This notwithstanding, the term, "social studies" must be used in a generic sense which takes the singular verb 'is' [3]. This signifies that there is controversy surrounding social studies with regard to how it is conceptualised. This is supported by Kankam, Bekoe, Ayaaba, Bordoh and Eshun (p. 143) that, "there have been many different conceptual perspectives given to the scope of content of social studies through time and space" [4].

According to Saxe (p. 18), "the evolution of social studies to its present form can be traced from the early stages where it was rooted in the social sciences for the purpose of attending to social welfare and subsequently grounded in the social sciences for the purpose of directly educating future citizens" [5]. This, in the words of Bekoe, Quashigah, Kankam, Eshun and Bordoh, implies social studies, thus, evolved as a curricular need to serve a purpose for the worthwhile development and nurturing of young citizens to fit into ideal society [6].

According to Bekoe et al, there are many efforts being made to improve the teaching and learning of the subject, however the varied conceptions of the subject lend students in misunderstanding the essence of the subject introduction in Ghanaian educational curriculum [6]. The objectives set for the subject was in right direction to meet the challenging issues of the society. Bordoh, Eshun, Brew, Kofie, Osman and Kwarteng assert that if social studies is to help in promoting attitudinal change in the Ghanaian society, then it is not only the necessary teaching-learning resources that should be readily available, but there is also the need for trained teachers to have positive attitude towards the teaching and learning of the social studies concepts used in the subject [7].

On conceptualisation of the subject, Martorella asserts that the field of social studies is so caught up in ambiguity, inconsistency and contradiction that represents a complex educational enigma [8]. This notwithstanding, Bekoe and Eshun (p. 45) posits, “Although social studies is seen as an integrated body of knowledge, there is an issue of acceptable level of integration” [9].

Social studies as a single school subject, is a relatively new discipline in Ghana and many other countries, even though it has been around for considerable number of years. It is new because most of the subjects/disciplines in the school curriculum, often referred to as traditional disciplines, predate social studies by decades and even centuries [9]. It is also new because it has still not developed any body of knowledge of its own and still relies on concepts and generalisations from existing social science and humanity disciplines [9].

Over the past several years, social studies has become a more visible school subject and the conception of learning has evolved from doing and knowing to experiencing and making meaning. 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 with an emphasis on learner outcomes: the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and disposition to action that teachers wish to develop in students (pp. 39-40) [9]. This citation precisely describes the evolution of social studies, as a single discipline of study, among the school curriculum in Ghana. It has evolved from a collection of specific history and geography topics, which used to characterise the early social studies curriculum, into an issue centred (trans-disciplinary) subject.

Among the African nations, social studies has been used to improve the self-image of people in the society after a long colonial rule and heritage. In Ghana, it was aimed at understanding the interrelationships between the social and the physical environment and their impact on the development of Ghana; appreciate the impact of history on current and future development efforts of the country; appreciate the various components of the environment and how these could be maintained to ensure sustainable development; recognise the major challenges facing Ghana and be able to develop basic knowledge and skills for dealing with such challenge; understand the dynamics of development in the world and their impact on development in Ghana; develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for personal growth, peaceful co-existence, and respect for peoples of other nations; and develop a sense of national consciousness and national identity [10], [9]. Although, differences exist in the conceptualisation of social studies as citizenship education, its focal point reflects on how contemporary problems could be solved.

## **2. Definition of Social Studies through Time and Space**

Many writers and experts have sought to define social studies based on their own academic and cultural orientation. On the question of definition, Ravitch poses these questions: What is social studies? Is it history with attention to current events? Is it a merger of history, geography, civics, economics, sociology and all other social sciences? Is it a mishmash of courses such as career education, gender studies, and environmental studies? Is it a field that defines its goals in terms of cultivating skills like interpersonal relations and critical thinking? [11]. Granted that over time social studies scholars have frequently wrestled with the precise definition of the subject, these questions posed by Ravitch, are in agreement with Tabachnick, who opined that

in trying to find out what social studies is, one should examine the general definitions for social studies offered by educators whose special interest is in social studies education, this will serve as guideline and statement of purpose for social studies [12]. In the words of Ayaaba, Eshun and Bordoh (p. 61) “although there are different perceptions and approaches to the social studies curriculum, there is unanimity among educators that the primary purpose of the subject is citizenship education” [13].

According to Kankam et al, there have been many different conceptual perspectives given to the scope of content of social studies but the focus is the objectives around which the various proponents identified as elements of their conceptual dimensions and given definitions [4]. With this, it is evidently clear that there is a lack of consensus about the concept of social studies as some proponents such as Aggarwal and Martorella view the subject as an amalgam of the social sciences [14,8]. Protagonists such as Wesley and Wronski also view social studies as an approach or method to the teaching of the social sciences [15]. Others including, Quartey, Banks, and Eshun and Mensah, also conceive the subject as citizenship education [16,17,18].

From the foregoing, the various authors agree that social studies draws its content from the various social sciences to present a unique body of knowledge to be able to promote citizenship education. It must be emphasised, however, that social studies and social sciences are distinct fields of study. To achieve its overall goals, social studies promotes learning experiences that have both a distinct content-focus and process focus. The latter, for instance, provides opportunities for learners to become actively involved with interpreting and judging knowledge. In view of this, social studies as a subject should transcend beyond the amalgamation of the social sciences and draw content knowledge from other fields that could help solve societal problems. It is this gap identified that this research was designed to fill. According to Bordoh, Eshun, Kofie, Bassaw and Kwarteng (p. 169), various schools of thought have emerged to give different definitions to the subject but there has been a consensus that the subject Social Studies is citizenship education [19].

In Ghana, according to the teaching syllabus for social studies, the subject prepares the individual by equipping him or her with knowledge about the culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future [10]. These clearly show that it is accepted that the ultimate aim of social studies is seen as citizenship education. Eshun and Mensah (p. 183) assert that social studies should be taught as a holistic subject, which should reflect behavioural change in students and not facts from other social sciences. Social studies teachers should stress teaching of skills more than the factual content. The main role of the social studies teacher, therefore is to emphasise the development of relevant knowledge, positive attitudes, value and problem solving skills of students [18].

From the foregoing discussion, there is a central notion that social studies is citizenship education, that is, equipping learners with positive attitudes, values and skills to enable them become effective citizens. Of all these, Quashigah et al. (p. 133) assert that, “the varying conceptions through time and space indicated that social studies is seen as a subject introduced solely to right the wrong in society, and its teaching and learning must be centred on issues and how problems are solved to equip the youth with positive attitudinal building skills and behavioural change” [2]. This sharp directed definition with the essence of the subject introduction into the Ghanaian school curriculum will lend itself to a focused nature and scope of social studies.

### **3. The Nature and Scope of Social Studies through Time and Space**

Kankam, Bordoh, Eshun, Bassaw and Andoh-Mensah (p. 74) stress that it is traditionally accepted that for any effective teaching and learning, the teacher should have both the content knowledge and the pedagogy. Teachers' knowledge about the subject matter to be learned or taught and that of the content to be covered in the syllabus are very important and when applied well will promote effective teaching and learning [20]. A teacher with deep pedagogical knowledge understands how students construct knowledge and acquire skills and how they develop habits of mind and positive dispositions toward learning.

According to Bekoe and Eshun (p. 93), "there are confusing arrays of conceptual perspectives concerning the aims, nature and content of social studies and that cultivation of a clearer conception of the subject in Ghana has become very necessary" [21]. "Social studies from its early beginning was intended to achieve nation building and the aspirations of the country, therefore, constitute the basis for teaching it" (p. 137) [4]. However, there seem to be varied conceptions and debate about the meaning of social studies and how it can be taught to achieve its goal of citizenship education. It is for this reason that authors posit that there is no consensus among educators as regards what social studies is or ought to be. This has culminated into the festering debate concerning the nature and scope of the subject and its relationship to the social sciences. It is important to note that the boundaries or limits in terms of what should be included in the content of the subject is crucial to the subject matter or area. Consequently, the scope of the subject becomes a very much concern after conception and definitions of the subject.

The scope of a subject is said to be the borders of what is to be taught and the depth of what is to be taught. The field of social studies is said to be caught up with ambiguity and this signifies the controversy surrounding the subject. It is of no surprise that some people see social studies as a subject without a scope and is, therefore, described as a schizophrenic bastard child [22]. However, it is important to note that the scope of a subject is determined by its definition. By implication, the different conceptions and definitions will give or determine the different scopes of the subject.

Therefore, in the case of social studies, the varied conceptions or schools of thought suggest different scopes of the subject. Scholars who belong to the school that defines social studies as citizenship transmission believes that the scope of the subject should be confined to the values, norms, knowledge and skills manifested in a particular society [23]. Conversely, if the subject is viewed as an amalgamation of social sciences, its scope will include knowledge, skills, attitudes and methods employed in these subjects for the purpose of citizenship. This has virtually created a gap of knowledge as to what the exact scope of the subject should be or is. In extreme situations, some scholars debunk the idea of confining the subject to specific entities or phenomenon. Beard, for instance, perceives social studies as a seamless web and, therefore, lacks scope [24].

According to Akinlaye, the scope of the subject can be viewed in two perspectives, namely: the content that is to be mastered in the subject (i.e the facts and information, the concepts and generalisation, the laws and principles, etc); and the mental processes and the different kinds of skills that are acquired through learning of the subject. Since it is agreed that social studies seeks to instill in students, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for the purpose of citizenship, its scope must reflect the

problems, challenges and aspirations of the country [25]. Of all these, it is pertinent to note that, the goals of every country differ and so the purpose of including social studies differs across countries thereby generating varied scopes. This seems not to give a consistent scope of the subject across the world. The ever-changing education of a country can contribute to the changing scope of the subject as the goals of education can change. This, therefore, creates a knowledge gap as to the consistency of the scope of the subject with the educational philosophy or goals.

What seem to be an issue in Ghana is the curriculum differences across levels of education. “Curriculum differences seem to be evidenced in the social studies scope of content for colleges of education and how the basic school teaching syllabus is also structured” (p. 138) [4]. This suggests that there is some level of confusion as to what the scope of social studies is in Ghana, since the perceived scope in the colleges of education is different from that of the basic schools. Trained teachers / teacher-trainees may be confused as to how to teach the subject since the structure of the basic school social studies syllabus will not be in consonance with what they used while in school. These, therefore, present an unclear path of the scope of the subject.

This notwithstanding, at all levels of education, the goals of social studies have been characterised by Martorella as: (1) the transmission of the cultural heritage; (2) methods of inquiry; (3) reflective inquiry; (4) informed social criticism; and (5) personal development, have traditionally received the greatest emphasis at the elementary level; at the high school level, methods of inquiry have received more emphasis [26]. As phrased in the curriculum guidelines released by the NCSS (p. 262), “the basic goal of social studies education is to prepare young people to be humane, rational, participatory citizens in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent” [27]. This indicates that the main goal of the Social Studies teacher is to emphasise the development of relevant knowledge, positive attitudes, values and problem-solving skills of students. The goals which are spelt in the definition of a discipline form the basis for developing a curriculum. However, lack of consensus in defining a subject may sway away and turn the various components of a discipline (p. 85) [21]. This calls for a definition consistent with the scope of the subject across all levels of education which seems to be lacking as far as social studies is concerned.

“...efforts to improve teaching and learning of social studies will often fail if the complexity of teaching is underestimated. In teaching the subject, there should be an attempt to rather consider the integrated system of relationships that constitute the teaching experience as a whole” [4]. This assertion suggests that the varied scope of the social studies presents a confusing state of what it ought to be, and if these complexities about the scope are not cleared, teachers, learners and other and stakeholders of education would always find it difficult in comprehending its essence in the school curriculum. The issue of what should be taught to students at all levels of education (the issue of curriculum content) obviously is a fundamental one, and it is an extraordinarily difficult one with which to grapple with. Making inferences, it is then very important that experts in the subject are brought together to set a benchmark for the scope of content of it.

#### **4. The Content of Social Studies through Time and Space**

The content of the social studies curriculum is the most inclusive of all school subjects. Stanley and Nelson define social education as “the study of all human enterprise over time and space” [28]. Determining the boundaries of the social

education taught in schools, what most people know as the social studies, requires decisions about what social knowledge is most important, which skills and behaviours are most valuable, what values are most significant and what sequence of content and skills best fit the subject matter and the students [28]. One of the earliest uses of the term, “social studies” to refer to school subjects is attributed to Thomas Jesse Jones in an article that appeared in the *Southern Workman* in 1905 [12]. Jones expanded the article into a book, *Social studies in the Hampton curriculum*, in which he expressed his concern that young African Americans and Native Americans “would never be able to become integral members of the broader society unless they learned to understand society, the social forces that operated within it, and ways to recognise and respond to social power” (p. 725) [12]. The traditional view of the origins of the contemporary social studies curriculum came to light as a result of the 1916 Committee of National Education Association. They introduced the term, “social studies” and created the scope and sequence of courses that define the contemporary curriculum. As mentioned above, the origins of the contemporary social studies curriculum has recently become a flash point between advocates of a history-centred social studies curriculum and those calling for a curriculum based on the interdisciplinary study of current social studies.

Bordoh et al. (p. 169) posit that the contents of social studies are drawn from several social sciences but not determined by the discipline of any one of these. Social studies is meant to cover the ground, traditionally associated with history, geography, economics and civics, among others, if the teaching of these subjects only impart miscellaneous and unrelated information and does not throw any light on it or provides insight into social conditions and problems or creates the desire to improve the existing state of things, their educative significance will be negligible [19]. The whole group of studies, therefore, be viewed as a compact whole, whose object is to adjust the students to their social environment.

According to Bekoe and Eshun:

Social studies was introduced and confined to the junior secondary schools (JSS), now junior high schools (JHS) and the teacher-training institutions. The subject in the primary schools became known as environmental studies. In 1998 social studies in Ghana underwent another evolution or perhaps a revolution, on this occasion, with its introduction in the senior secondary schools (SSS), now senior high school (SHS). This was occasioned by the recommendation of the 1994 Educational Review Committee, which asked for the introduction of social studies to replace life skills at the SSS level to provide the basis for continuation of learning, in the discipline, from the JSS to the SSS levels. This committee, however, succeeded in transforming social studies from amalgam of discrete traditional social science disciplines, which it used to be, to one that is issues-centred and problem-solving in nature [9].

It is, particularly, important to note that social studies is also a discipline or a course of study at the two teacher preparation universities in Ghana. These are the University of Cape Coast (UCC), which was the first to introduce it as a programme of study, and the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), which followed later. The current situation in the social studies front, in Ghana, is that whereas the UCC still runs the course as an amalgam of Sociology, History, Economics and Geography, the UEW has its reflecting the issue-centred and problem solving curriculum, as introduced in the SSSs now SHS, since 1998 [9].

According to Bekoe and Eshun, documentary evidences gathered from the two major universities show some similarities and wide differences in curricula structure. At UEW, students are introduced to social studies as a single subject which is problem solving and theme based, and trans-disciplinary in nature. Students of UCC are rather introduced to the discrete subjects with a multidisciplinary approach in the social sciences, including economics, geography, history and sociology [9]. This brings to the fore, the controversy surrounding the nature and content of social studies in Ghana. In the view of Kankam et al, this may confuse trained teachers as to how to select the content of the subject since the structure of the basic school social studies syllabus they will use to teach will not be in consonance with what they were taught while in college [4]. There is, therefore, the need to harmonise the social studies curriculum in the colleges of education and that of the basic schools.

The nature of the content of social studies at the junior high school level is concerned with equipping the pupil with an integrated body of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help the pupil develop a broader perspective of Ghana and the world, in general. The integration is achieved in the three sections of the syllabus each of which focuses respectively on (1) The environment; (2) Governance, politics and stability; and (3) Social and economic development [10]. This implies that the subject must be woven around these three thematic areas. On the content of the colleges of education and that of the JHSs, a research conducted by Quashigah, Kankam, Bekoe, Eshun and Bordoh (p. 10) revealed that the content of the social studies curriculum at the JHS level reflects the tools needed by the individual to solve personal and societal problems. The units or topics under this curriculum is based on themes derived from the persistent contemporary problems of Ghana which is transdisciplinary in nature. The nature of the content of social studies at the JHS level does not fall in line with that of the colleges of education [29].

This supports Bekoe and Eshun (p. 44) on social studies curriculum feuding and implementation challenges in Ghana, which revealed that “teacher training institutions subscribe and use a particular conception of social studies curriculum for the production of social studies education graduates” [9]. The implication here is that teachers may come to conceptualise social studies differently based on how they would perceive its nature of content. Bekoe and Eshun (p. 44) recommended, “if importance is attached to social studies then resources already invested in its implementation in Ghana, must be followed by programme review and remedial measures taken early so as to make it more effective and viable” [9]. It shows clearly “there are confusing arrays of conceptual perspectives concerning the aims, nature and content of social studies and that the cultivation of a clearer conception of the subject in Ghana has become very necessary” (p. 93) [21]. The fore going analogy really shows that there is the need for a national pathway to curriculum design, development and implementation in the broad scope of the content of social studies.

## **5. Teaching and Learning of Social Studies through Time and Space**

It is evident that, as countries desire for development as well as higher achievements, the place of citizenship education which serves as a springboard for all learners to develop their capabilities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society is paramount and cannot be underestimated [30], [31]. Education for citizenship has become a prime concern and the focus of primary, secondary and the early education curriculum across the globe [30]. It is seen as the fulcrum on which the development of relevant knowledge, skills,

values and understanding required to become informed, active and responsible citizens revolves. This, therefore, goes to say that learners need a unique and peculiar type of education which will enable them to participate effectively in life. Social studies education is one of the educational programmes that can help develop positive attitudes in citizens and thereby contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation (p. 210) [31].

However, teachers' varied conceptions about social studies as an amalgamation of the social sciences, citizenship education, reflective inquiry or problem solving have influence on their classroom practices. The background knowledge of social studies teachers is built from their training institutions and this goes to influence the way they teach (i.e. selection of content, unit or topic, formulation of objective(s), mode of teaching, and assessment tool(s) used) [32]. In support, a research conducted by Bekoe, Kankam, Ayaaba, Eshun and Bordoh revealed that where final year teacher-trainees are responsible to conduct curriculum-based teaching in the Ghanaian basic schools, the orientation about what they believe in rather impact on what and how they go about their classroom activities; instruct, engage their students of, and manage their social studies lessons. Discrepancies exist between the ideal classroom activities teacher-trainees said they will exhibit and what they actually demonstrated in their teaching, engaging their students and managing their social studies lessons [33]. This implies that premium has to be placed on what should be taught to student teachers learning social studies.

The aim or main goal of teaching social studies at any level of education is to promote good citizenship [17]. This means that social studies is to prepare citizens who can make reflective decisions and participate successfully in the civil life of their communities, nations and the world. Thus, it is very prudent and imperative that much attention should be given to its teaching and learning in senior high schools so as to accomplish the intended outcome of the subject [31].

However, according to Eshun et al. (p. 210), "there is a vast gap between intended objectives and actual classroom practices in the teaching and learning of social studies in Ghana. This requires social studies teachers to be aware of the profile dimensions of the subject to enable them formulate behavioural instructional objectives in the teaching and learning process in order to promote acceptable attitudes, values and skills of students" [31]. Teachers are expected to relate issues taught in the classroom to real life situations in the country and guide students to find practical and reasonable solutions to them. The teaching of the subject will lose its intrinsic value if it does not address the contemporary persistent issues of human survival in the nation which is the main focus of the subject [31]. It is argued that several factors account for the failure of classroom practices to achieve educational goals and objectives. However, one factor which is central to this phenomenon is the teacher, that is to say, teacher effectiveness. It is also a well-known fact that teachers' knowledge will influence how teaching and assessment are carried out in the Social Studies classroom [9].

Thus, defining what should be in the social studies curriculum requires answering the questions, who should determine what is taught?, and what material should be taught? It would appear that there are a limited number of options available to curriculum developers in answering these questions. Who determines the curriculum can only be one or more of the following: (a) students' needs or wants; (b) teachers' knowledge and expertise; or (c) government's policies in response to society's problems or issues. The options for determining the substance of curriculum relates to

either (a) important content, such as what make-up citizenship education or (b) important processes, such as knowing how to learn [34], [35]. This is because teachers are the critical factor in student learning [4]. Teachers control the learning environment and ultimately determine what is taught, when it is taught, and how it is taught [29].

Successful teachers are able to transform their knowledge of social studies concepts into a form of knowledge that can be understood by integrating knowledge of learners, representations, instructional strategies, assessments, and curricular resources to create meaningful learning opportunities that make connections between lesson content and students' experiences [35]. This calls for effective and successful teachers.

In the teaching and learning of social studies as a subject, Schmidt as cited in Bekoe et al suggested three aspects of instruction - content, learning and outcomes - that need to be reconnected with the fundamental humanity of this discipline [36], [6]. According to Schmidt (p. 4-5),

“Putting the social back in content means re-establishing human beings as the central subject of social studies-their lives and stories, their triumphs and abysmal failures, the enduring dilemmas embedded in the study of family and society over time. Putting the social back in learning means creating learning environments and using instructional practices that are compatible with the natural recurring cycle of learning in human beings. Putting the social back in outcomes means incorporating into the curriculum, challenging problems, authentic experiences, and real-life tasks that have consequences in the community or world, and teaching students to accomplish it.” [36]

This means that aside content, the teacher-trainees need to learn methodology before going on teaching practice or internship.

Eshun (p. 17) asserts “teaching social studies is stressed to be done in student-centred techniques and strategies” [37]. Eshun, further stress that brainstorming, role-playing, simulation, discussion and debate were the major techniques stressed by both colleges of education curriculum and the junior high school social studies syllabus in Ghana. This makes it prudent for the Social Studies teacher to be familiar with the major objectives in the subject area in order to formulate objectives in all the domains of learning following the different classifications by Bloom's 1956, Krathwohl's 1956 and that of Taba's 1962 (p. 185) [38]. This indicates that the techniques of teaching and assessment need to be taken seriously to reflect social studies objective of building positive attitudes in learners.

According to Quashigah, Eshun and Mensah, the success of instruction can only be determined by a proper evaluation; hence it is important that teachers possess the necessary skills for affective evaluation [39]. Pierre and Oughton, as cited in Bekoe et al, claim that although many college teachers outline and plan lessons with affective outcomes, they fail to indicate how these will be taught and evaluated [40,6]. This implies that there is an existence of an enormous gap between intended objectives and actual classroom practices in the teaching of social studies in Ghana [6]. From a number of studies on guidelines for effective design of attitudinal instruction suggest that children should be allowed to take integral part in the teaching and learning activities to inculcate in them the active participatory roles they have to portray in society.

The question that inevitably arises here is, how should a social studies classroom that prepares active citizens look like? Brophy and Alleman (p. 3), as cited in Eshun and Mensah (p. 178), give us good insights because they argue that the goal of social studies education is “providing students with the knowledge, skills and values that they will need to understand modern life and participate effectively as pro-social group and responsible citizens” [41,18]. Thus, the tenet of learning is the development of skills and values necessary for citizenship. In achieving this, a research conducted by Bekoe et al, suggested that children should take integral part in teaching and learning activities and without their involvement in classroom activities implies learning has not taken place. Teachers must not only be abreast with teaching skills in the affective, but must also be knowledgeable in how to assess attitudinal learning [6].

## **6. Assessment Practices in Social Studies Education**

Assessment is central to teaching and learning because assessment information is needed to make informed decisions regarding students’ learning abilities, their placement in appropriate levels and their achievements [42]. According to Sadler, assessment refers to the making of evaluation on students’ overall performance and generating assumptions regarding their learning and production education-wise, including the quality or achievement in tasks such as tests, projects, reports and examinations [43]. The success of any assessment depends on the effective selection and the use of appropriate procedures, as well as on the proper interpretation of students’ performances. Thus, assessment procedures also help in evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of the curriculum, instruction and the teaching methodology [42].

Michael Scriven proposes the use of formative and summative assessment in order to make the distinction between the roles of evaluation. Hence, assessment is perceived to serve two different purposes, namely: (1) formative; to improve instruction and (2) summative; to measure students’ achievement. The use of assessment to classify, predict and sort has also changed to advance the process of teaching and learning in addition to accountability purposes [44].

The argument for assessment, as a measure of educational outcomes, is that it is expected to improve teaching and learning, and contribute to overall school improvement [45]. However, it appears that instructional testing has always placed more emphasis on the low-order level of thinking. The quality of test depends on the ability of the individual to capture most if not all skills in thinking, from the content taught in the curriculum [38].

Wiggins argues that the aim or purpose of assessment is primarily to educate and improve student performance, not to audit it. Schools tend to focus on teaching students to pass simplistic, multiple-choice tests that neither assess what we neither value nor provide feedback about how to teach and how to learn [46]. The tendency is to sacrifice what we truly want to assess and settle for score accuracy and efficiency. Also, Boud and Falchikov suggest that educators need to move from traditional (paper and pencil) assessment that focuses on specifics, standards and immediate outcomes to more sustainable assessment that can aid students to become more active learners not only in managing their own learning, but also assessing themselves to life beyond the end of the course [47]. In addition, there has been considerable critique of both the inadequacy of current assessment practices by classroom teachers and external examination. This call for authentic assessment in the teaching and learning.

There has been the debate of alternative techniques in assessment. However, Herrera, Murry and Cabral include formative and summative assessment along with other types of authentic assessment, such as performance based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment and peer-assessment, interview-based assessment, play based assessment, cooperative group assessment, dialogue, journal and scaffold essays [48]. In support of these an outcome-based approach requires that we test in authentic ways what is considered to be most important in terms of knowledge, skill, values and attitudes [49]. Thus, if critical thinking, problem solving, positive attitudes and values, analytical skills and civic competence are highly valued, then students should be guided to be able to demonstrate mastery of these through worthwhile activities which meet the demands and expectations of the society. Authentic tasks tend to provide more freedom to demonstrate their competencies, for example, business proposals, projects, portfolios, artwork and videos, among other tangible products [50].

However, it has become common more recently among educational reformers to criticise traditional testing for its emphasis on outcomes that will not serve the students beyond the classroom. Authentic assessment has emerged out of this criticism with the promise that assessment can be constructed so as to further both teaching and learning [51]. The criticism has substance because for example, social studies assessment in Ghana is dominated by traditional testing from the classroom to the national level. The primary purpose of assessment in social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally-diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Hence, the need to employ authentic assessment in our various classrooms depends greatly on how teachers perceive authentic assessment. Winking, also points out the role of authenticity and states that authentic assessments require higher order thinking skills so that students can solve real life-related problems [52].

It is agreed 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 [48]. Authentic assessment strategies include portfolios, open questions, exhibits, demonstrations, hands-on execution of experiments, self-assessment and computer simulations [53]. The most common authentic assessment tools are performance assessment, portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, alternative assessment, authentic pedagogy, authentic learning and projects. Formatively, authentic assessment should be carried out by social studies teachers to help students realise the potentials of the subject as an attitudinal building.

According to Bordoh, Bassaw and Eshun (p. 9), “Formative assessment refer to the hands on deck process of information on the students’ academic achievements in the classroom. It is the type of assessment which is ongoing or goes on in the course of instructional delivery” [54]. It is in this light that, evaluation of students’ learning in social studies needs to be taken seriously. Quashigah, Eshun and Mensah (p. 84) assert, “The pedagogical content knowledge of social studies teachers do influence the way they assess their lessons” [39]. This assertion is supported by Eshun and Bordoh (p. 173) who contend that “the background knowledge of Social Studies teachers is built from their training institutions and this goes to influence the way they teach (i.e. selection of content, unit or topic, formulation of objective(s), mode of teaching, and assessment tool used)” [55]. As a result of this, implementers of social studies curriculum need to be abreast with how the subject is assessed formatively.

However, Bordoh and Eshun (p. 107) stress that “due to hasty nature in formulating formative assessment and scoring, tutors laid emphasis on cognitive domain to the neglect of affective and psychomotor domains which are also of paramount importance.” With this, much is needed to assist social studies teachers to be abreast with the nature and the content of the subject to be in a harmonised subject-matter required to improve the quality of its teaching and learning [9]. It is, therefore, important for teachers to be abreast with formative assessment techniques and how to use them in their classroom activities in order to win back public confidence. This could be achieved if tutors try to follow the laid down procedures in administering formative assessments [56]. This has become necessary because formative assessment and feedback are essential elements in the teaching and learning process as it provides information on learners' strengths and weakness in relation to their progression.

## 7. Supervision and Feedback in Social Studies Curriculum

According to Bekoe, Attom and Eshun, the rationale for the teaching of Social Studies at the first and second cycle and the tertiary institutions in Ghana is to equip learners with problem solving skills. In the view of this, content and topics are thoughtfully selected to ensure that learners acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be able to solve individual and societal problems [57]. Bekoe, Eshun and Attom (p. 3) argue that “This notwithstanding, worthwhile feedback which is very essential in closing the yawning gap between curriculum supervisors and supervisees in Social Studies education seems to be poor” [58].

There are different schools of thought about what supervision should be. “Supervision may be explained to mean an expert technical service which is primarily aimed at studying and improving cooperatively, all factors which affect institutional growth and development” (p. 21) [59]. School supervision is, therefore, aimed at improving conditions within the school climate, as well as teaching and learning in the school [58]. On the other hand, it is stressed that curriculum supervision is intended to embrace those activities in the school which directly involve the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and appraisal of the school curriculum [60].

Glanz opines that there are those who have criticised modern concepts of supervision as being bureaucratic, hierarchical and oppressive. To postmodernists, rational-technical conceptions of supervision reduce effective supervision to routines which turn supervisors into autocratic lords with the authority to diagnose teachers' pedagogical lapses and impose solutions [61]. On the other hand, Ovando compliments effective supervision, and maintains that it implies that educators, including teachers, curriculum specialists, and supervisors would cooperate in order to improve instruction [62].

According to Bekoe, Eshun and Attom (2017), it appears the power of pre-conceived mind-sets and perceptions of curriculum supervisors in many ways influence their attitudes, and approaches to supervising the curriculum. The expectations that curriculum leaders and social studies teachers, as well as students may have concerning the curriculum and how it should be implemented, will to a large extent affect the curriculum supervision [58].

Success criteria and flaws of social studies curriculum implementers and learners should be shared through feedback. Teaching and learning of social studies is aimed at knowledge acquisition and the development of right attitudes, values and skills.

Reflecting on the pre-instructional, instructional and post-instructional activities is necessary in providing feedback to teachers and students on appropriate and best practices that can aid scholarship [57]. The seemingly, lack of these conditions in the Ghanaian schools provides the springboard for prescribing 21st century social studies classroom where curriculum supervisees and supervisors would cooperate to unearth students with positive attitudes and skills to right the wrong in society. The issue arises as most Ghanaians apparently hold the view that effective curriculum supervision is a key explanatory factor for high academic performance in schools. This cannot be achieved without appropriate and timely feedback in social studies curriculum supervision.

Feedback is very important in curriculum supervision. Eshun, Bordoh, Bassaw and Mensah (p. 46) state that “the presence of mere feedback is insufficient for judging the guidance of learning and that it should rather help learners to assess themselves whether they are doing well or not” [63]. To the teacher, Eshun and Mensah (p. 194) affirm, “there is the need to make appropriate educational decisions, and refocus students’ learning to make it more efficient and effective. In addition, the continuous monitoring of students’ learning will provide teachers with the feedback about their effectiveness as curriculum implementers, and then the results of the assessment can be used to enhance teaching and learning” [38]. This suggests that feedback about the specifics of individual work is best addressed to the individual in a way that he or she can understand. “The clarion call for effective teaching and the use of feedback to boost the teaching and learning of social studies concepts will not be possible if the curriculum is not properly supervised” (p. 30) [57].

This notwithstanding, Eshun, Bordoh and Kofie (p. 146) assert, “various issues relating to curriculum supervision have proved quite controversial. The controversy stems from the different conceptions held by curriculum leaders and teachers about the nature, approaches, importance and practice of the curriculum supervision within different educational delivery settings” [64]. In view of this, Cobbold et al, state that a leader whose perceptions of leadership are underpinned by equal participation, group thinking and liberal ideals is likely to pose a democratic attitude to goal achievement and supervision as well [59].

However, an autocratic minded leader is likely to pursue supervision with an attitude of self-centredness and fault finding without giving concrete feedbacks. The essence of feedback which can be used to close the gap between the supervisor and the supervisee seems to be missing in institutions. According to Hattie and Timperley, feedback is information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding [65]. This clearly shows that feedback for teaching/learning should be provided to the teacher/learner with the intended purpose of improving teaching/learning by a curriculum agent. Feedback, can simply be regarded as the information a teacher/learner receives on how he/she is doing in his/her efforts to reach the desired goal. Both teaching and learning aims at achieving targeted goals. While the teachers/learners strive to reach these goals, they constantly need information on how well or otherwise they are on course. Such information must be descriptive enough to direct teachers/learners to achieve their goals [59]. Thus, feedback is not advice, evaluation or judgments, neither is it a grade as it cannot possibly tell learners what to do next time to improve their performance.

The quality of feedback is judged by its characteristics and attributes towards its purpose. Given the definitions and characteristics of feedback, it is then seen to be an important component of curriculum supervision. Descriptive feedback rather than evaluative feedback can focus on the strength or weakness of supervisors and supervisees. Feedback is most effective when it points out strength in the work as well as areas needing improvement [57]. Bekoe, Attom and Eshun (p. 30) emphasise, “information is only considered feedback when it is used to alter a gap” [57]. This means that the feedback generated from curriculum supervision must be used to make changes in the supervisors and supervisees’ task performance. This will help them close the gap between their current status and intended supervisory goals. On this, it is stressed “supervisors have to develop better interpersonal relationships with those they serve, helping them to see that problem solving can only work well in a friendly and trusted school environment” (p. 128) [60]. Also, Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead are of the view that teachers should collaborate with administrators and supervisors to analyse the job of teaching and the research on effective teaching [66].

With all of their differences, there should be singleness of an ultimate purpose to produce a sound and functional curriculum delivery. However, there is an obvious lack of professional unity among supervisors and supervisees on effective and acceptable scope and approaches to curriculum supervision [64]. This clearly shows that the history of curriculum supervision seems to be inundated with controversy, power struggle and subservience to administrative convenience, which has resulted in some form of resistance from teachers who view supervisors as system executioners.

Curriculum supervision in social studies, therefore, involves in-class observation of teaching and learning, assisting teachers and learners, professional and group development, evaluation of teachers/learners, research and revision of the social studies curriculum. In effect, these responsibilities require much complex, collaboration and developmental effort with social studies curriculum supervisors and teachers, instead of the hitherto, more strictly inspectorial tasks. The foregoing analogy shows that the purported gap between supervisors and supervisees role in social studies education can be bridged through the feedback technique. This is because the current period of sweeping changes in curriculum reforms in educational delivery are necessitating corresponding changes in the roles of curriculum supervisors and supervisees. In helping to define the role of supervisees in social studies education, Bekoe, Attom and Eshun (p. 30) assert “the current period of all-encompassing changes in curriculum reforms within the context of post-modern educational delivery is necessitating corresponding changes in the roles of social studies teachers. The roles of social studies teachers have assumed more complex dimensions, perhaps, because the social studies curriculum of today and its process of delivering have become much more complex on the premise of solving individual and societal problems” [57].

## **8. Social Studies Curriculum: The Way Forward**

There have been many different conceptual perspectives given to the conception, definition, nature and the scope of the content of Social Studies through time and space. However, the focuses are the objectives around which the various proponents identified as elements of their conceptual dimensions and given definitions. Objective of social studies that are in line with national policy on education objectives have shown that Social Studies is an essential subject to be taught at all levels of education in Ghana. Drawing concepts from Bekoe and Eshun, there must be a general agreed

conceptions about social studies as a discipline and for this to be effective, the nation's two known teacher training universities (UCC and UEW) should review their conceptions of the discipline [9]. Although the field of social studies is so caught up in ambiguity, inconsistency and contradiction, there is still the need for a synergy in its conceptualisation for it to achieve its main objective [8].

The contents of social studies are drawn from several social sciences but not determined by the discipline of any one of these. Social studies is meant to cover the ground, traditionally associated with history, geography, economics and civics, among others, if the teaching of these subjects only impart miscellaneous and unrelated information and do not throw any light on it or provide insight into social conditions and problems or create the desire to improve the existing state of things, their educative significance will be negligible. The whole group of studies has, therefore, to be viewed as a compact whole, whose object is to adjust the students to their social environment. It is also recommended that the content of social studies should be tailored to deal with problems of the society rather than focusing on some aspects of the social sciences.

The implementation of social studies must be taken into strict consideration, since it is a known fact that teachers' conceptual understanding of social studies influences classroom instruction. Social studies as a subject should be implemented by trained teachers with its right conceptualisation which should be directly in line with the aims and objectives of the subject. Over the years social studies has been marginalised because it is seen as a reading subject, since it is not given the needed attention. This can be curtailed by employing strict measures which place value on its implementation.

Quashigah et al researched on, "Mentees' social studies curriculum conceptions and their classroom practices in the junior high schools in Ghana" and revealed that mentees' conceptions about social studies have great impacts on their classroom activities (the way they select contents, units, topics, set objectives, teach and assess pupils) [35]. The authors also deduced that the implementation of curriculum becomes successful when the teacher's curriculum conception, teacher-constructed syllabus, the teacher's personality, the teaching materials and the teaching environment interact with the learner in a positive way.

For the teaching of subject to makeover, it is recommended that social studies teachers should make it a duty to help students have better and more realistic ideas about the multiple realities of what constitute social studies in the real world since they (teachers) influence what is taught [35]. Since social studies is seen as an attitudinal subject through time and space, the Ghanaian school curriculum should be enhanced with the current happenings in the society to help develop the 21st century youth who will be well resourced to selflessly help the country to its developmental path. This can best be done when curriculum supervision is understood by both supervisees and supervisors, and professionally carried out by curriculum leaders.

Curriculum supervision involves observation of teaching and learning, assisting teachers in their professional development, both in individual and group context, evaluation of teachers, research and revision of the curriculum (Education Encyclopaedia cited in Eshun, Bordoh & Kofie, p. 146) [64]. Various issues relating to curriculum supervision have proved quite controversial. The controversy stems from the different conceptions held by curriculum leaders and teachers about the nature, approaches, importance and the practice of curriculum supervision within

different educational delivery settings. Educational systems and institutional frameworks differ for sure. Nevertheless, with all of the differences, there should be singleness of an ultimate purpose to engender a sound and functional social studies curriculum delivery.

However, there is an obvious lack of professional unity among supervisors and supervisees on effective and acceptable scope and approaches to curriculum supervision. Effective curriculum supervision thrives on both supervisors and supervisees keeping records of all formal, as well as informal supervision sessions and providing immediate feedback. The authors further assert that motivated staff requires less supervision and are willing to accomplish tasks. Also, mutual trust creates conditions for self-direction and self-confidence in supervisees [59]. These are favourable conditions for curriculum supervision.

As stated by Glanz, there are those who have criticised the modern concepts of supervision as being bureaucratic, hierarchical and oppressive [61]. Supervisors have to develop better interpersonal relationships with those they serve; helping them to see that problem solving can only work well in a friendly and trusted school environment [60]. This calls for the need for supervisors to be abreast with the scope and the ideal approaches of curriculum supervision leading to effective implementation.

Bekoe, Eshun and Attom posit that there was a strong consensus among curriculum leaders and social studies teachers that the major purpose of social studies curriculum supervision are the monitoring of performance, sharing of information/feedback and solving problems [58]. Curriculum leaders and social studies teachers should collaborate with each other in an effort to improve students' learning. Mentoring of beginning social studies teachers to facilitate a supportive induction into the teaching profession is the role of the curriculum leader. Modelling and providing beginning social studies teachers with descriptive feedback on teaching and learning is a crucial part of increasing achievements. This helps to ascertain and self-assess where they need improvement in their classroom activities. It was also revealed that effective curriculum supervision thrives on both supervisors and supervisees keeping records of all formal as well as informal supervision sessions and providing immediate feedback. Immediate feedback is most important for effective social studies curriculum supervision [58].

Feedback should always be at the personal level in social studies education. Occasionally, feedback should be through supervision conferencing in social studies education. All feedback in social studies curriculum supervision should be a dialogic interaction between the supervisor(s) and the supervisee(s) [58]. Provision of worthwhile feedback is seen as the centrepiece of delivering the social studies curriculum supervision process. The formulation of worthwhile feedback mechanisms will close the yawning gap between curriculum leaders and social studies teachers. The wide-yawning gap between the roles of curriculum supervisors and supervisees in social studies education can be bridged through worthwhile feedback technique, where feedback is seen as descriptive on the purpose of finding solutions to challenging situations and not evaluative, whereby it is seen as fault finding. Formatively, teachers should be abreast with modern techniques of assessing social studies classroom outcomes.

Eshun et al. (p. 47) emphasise that “effective formative assessor requires someone who has the necessary depth of content knowledge of the subject s/he is teaching” [63]. This implies that social studies can be taught and assessed best by a teacher who

is highly abreast with the scope of content knowledge of the subject curriculum. This has become necessary because teachers hold the key to sound educational system of any nation and that the education standard of teachers, their quality and competency with all the conception they form about a subject need to be taken into prominence [20].

Current social studies classroom should include formative and summative assessment along with other types of authentic assessment, most common tools such as performance based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment, alternative assessment, authentic pedagogy, peer-assessment, interview-based assessment, play based assessment, cooperative groups assessment, dialogue, journal, scaffold essays, artwork, videos, open questions, exhibits, demonstrations, hands-on execution of experiments, computer simulations, authentic learning and projects. Formatively, authentic assessment should be carried out by social studies teachers to help students realise the potentials of the subject as an attitudinal building.

There is all indication that each assessment technique under formative assessment is useful and this can contribute to the conception of formative assessment. After analysing the papers on assessment practices, it is deduced that assessment is indeed an integral part of teaching and learning. Emphasis should, therefore, be placed on authentic assessment which includes formative assessment to enhance the total development of the students. Therefore, if teachers want more students' information to guide their daily instruction, to engage all learners, they will have to test in a different manner.

Since curriculum dictates what is to be taught in an educational system, there should be a national curriculum policy on social studies in Ghana. There is, therefore, the need to identify and formulate a better conception of social studies as a subject that helps learners to acquire knowledge, skills, positive attitudes and values. This is because, according to Quashigah et al, the teaching syllabus for social studies prepares the individual by equipping him or her with knowledge about the culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future [29]. These clearly show that it is accepted that the ultimate aim of social studies is seen as citizenship education.

There is also the need for a quality assurance mechanism to be instituted in the teaching profession to ensure that teacher preparation programmes in the country are designed to focus on the needs of society. The classroom practices of teachers, so far as social studies is concerned, must be centred on the current knowledge and understanding of what the subject is; issues based and problem solving. This paper, though did not align itself with any of the schools of thought, it will provide a benchmark for curriculum developers in the designing of social studies curriculum for Ghanaian schools in the future.

## 9. Conclusions

There are varying conceptions of social studies through time and space but the ultimate aim has been for citizenship education. The varying conceptions through time and space indicated that social studies is seen as a subject introduced solely to right the wrong in the society, and its teaching and learning must be centred on issues and how problems are solved to equip the youth with positive attitudinal building skills and behavioural change. This definition with the essence of the subject introduction into the Ghanaian school curriculum gives a focused nature and scope of

social studies. It is believed that social studies is an integrated subject, but there has been an issue with the acceptable level of integration which has to be the solving of individual and societal problems.

Lack of acceptable level of integration in the contemporary social studies curriculum has led to different nature and scope of content of the subject. The varied scope of content has resulted in social studies being viewed as the teaching in the discrete subject areas, with a primary emphasis on geography, historical and sociological concepts, citizenship, global citizenship, multicultural, human rights, political, economic, moral and peace education. These views show the varied conceptions of social studies in Ghana.

Teaching and learning of social studies, though carried out from the vast array of curricula content would still have to be geared towards the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help solve individual and societal problems. Social studies curriculum supervision and feedback were seen as very imperative in realising the main goal of the subject which is positive attitudinal development. Curriculum leaders and social studies teachers should collaborate with each other in an effort to improve students learning of the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes for solving sensitive and contemporary societal issues.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

## Author Contributions

The author contributed in the conceptualization, investigation, methodology, trustworthiness/validation, resources, data curation, formal analysis, and final writing, which comprises the original draft preparation, review and editing of the paper.

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