

Benefits of Authentic Assessment Practices in the Basic Schools of Ghana: Social Studies Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract:

The objective of this study was to examine the benefits of authentic assessment practices to Social Studies teachers in the Basic Schools of Ghana. This study was mixed-method research that adopted the explanatory sequential design. The census method was used to collect data from 127 Social Studies teachers in 85 junior high schools. A questionnaire of 71 items and a semi-structured interview guide aided the successful collection of data. Based on the findings of this research, authentic assessment assists Social Studies teachers in transforming concerns and situations into active learning with real-world applicability. They can align assessments very well with learning goals, create and organize ideas with a purpose and guide students to collaborate in their tasks. Teachers can the teachers coach their students on how to produce and arrange their thoughts with a purpose, as well as how to collaborate and cooperate with their classmates and school staff. They can guide students to think about their learning processes and control their learning, making informal observations about students' responses to instructions to help guide them on complex or higher-order thinking activities. It is recommended that teachers must incentivize instructors to use authentic assessments for students, and educational leaders should provide the resources to execute authentic assessment activities. It is also recommended that colleges of education and universities should emphasize both conventional and authentic assessment methods to build the capacity of trained Social Studies teachers.

Keywords:

Benefits, Authentic Assessment, Practices Basic Schools, Social Studies, Teachers

1. Introduction

Curriculum practice would not be complete without assessment. The effect of teaching and learning is a key element for administrators, teachers, and learners in every educational system. It raises concerns about the skills pupils can result from

more complete knowledge and comprehension, as well as their experiences in the educational system. Because students have to gain skills and understanding that are adaptable to the workplace, concern for how learning occurs in the classroom and how the quality of learning is impacted by instruction and assessment is desirable. Educators must consequently consider the success of curriculum practice and learning assessment in the school environment [1,2,3,4]. Authentic assessment as an assessment practice in Social Studies is made up of an interrelated set of dimensions. For instance, the process is influenced by factors that include the knowledge teachers have about authentic assessment, and their authentic assessment practices during instructions. The authentic assessment tools teachers need to employ and or make students perform is also a factor. Also, challenges teachers encounter practising authentic assessment including what they benefit from authentic assessment, influence the effective realization of authentic assessment in Social Studies [5].

Teachers' knowledge of authentic assessment, how they practice authentic assessment, and the authentic assessment tools teachers employ or students are made to perform can be linked to the constructivists' theory. The assumptions of this theory as indicated in a study shows that authentic assessment can be considered a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, emphasizing collaborative, self-directed learning, and experimentation and enhanced by flexibility in practice [6,7]. Authentic assessment helps the teacher to practice sound assessment in Social Studies education by putting his or her learners first in mind. It aids the teacher to determine what the pupils need to know, the evidence of learning, and the kinds of instruction and assessment that provides opportunities for the pupils to learn and demonstrate their learning beyond the classroom [8]. Hence, constructivists' theory as an assumption suggests that authentic assessment strategies or tools such as presentations, peer review assessments, simulations, case studies, exhibitions, and demonstrations should be practiced as an alternative assessment to lead to the realization of the benefits the method offers in its use for the realization of the purposes of Social Studies. Studies have revealed that authentic assessment improves learning, enhances instruction and assessment for learning, and increases the academic achievement of teacher trainees [9,10]. Teacher authentic assessment practices such as guidance to learners in knowledge application, further explanations or continuous probing of students, and informal observations of students enhance effective authentic assessment in Social Studies, including the gender of the Social Studies teacher [11].

Authentic assessment, as a classroom assessment strategy, does have a place in schools. However, a study on Teachers' perception of authentic assessment techniques practiced in Social Studies lessons in Senior High Schools in Ghana; published in *International Journal of Educational Research and Information Science* revealed that authentic assessment used in their classrooms was limited by policies, time, resources, and assessment methods employed by their schools [5]. These policies affect their use of this assessment method because the subject is a core. There were huge noticeable gaps and variations between the teachers' perceptions of authentic assessment and their relevant practices in their classrooms. Although they could practically demonstrate some level of understanding of what constitutes authentic assessment processes, they still lacked a comprehensive and profound understanding of the real benefits and uses of authentic assessment purposes to social studies teaching and learning. The curriculum content of Social Studies should be reoriented to incorporate more authentic assessment practices at all levels of education in Ghana. This should emphasize classroom-based tests and not standardized tests. Regular in-service

training and capacity-building workshops on classroom authentic assessment should be organized for teachers to improve their use of assessment as a tool to enhance teaching and learning [5]. The aforementioned researchers looked at Social Studies teachers' practices of authentic assessment within the Central Region. Their study failed to show the link between teachers' knowledge and the benefits of the use of authentic assessment practices. Since it appears no study has been done on teachers' benefits of authentic assessment practices in the Eastern Region [5]. The purpose of this study was to examine the benefits of authentic assessment practices to Social Studies teachers in the Basic Schools of Ghana. The study was guided by this research question - What are the benefits of authentic assessment practices to Social Studies teachers in Junior High Schools in Ayensuano District?

1.1 Benefits of Authentic Assessment Practices

The research was conducted in Turkey to ascertain the impact of authentic assessment on preservice teachers' attitudes regarding academic accomplishment, attitudes toward educational measurement, and perspectives on authentic assessment [12]. The above research objectives are related to this study since this study seeks to find Social Studies teachers' benefits of authentic assessment in the Ayensuano District. On fifty potential teachers in an experimental group and forty-five preservice teachers in a placebo group, Ozan used a mixed-methods approach. This research followed the same research methodology as the above one, including the use of the interview as a data-gathering technique. Ozan discovered that authentic assessment improves teacher candidates' academic performance considerably [12]. This finding backs up the findings of an earlier study that authentic assessment combined with a constructivist approach greatly improved teacher candidates' educational success and problem-solving skills [13, 14]. As a result, another researcher contends that authentic assessment practices undertaken in the context of scientific research methodologies not only improve teacher candidates' problem-solving skills but also their behaviours toward measurement and evaluation in education [15, 16]. As a result of authentic task-oriented activities, prospective teacher candidates' perspectives toward special teaching approaches improved [14,16].

Preservice teachers recognize that authentic assessment is critical to gaining working experience, developing professional skills, practising in an actual situation, and improving learning quality. The bulk of preservice teachers agreed that authentic assessment applied to all courses, confirming these findings [12,16]. The findings from the above studies are significant to this work since this study seeks to discover the benefits of authentic assessment practices to teachers. Studies indicated that instructors need authentic assessments to evaluate the writing ability of learners in schools [5, 16-17]. The above objective reflects the objective of this study for it is interested in finding the benefits of the practice of authentic assessment.

Researchers employed a survey and data were collected through interviews from twenty English teachers. This study also employs interviews as a tool for gathering data. Their study exposed that the types of authentic assessment which include writing sample, experimentation or demonstration, portfolio, performance assessment, writing process, project or exhibition, journal, constructed-response items, and self-peer-assessment are urgently needed by the tutors as these kinds of authentic assessment appropriately aid teachers to properly assess students writing skill [17]. This backs up findings that end-of-term exam results are rarely used to alter teaching and promote learning. A study acknowledged standard assessments as only appropriate for

qualitative comparisons of students, programs, and institutions [19]. Authentic assessment aids in the improvement of learning and instruction when the instructor delivers comprehensive feedback to students, highlighting progress and providing recommendations for future achievement or remediation [5,16,17,18,19,20]. Authentic assessment hence can be seen as beneficial practice as teachers can provide scaffold educational experiences to learners. Their findings are of relevance to the present work which seeks to analyze the merits of the practice of authentic assessment.

A study on the beneficial impacts of teachers' active participation when developing and putting into practice authentic assessment tasks and appraisal for active learning on learner performance, indicated that authentic assessment assists teachers in actively engaging in formative assessments, which contributes to the emergence of attitudes including self-controlled learning, investigative attitudes of cognizance, and lifetime learning [21]. As a result, teachers' lifelong development and observations of their classroom practices are enhanced. Furthermore, using an inquiring perspective to improve teacher potential through authentic assessment activities allows for effective teacher learning and growth [16,21]. Teachers have a mutual view of the central objective of authentic assessment, which is to optimize teaching and learning. Authentic assessment is a great learning tool for enhancing self-improvement in leadership educational programs because it permits teachers to expand learners' learning and enables learners to uncover their genuine, authentic selves. These observations are pertinent to this study since its objective is to define the importance of authentic assessment practice for teachers [5,16,17,18,19,20,21,22].

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted the explanatory sequential design under the mixed method. The study was done in the Ayensuano District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Ayensuano District is one of the 33 administrative districts in the Eastern Region of Ghana which was carved out of the Suhum Kraboa Coaltar District Assembly in 2012. The District lies within Latitudes 5° 45" N and 6° 5" N and Longitudes 0° 15" W and 0° 45" W. It is located in the southern part of the Eastern Region and shares boundaries with Suhum, Nsawam Adoagyiri, and West Akim Municipalities as well as Akuapem South, Upper West Akim Districts. The District has a total land area of 499km². The Ayensuano District has eighty-three (83) junior high schools (59 public/government and 24 private), with two (2) senior high schools (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). This study is undertaken in this area since the researcher has observed junior high school Social Studies examination papers and found that pupils do poorly at answering meta-cognition questions.

The population for the study comprised all Social Studies teachers in Junior High Schools in the Ayensuano District. Convenient sampling techniques and census methods were used to select the district, and all the one hundred and twenty-seven (127) teachers who teach Social Studies in the junior high schools in the district. The census method is the process of gathering data from every member of the population. The census method can collect reliable, representative, and accurate data and provides researchers with in-depth information covering all the facets of their research problems [21]. Nine teachers were sampled for the interview, one from each circuit that made up the district. Teachers who opted in willingly to be interviewed were selected. Nine teachers were interviewed based on claims of methodological study (code saturation on interview data) [22]. They revealed that the point at which no additional information or issues are identified is achieved in nine interviews.

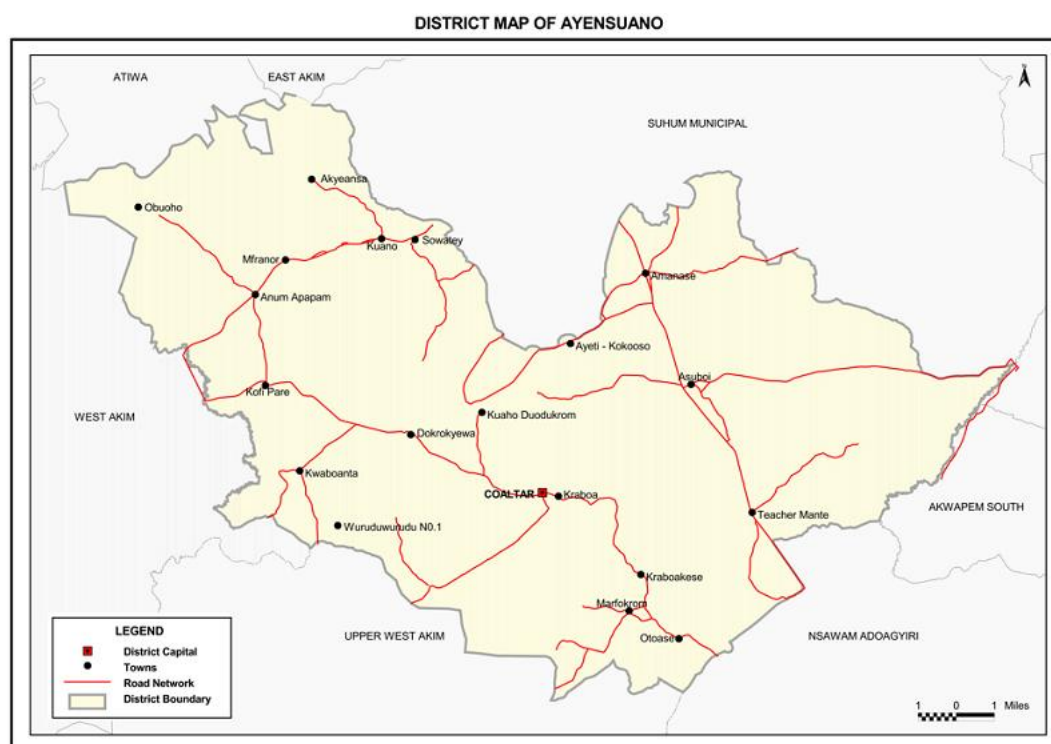


Figure 1. Map of Ayensuano District.

Source: Ghana Statistical Service, GIS

The main instruments used for data collection and analysis were questionnaires and interview guides. These instruments were used for triangulation purposes. The questionnaire was close-ended items on a 4- Point Likert scale of Most of the Time, Occasionally, Rarely, and Never. Besides the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data from nine of the teachers to probe further into some issues on which the questionnaire was unable to obtain in-depth information. Using a semi-structured interview guide, the researcher was able to get a thorough grasp of the subject under examination. The interview also allowed some level of flexibility for the respondents to express themselves in detail concerning the topic under study [23]. The quantitative data were analysed with both mean and standard deviation, while qualitative data from the interview were transliterated and coded based on themes derived from the data collection.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents results and discussion on the research question - *What are the benefits of authentic assessment practices to Social Studies teachers in Junior High Schools in the Ayensuano District?* The aim of research question five was to learn from the respondents about the advantages of using authentic assessment in Social Studies classes. The questionnaire items were created to aid in the search for answers to this research question. Table 1 shows the end outcome of the advantages.

Table 1. Benefits of Authentic Assessment to Social Studies Teachers.

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Preamble:</i> Through the practices of authentic assessment, I can.....		

effectively translate issues and situations into meaningful tasks that have real-world relevance.	3.38	0.68
align assessment appropriately to learning goals.	3.41	0.73
create and organize ideas with purpose.	2.61	1.11
use symbols and words better to show meaning.	3.00	0.83
guide students to collaborate in their tasks.	3.34	0.71
prepare a criterion for assessing the learner's projects.	2.64	0.86
guide students to apply their knowledge to real-life problems.	3.34	0.71
guide learners to use hands-on tasks to conduct several investigations.	2.82	0.89
use a variety of teaching and learning resources.	3.42	0.75
guide learners to cooperate with peers and school personnel.	3.45	0.66
guide students to reflect on their learning processes and take control of their learning.	3.37	0.75
assist learners to communicate through pictures.	2.82	0.99
make an informal observation about how learners respond to instructions.	3.48	0.69
guide learners on complex tasks or higher-order thinking activities.	3.00	0.75
Grand mean	3.17	0.44

Source: Field Survey, Asante (2022)

Table 1 shows that most respondents can efficiently convert concerns and scenarios into meaningful activities with real-world applicability most of the time, and their replies do not differ much. The computed mean and standard deviation values of 3.38 and 0.68, respectively, demonstrate this. Authentic achievement aims to promote assessment based on relevant, real challenges or activities. This means that authentic assessment assists teachers in teaching and assessing pupils based on meaningful and real-world relevant assignments [24]. This will be meaningful and pertinent to the learner beyond the classroom. With regards to the statement that through the practice of authentic assessment, teachers can create and organize ideas with purpose, the majority of the respondents responded 'occasionally' to it and their responses were consistent ($M=2.61$, $SD=1.11$).

Further, the data from Table 1 depicted that, the majority of the respondents most of the time can guide students to collaborate in their tasks and their responses did not differ much from one another ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.71$). This is consistent with the findings of a previous study that authentic assessment allows learners to study alongside their peers, boosting social development through active participation and in-depth understanding [25]. This is related to Vygotsky's theory of social development, according to which authentic assessment improves criticality, teamwork, problem-solving, active engagement, and analytical processes [26].

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents occasionally can prepare criteria for assessing learners' projects and their responses were homogeneous. This is evident

from the computed mean and standard deviation values of 2.64 and 0.86 respectively. This finding backs up other studies that social moderation improves the reliability and flexibility of teachers' prerogative or grading by bringing together instructors who teach related topics to clarify scoring criteria and standards and compare students' performance [27,28]. They highlighted that if the performance criterion is disclosed, students would enjoy and comprehend it since the grading procedure is multifaceted and the scoring criterion is always known and understood. [27,28]. These tasks and evaluations deal with tasks difficulties, deadlines, organizing, collaborations, mastering core skills, understanding, development, and application of key competencies. This is used to recognize and credit students for their educational advancements.

However, the data demonstrated that most of the respondents can usually aid students in applying their learning to practical challenges, and their replies were homogeneous ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.71$). According to Table 1, the majority of respondents can use a wide range of teaching and learning resources most of the time, and their replies to the statement were consistent. The computed mean and standard deviation values of 3.42 and 0.75, respectively, demonstrate this. The results showed a calculated mean value of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 0.66, based on the premise that accurate evaluation allows teachers to guide students in cooperating with classmates and school staff. This denotes that most of the respondents most of the time can do that and their responses did not differ much from one another.

In addition, the results in Table 1 showed that most of the respondents occasionally can guide learners on complex tasks/ higher-order thinking activities and their responses did not differ much from one another. This is clear from the computed mean value of 3.00 and standard deviation value of 0.75. These findings are in harmony with earlier research that authentic assessment aids critical thinking skills, learner independence, dedication, and enthusiasm for learning in students. As a result, students are stimulated to be imaginative, and reflective, and practice their abilities, talents, and perform activities that mimic their projects in the future and their current surroundings. This is very important for students' self-directed self-motivated success in the real world [29,30].

The mean of means (grand mean) and standard deviation of the responses to Social Studies instructors on the merits of authentic assessment were 3.17 and 0.44, correspondingly. The findings support the previous assertion that teachers have a common awareness of the advantages of authentic assessment in improving instruction and increasing learning [22]. Teachers can help students realize their actual selves by deepening their learning. As a result, authentic assessment is a powerful instrument for educational leadership development. The implication is that the majority of respondents can benefit from the use of authentic assessment in Social Studies instruction on occasionally. Similar findings came up from the interview such as follows:

“Authentic assessment helps me to be able to use multiple assessment types or forms. And the teacher who uses authentic assessment to assess his or her students in return learns much from the students. There are times teachers will think of knowing very much but students' responses through discussion, their presentations, and essays, the teacher is helped a great deal about the topics under Social Studies. Many things are hidden from you the teacher but through authentic assessment practices, they will be revealed to you. It broadens the

teacher's knowledge horizon. It also makes teaching very simple and, it is a better assessment practice which I think all teachers must use in their subject areas. This will help the students to know the relevance of education in their lives, and what is expected from them in their communities" (Azambuja).

"The fact is that authentic assessment is not only beneficial to the teacher alone but trickles down to the nation as a whole. To the teacher, it helps you to assess yourself to see whether the general objectives, aims, and goals of Social Studies education are achieved. It also gives you an array of assessment types, forms or practices to choose from. This, therefore, enhances our teaching methods and strategies. The benefit of Social Studies teachers using authentic assessment for the nation is that it will help our students to practicalise whatever they learned in class in their communities. This is because Social Studies is not limited to the classroom but extends to practised all our surroundings- our environment and institutions. Practising authentic assessment in Social Studies helps our country grow and develop. Take a situation where a student can understand the repercussions of littering around human existence; this will help solve or lessen filth as a sanitation issue in our country. The budget for sanitation will then be reduced and the money moved to develop other sectors within our economy. I, therefore, believe authentic assessment benefits the teacher to do more to help himself or herself, the student, and the country as a whole" (Buju).

These findings are very significant since teachers seek to nurture students who can apply their acquired skills, attitudes and values, and knowledge to solve contemporary and persistent social problems.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the primary findings of the research, authentic assessment assists Social Studies teachers in transforming concerns and situations into active learning with real-world applicability. They can align assessments very well with learning goals, create and organize ideas with a purpose and guide students to collaborate in their tasks. Teachers can coach their students on how to produce and arrange their thoughts with a purpose, as well as how to collaborate and cooperate with their classmates and school staff. They can guide students to think about their learning processes and control their learning. Teachers are able to make informal observations about students' responses to instructions to help guide them on complex or higher-order thinking activities. It is recommended that educational managers and administrators must incentivize instructors to use authentic assessments for students. Again educational leaders should provide the resources to execute authentic assessment activities. It is also recommended that colleges of education and universities should emphasize both conventional and authentic assessment methods to build the capacity of trained Social Studies teachers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Data Availability Statement

Data is available on request from the corresponding author.

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