USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO IMPROVE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

KWABENA NYAMEKYE

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON, IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MA DEGREE IN
TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE.

JUNE, 2012
DECLARATION

With the exception of the references and quotations from other sources which have all been acknowledged, I hereby sincerely declare that the entire dissertation is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in the University or elsewhere.

KWABENA NYAMEKYE
(CANDIDATE)

PROF. AKOSUA ANYIDOHO
(SUPERVISOR)
ABSTRACT

Quality education is the bedrock of national development and progress. In the course of the history of education in Ghana, there arose the need to improve accessibility. Hence, a series of interventions such as the Education For All (EFA), the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), and the abolition of school fees and levies which led to the introduction of the Capitation Grant scheme (CGS), were introduced. These initiatives triggered a surge in enrolment figures in public primary schools by about sixteen percent (16%). It became necessary that after getting the children into school, the government should ensure that the children receive relevant literacy skills and for that matter, academic knowledge.

As a sequel to this development, there arose the need for quality instruction in the classroom, an issue which has become a major concern among reform movements across the world. Concern with quality immediately gives rise to the issue of assessment. Assessment is the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the students about their progress, strengths and weaknesses and to judge instructional effectiveness and weaknesses and curricula adequacy. This is why various reforms that have dominated the education scene in the last three decades propose the use of assessment as a critical factor to improve quality.

This research is to find out the opinions of the actual administrators and users of assessment results. The views collated from the various stakeholders showed that there is no major attempt to use the results of the various assessments so far conducted in the public schools in the classrooms to target the individual testees. Also, the opinions gathered suggest that many teachers in the classroom need a serious training / orientation on how to plan a test and how to write good test items.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Benjamin Kwaku Prempeh Esq. and Dr. Ato Essuman,

Member, Council of State and former Chief Director, Ministry of Education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am greatly indebted to God, the almighty for bringing me this far. I am most grateful to Prof. Akosua Aniyidoho, my Supervisor, for her tolerance and guidance throughout the preparation of this work. She has proved to be an ideal mother especially the support she gave me when I nearly lost my only child while I was writing this dissertation.

To all the lecturers at the Department of Linguistics, I express my deepest gratitude.

I wish to register my sincerest appreciation to Dr. Ato Essuman, former Chief Director, Ministry of Education, Accra for the invaluable support he gave to me during my studentship.

May God bless all those who helped me in diverse ways to bring this work to fruition.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:
1.0 Background ................................................................. 1
1.1 Statement of the problem .................................................. 3
1.2 The purpose of the study .................................................. 4
1.3 The scope of the study .................................................... 5
1.4 The research objectives ................................................... 5
1.5 The research question .................................................... 6
1.6 Hypothesis .................................................................. 6
1.7 Limitation of the study ................................................... 6
1.8 Organization of the study ................................................ 7
# CHAPTER TWO:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Importance of language</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Concept of Achievement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Influence of some selected theories on assessment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Classroom dialogue</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Theoretical framework</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.</td>
<td>Past and current assessment systems in use in the Ghana Education Service</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.1</td>
<td>Continuous Assessment (CA)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.2</td>
<td>Criterion – Referenced Test (CRT)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.3</td>
<td>Participatory Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4</td>
<td>Rationale for a unified national assessment format</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.5</td>
<td>National Education Assessment (NEA)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.6</td>
<td>National Education Assessment (NEA)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.7</td>
<td>School Education Assessment (SEA)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Method used</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Designing the semi-structured interview</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Interviewing</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Identity and negotiating access .................................................. 35
3.6 Plan and conduct of the interview ................................................. 36
3.7 Sampling ..................................................................................... 36

CHAPTER FOUR:

4.0 Discussion of data ................................................................. 38
4.1 How long have you been teaching in the Ghana Education Service?------- 39
4.2 How long have you been in the administration in this school/ district?----- 40
4.3 Have you heard of BECAS? ....................................................... 40
4.4 Has your school or municipality ever participated in any BECAS assessment? -- 41
4.5 Was your class involved? ......................................................... 42
4.6 How did your class/pupils fare? ............................................... 42
4.7 How did the test result impact on the teaching and learning in your school? ----- 42
4.8 In your opinion, do you think assessment tests should be sustained? ------- 43
4.9 How can the quality and usefulness of the tests be improved? .............. 45
4.10 Are assessment tests useful to quality education delivery? ................ 47

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and recommendations .................................. 49
5.1 Summary .................................................................................. 49
5.2 Conclusion ............................................................................... 50
5.3 Recommendations .................................................................... 51
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 53

APPENDICES

1. Interview schedule for respondents (Questionnaire) .............................................. 58
2. Setting good tests ..................................................................................................... 59
3. Writing good test items ............................................................................................. 60
4. Formal assessment methods ....................................................................................... 61
5. Setting short answer question types ......................................................................... 62
6. Writing multiple questions ........................................................................................ 63
ABBREVIATIONS

Some terminologies and abbreviations have been used in the study which needs to be defined:

AED : Academy for Educational Development

ASU : Assessment Services Unit

AFT : American Federation of Teachers

CA : Continuous Assessment

CRDD: Curriculum Research and Development Division.

CRT : Criterion Reference Test

GES : Ghana Education Service.

L.1 : The local language spoken in a given location and not necessarily a mother tongue.

L.2 : A second language that has been adopted as an official or national language. In this study, English is the second language.


NEA : National Education Assessment

PMT : Performance Monitoring Test

QUATEM: QUIPS Achievement Test in English and Mathematics.

QUIPS: Quality Improvement in Primary School.

Rural : A location whose population is less than 5,000.

SACMEQ: Southern Africa Consortium for Educational Quality.

SBA : School-Based Assessment.
SEA : School Education Assessment
TIMSS: Third International Mathematics and Science Study.
Urban : Classification of location with a population size of 5,000 or more.
CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Increased access to education for all school-age children by the year 2015 is a cardinal objective of the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many countries, especially low income countries including Ghana, have therefore adopted policies to achieve this objective. Ghana’s constitutional obligation to provide Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) did not lead to the desired results (FCUBE Mid-Term Evaluation Report, 2002)? However, to ensure that targets are met by 2015, existing national affirmative action programmes, like the girl-child education drive and school feeding programmes, have been supplemented by specific additional interventions, notably, Education For All (EFA), Fast Track Initiatives (FTI) and the abolition of school fees and levies, otherwise known as the Capitation Grant Scheme (CGS). The latter initiatives have triggered a major surge in enrolment figures in public primary schools by about sixteen percent (16%). Consequently, it has become imperative that, after getting the children into school, there is the need to ensure that they receive relevant academic knowledge.

This is why, as a sequel to this development, there arose the need to ensure improvement in quality instruction which has become a major concern of educational reform movements across the world. A concern with quality immediately gives rise to the issue of assessment. Assessment is the process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students; to give feedback to the student about the
progress, strengths and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricula adequacy, and inform policy. Assessments are also intended to help the teacher to establish what the students already know and what they need to learn. It is as a result of this that a teacher would know what children are able to do or not able to do, and to plan accordingly.

Consequently, research into school assessment as an essential tool for effective teaching and learning has witnessed a tremendous increase in recent years (Assessment Support Group, 1999). This is why various reforms that have dominated the education scene in the last three decades propose the use of assessment as a critical factor to improve educational quality. According to Gipps (1994), “assessment results provide information on students’ learning achievement, problems and indicate needs for remediation”. Assessment is therefore a powerful tool for diagnosing learning problems to promote effective teaching and learning. The overarching purpose of assessment, therefore, “is to give teachers the information needed to provide quality instruction” (McMillan, 2001). In spite of the pivotal role assessment plays in the teaching and learning process, little is known about how pupils are assessed by their teachers (Kellaghan and Greaney, 2004). Indeed, there appears to be evidence that the quality of assessment may be deficient in many ways. Some of the problems that have been identified include the use of poorly focused questions, a predominance of questions that require short answers involving factual knowledge, the evocation of responses that involve repetition rather than reflection, and the lack of procedures designed to develop higher order skills (Black and William, 1998; Madaus and Kellaghan, 1992).
Research in assessment practices in Africa also reveals similar situations as stated above. The Kenyan study in relation to questioning during English language lessons reveals that questions were not asked in many lessons at all. Where questions were asked, they were the closed type. Closed questions are those that do not facilitate the development of higher order thinking; for example, “What is a noun?” It was further noted that there was little assessment of pupils’ understanding of previous English language lessons before new lessons were taught (diagnostic).

In Tanzania, a low taxonomic level questioning, which was described as mere recall of facts, was noted in primary classes. The pupils responded individually or in chorus to questions posed.

In a study that compared Ghanaian and Japanese classroom assessment (Hattori and Saba, 2008, cited in ESP Report 2009: 3) found that Ghanaian teachers asked mainly fact eliciting questions that demanded simple answers, unlike their Japanese counterparts.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The frequently asked question by policy-makers and other stakeholders in education today is: “Are pupils, as a result of being in school, acquiring the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes in the English Language?” This is a question that assessment outcomes are sometimes used in finding answers to.

The 2007 Education Sector Report has revealed that learning achievements especially in literacy, is very low. According to the report, only 16% of Ghana’s youth attain proficiency in literacy by primary six. The Report further revealed that teachers’ classroom assessments are not properly done. This is traced to the Continuous
Assessment (CA) scores obtained from the schools, which constitute 40% of the total scores needed for a candidate to pass the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The BECE is the only external examination administered in the first ten years of schooling, whilst end of term and end of year assessments for each grade are set and administered by the teachers. There is evidence that currently the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), which is the certifying body, does not accept wholesale Continuous Assessment (CA) scores since it appears there is no correlation between the CA results and the external assessment results, due to the lackadaisical and unprofessional manner in which the continuous assessment test and, for that matter, school tests are administered by teachers. Consequently, there have been threats of non-inclusion of CA results from the schools into the overall WAEC scores. As a compromise, therefore, CA marks are standardized before they are added to the external examination results. These complications between the external examining body and classroom teachers call for a close look at assessment practices in the schools. I believe that the findings of a research into national assessments, and how they are conducted, may inform education providers and managers to design new ways for their improvement, and ultimately improve instruction in the English language in the classroom.

1.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to conduct an in-depth investigation (using data collected from the opinions of key administrators and users of assessment results) into the various national assessment programmes in the English language, including those used in the past and those that are currently running in Ghana. This is in a bid to suggest how a
formative test in English for the primary school should be designed, and the subsequent use of the test results to improve instruction in English.

The study, hopefully, will be beneficial to future national/district assessment managers and students of educational measurement and assessment or psychometricians who wish to assess children’s performance in the English language.

1.3 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study aims at examining the various classroom and national assessments in English language that have been introduced in Ghana since the 1990s. The various assessment types that have been administered in Ghana will be reviewed. These include: the Performance Monitoring Test (PMT), the Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT), the Continuous Assessment (CA) {also referred to as the School – Based Assessment (SBA)} the National Education Assessment (NEA), and the School Education Assessment (SEA). It is instructive to note that, in all the above assessment types, the English language is a critical component.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

(i) To elicit the views of education managers, headteachers and teachers about the various assessment types that have so far been administered to pupils in Ghana and their opinions about how effectively their results have been utilized.
To examine the utilization of national assessment tests in English that have been conducted so far and their usefulness in English Language instruction to the Primary School teacher and pupil.

To suggest how a formative test in English (for the primary school) should be constructed/designated with good test items.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

The fundamental question to be answered by this study is:

To what extent do assessment reports impact on improving instruction in English in primary schools?

1.6 HYPOTHESIS

In an attempt to conduct a scientific study of the topic, the following assumption is made:

With the massive injection of Donor, NGO and Government of Ghana (GOG) funding of education and the resultant marked improvement in the provision of infrastructure and logistic support there should be a corresponding improvement in instructional delivery and learning outcomes which should positively impact on pupils’ competency levels in English.

1.7 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to two municipal educational directorates: – Madina – Abokobi and Adenta – and two schools from each educational directorate, taking into account their location: urban and rural.
1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter One gives the background and the general overview of the study. Chapter Two presents a review of related literature. A detailed description of the methodology employed in the study is provided in Chapter Three. Chapter Four has the results of the study and the discussion of the findings. Finally, Chapter Five captures the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the past and current assessment systems will be reviewed, based on their purpose, mode of administration, their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities they offer, the threats they are predisposed to, the mode of scoring, analyzing and reporting. But, before I turn attention to these matters, I will first of all look at the importance of language in the pursuit of academic knowledge, the concept of achievement, and then, academic achievement.

2.0 IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Language is one of man’s major means of expression. This is why it plays a cardinal role in a child’s formal and informal education. Bamgbose (1976), is of the view that, in formal education, the degree of mastery in the language of instruction influences school achievement considerably. Bamgbose (1991) further contends that language is, without doubt, the most important factor in the learning process for the transfer of knowledge or skills. Based on this viewpoint, it becomes imperative for more seriousness to be attached to the teaching/learning of English at the foundational level of the academic ladder, especially as it is the medium of instruction and assessment in our schools.

2.1 CONCEPT OF ACHIEVEMENT

Every human being’s ultimate desire is achievement. However, achievement has been given different definitions by many authorities. According to Sundberg (cited in Phares, 1979), achievement is associated with ability and aptitude, which constitute the
intelligence of an individual. In his view, ability is the current available power to perform a certain task, and aptitude is the potential for performance after training. Achievement is therefore a successful performance of a task, and aptitude is the potential for performance after training. Achievement involves skills that a person has mastered as a result of direct instruction (Hammil, 1967). Hammil further stresses that such skills exist in the individual who has had specific training from parents, a teacher or oneself. He concludes that in the school, achievement tests are mostly conducted to discover how much a student knows about a particular content or subject taught and can be attained as a result of instruction. (Nicholas (cited in Clarizio and Craig 1974). The definitions of achievement given by Sundberg, Spodak and Hammil indicate that achievement depends on one’s abilities and capabilities to perform certain tasks after a given instruction and that one’s achievement is determined through assessment.

2.2 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Academic achievement is what a student is able to achieve when s/he is tested on what s/he has been taught (Sprinthal and Sprinthal, 1990). Curzon (1997: 87) defines academic achievement as “one’s performance in school or college in a standardized series of educational tests.” This makes academic achievement a crucial variable in the academic field.

It is in response to the crucial nature of academic achievement that a number of studies have been conducted to determine the factors that affect achievement, for example, Anastasi (1984); Neisworth and Bagnato (1987). The identified factors are viewed from two perspectives. While some see academic achievement as the content of
the intellect and therefore project intelligence as its basis, others see it as the product of the psychomotor abilities of a person and thus emphasize skills.

Anastasi (1984) sees academic achievement as being determined by intelligence. However, linguists have also established a close link between intelligence and language by acknowledging that language and thought are inextricably linked (Lahey, 1998). This shows that language has influence on academic achievement. Therefore, if children are not proficient in the language of instruction, the quality and quantity of what they take in from the teacher’s curriculum materials and produce by oral and written means will relatively be impoverished (Baker, 1988). Cummins (1979) in his theory, which seeks to conceptualize the relationship between bilingual education and school attainment, establishes that bilingual education could be said to be successful when pupils have enough L2 proficiency to work in the context.

Neisworth and Bagnato 1987) also believe that academic achievement depends on gift and talent and assert that giftedness is not something that can be taught. Opposed to the stand that intelligence quotient (IQ) is an index to academic achievement are those who advocate for environmental factors as being responsible for academic achievement. Whimbley (cited in Hammil 1987) notes that academic achievement is not dependent on genetic endowment, such as intelligence, but it is acquired. This suggests that people acquire achievement through instruction.

Flanagan (quoted by Morris and Blatt 1986) asserts that academic achievement is measured in terms of how well above the norm or average an individual performs. This means that the factors or variables in which high performance is recognized are
relative and culturally determined. Fanagan and his associates assert that exhibition of high skills indicate potential for success.

Kirk and Galagher (1986) are of the view that the direction in which gifts and talents move depend on several factors such as experience, motivation, interest and self-concept. Perhaps this assertion supports Whimbley’s supposition because these factors directly or indirectly affect achievement (McClelland, 1971; Atkinson 1984; Lahey, 1998). For example, McClelland (1971), in his theory of achievement motivation, postulates that the primary factor for any level of achievement is the existing environmental cue which propels the individual into action. Thus, he is of the view that, if the school’s environment is not stimulating enough, the level of achievement and motivation will be low in an individual who lives in the milieu.

In addition, Atkinson (1984) also propounds a theory of achievement motivation, and asserts that the tendency to approach an achievement goal is a product of three factors: the need for achievement or the motive for success; the probability of success; and the incentive for success. He maintains that, if the goal is perceived as easy to attain, then the individual will have a high expectancy of succeeding. The opposite holds for a difficult task.

The discussions above show that achievement is influenced by both hereditary and environmental factors, which include what happens in the school environment, especially in the classroom.
2.3 INFLUENCE OF SOME SELECTED THEORIES ON ASSESSMENT

2.3.1 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Learning has been described as “a relative change in behaviour as a result of experience, training or practice,” (Reece & Walker 1997: 249). The implication is that teachers’ work in the classroom needs to be carefully planned with skills and attitudes, in order that students will gain the required experiences, and change appropriately. Curzon (1997: 21) describes teaching as “a system of activities intended to induce learning” and a deliberate and planned nature of teaching that differentiates its results from other incidental learning. Assessment, on the other hand, acts as a link between Teaching and Learning, by determining the extent to which learning has taken place.

The importance of assessment can be seen in fig I below:

![Diagram](http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh)

Fig. I. Assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning. (Adapted from Brown & Knight 1994:46)

Assessment takes place immediately teaching starts and pupils’ learning is very often assessment-driven (Cox and Harper, 2000 p.69). Researchers have shown that student learning is often driven by those aspects of the learning programme that are assessed. The importance of assessment in the teaching and learning process therefore cannot be
over-emphasized. From the diagram, it could be seen that assessment is not the only focus of classroom work. Cox and Harper further propose that assessment should not be viewed as evaluation, although some authors use them interchangeably. Assessment should have broad perspectives and can be described as the tools which are employed to measure learner achievement.

Other views identified suggest that assessment does not only measure learning but also promotes it. This claim, supported by William and Black (2004), further confirms the benefits of regular use of diagnostic and formative assessment. Teachers are seen here to be very instrumental to actually ensure that pupils’ learning is carefully monitored and to continually do the necessary adjustments to achieve the desired results. Sheppard (2001) also confirms this assertion that formative assessment should take place during instruction. He further explains that, when assessment is integrated with instruction, it informs teachers about their students, what activities and assignments will be most useful, what level of teaching is appropriate, and how summative assessments provide diagnostic information.

2.3.2 Learning

The traditional notion of learning viewed children as passive learners who store knowledge as a result of memorization (Althouse, 1994; Bezuk et al., 2001). In effect, most teachers have for some time resorted to the teaching of facts and rules thus enforcing memorization. The behaviourist approach applies the stimulus response theory where learning occurs when there is a bond between a certain stimulus, resulting in a corresponding response (Bezuk, et al, 2001). It has been argued that the more an established response is made, the more established the bond becomes. In this theory,
learners become passive. It is assumed that no thinking is done here as learners wait for an action before they act. This approach thus emphasizes drill.

The constructivists however, believe that learners construct their own learning. This implies that knowledge emerges (Althouse, 1994; Bezuk et al., 2001). The constructivist postulate that children construct their own understanding of concepts by means of mental activities or by interacting with physical models (Althouse, 1994; Bezuk et al., 2001). Teachers should therefore organize their teaching in such a way that will ensure that children are given the opportunity to form their own concepts through frequent verbal and written discourse.

2.3.3 Teachers’ and pupils’ perception of English Language teaching and learning

Research conducted in recent times into teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of teaching and learning context has shown a systematic association linking teachers’ perceptions and approaches with pupils’ perceptions, learning approaches and outcomes (Biggs, 1999; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999).

It is argued that teachers conceptualize and approach teaching in a limited number of qualitatively different but related ways. Notably, teachers who perceive learning as the accumulation of information are more likely to view teaching as transfer of information. Such teachers are more likely to use teacher-centred approach where the teacher imparts information to pupils and uses assessment techniques which encourage rote learning. In contrast, teachers who view learning as a conceptual change are likely to use a pupil-centred teaching approach where independence in learning is encouraged through
discussion, debate and questioning among pupils, and assessment which reveals conceptual change (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Teachers should therefore be concerned with the purpose of education and focus teaching in this direction.

2.4 Classroom dialogue

Classroom dialogue is usually missing in an examination driven classroom. In Ghana, many teachers seem to be in a hurry to meet the curriculum goals (MOESS 2008). Effective classroom dialogue is the one that provides space for pupils’ voices to be heard. According to Alexander (2004), it is through the context of classroom talk that educational meanings are most characteristically conveyed and explored. Dialogue becomes not just a feature of learning, but one of its most essential tools; hence, the need to promote its use. Pupils may feel free to engage in fruitful and active participation, voice out their sentiments and doubts in the classroom when the atmosphere is such that they are given enough space to operate. This has been confirmed by Amit and Fried (2005).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Research on assessment indicates that formative assessment improves learning. This has been confirmed by the reviews by Black and William (1998a) in a research in the United Kingdom (UK). The broad characteristics of formative assessment identified were – high and challenging task, a high classroom discourse and questioning, feedback, and the use of self and peer assessment. Their main contention was that any successful classroom practice that brings about quality of interaction between pupil and teacher is
the heart of pedagogy. It is evident that, in reality, different teachers use their own style in practicing formative assessment according to how they understand it (Alexander 2004).

A study done by Black and William (1998) used action research to illuminate teachers own practice of formative assessment, making them conscious of its use in the classroom. The action research would be a useful tool in making teachers themselves see and practice what works for them. The “Black Box” analogy used by Black and William to describe the classroom is of great concern; that, whilst putting much emphasis on filling the classroom with some inputs and expecting desired outcomes, the actual processes taking place in the classroom also need to be attended to. Motivated by these researches, I would like to situate my research in line with that of Hodgen et al (2005) whose research examined tools to promote formative assessment.

2.6 PAST AND CURRENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS IN USE IN THE GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

2.6.1 Continuous Assessment

Continuous Assessment (CA) has been in Ghanaian schools since 1988. Its purpose was to find out the level of mastery that a pupil had attained in knowledge, skills and attitudes, in order to diagnose weaknesses and strengths of pupils (learning) so that the teacher can give effective remedial tuition in the classroom. This will enable the
teacher to do the final assessment and classification of pupils over a given period of teaching and learning to provide positive results.

Its mode of administration was that it is a composite of scores calculated from pupils’ exercises, assignments, project work, class tests and end-of-term examination results. After every three weeks, the teacher added the marks in each category, found the average, and recorded the scores. Continuous Assessment was used throughout the pupil’s stay in school from Primary one (1) to JHS 3.

Its strengths lay in the fact that it made evaluation an important part of the teaching and learning process. It gave the teachers an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the assessment of their pupils.

It helped to give a more comprehensive picture of the pupils’ achievements than does a single final examination. It provided the basis for effective remedial and individualized teaching. Like any assessment tool, the CA helped teachers to assess the effectiveness of their teaching methods and materials. Finally, the CA facilitated appropriate guidance and counseling to the pupil in their personal development, learning and preparation for a career.

However, the CA had its weaknesses. These included the fact that its design was too complex. Also, the training given to teachers in its use was grossly inadequate. The computation and recording of scores demanded too much time and work from teachers. The teacher had to administer thirty-two (32) tasks in a year. Consequently, the teachers with the connivance of their heads might manufacture scores for their pupils to boost the
image of the school but which were not true reflections of the capabilities of the pupils concerned.

These false figures distorted the real capabilities of pupils since the final total CA marks, computed by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), constitute 30% of the final score at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), while the external examination took 70%. This constituted a very serious threat to the credibility, reliability and usefulness of the CA.

The complex nature of the Continuous Assessment notwithstanding, there was a general agreement that it should be modified and simplified for its real benefits to be derived. This, realization saw the introduction of the School – Based Assessment into the Ghana Education Service System.

The school – based assessment system requires teachers to record marks of pupils from time to time. It is aimed at helping the pupil to function at his own performance level and not a time test. This assessment type seeks to improve the pupil’s learning and motivation as he performs his projects and sees positive results.

The SBA system consists of 12 assessments a year instead of the 33 in the previous continuous assessment system.

> Tasks 1 – 4 are administered in Term I
> Tasks 5 – 8 are administered in Term II
> Tasks 9 – 12 are administered in term III
> Each of Tasks 1, 5 and 9 is administered as an individual test coming at the end of the first four (4) weeks of each term.

> Each of Tasks 2, 6 and 10 is administered as a group exercise and consist of two or three instructional objectives that the teacher considers difficult to teach and learn. Each is administered at the end of the eighth (8) week of each term.

> Task 3, 7 and 11 are administered as individual tests under the supervision of the class teacher at the end of the eleventh (11\textsuperscript{th}) or twelfth (12\textsuperscript{th}) week of each term.

> Task 4, 8 and 12 are administered as project work to be undertaken throughout the term and submitted at the end of the term. Schools will be supplied with nine projects divided into three topics for each term. A pupil is to select one project topic for each term.

> As part of SBA, teachers are expected to use class exercises and home work as processes for continually evaluating pupils’ class performance and as a means of encouraging improvement in learning performance.

### 2.6.2 Criterion – Referenced Test (CRT)

The Criterion – Referenced Test (CRT) was introduced into Primary Education in Ghana in 1992 as part of the USAID funded Primary Education Programme (PREP). The CRT sought to assess the performance of the primary education sub-sector with regard to mastery of the English Language component of the primary school curriculum.

It was administered once a year on a 5\% sample of P6 classes in both public and private schools. The private school sample was used as control.
The CRT test instruments covered all the objectives in the syllabus. It was comprehensive. The test instruments had strong validity and reliability and had well-developed reporting procedures. Further, the CRT consisted of ten parallel test forms, administered in such a way as to prevent pupils from copying from each other and it is taken simultaneously throughout the country.

Nevertheless, some weaknesses were identified in the CRT. First, the sample size of 5% of P6 classes nation-wide appeared to be too small and might not have been very representative. Second, the duration of the tests (one (1) hour) was too long for pupils aged between 11 and 13. Also, apart from the general official report that was issued on the results of the CRT annually, there was very little sharing of information on the way the test was administered. Generally, the reports on the test results were published very late.

It is worth noting that the Criterion-Referenced Test scores could be used to validate the Continuous Assessment and Performance Monitoring Test. However, the test suffered the threat of sustainability because funds were not readily made available for it to be administered each year as was envisaged. For example, in 1999, the CRT was not administered because of unavailability of funds. The Ministry of Education (MOE), which was to fund it from its annual budgetary allocation, was unable to do so. Eventually, the MOE had to borrow funds from the World Bank to conduct both the 2000 and 2001 CRT. That saw the demise of the CRT in Ghana’s assessment programme.
2.6.3 PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (PPM)

The Participatory Performance Monitoring (PPM) consisted of:

(i) Performance Monitoring Test (PMT)

(ii) School Performance Appraisal Meeting (SPAM).

The purpose of the PMT was to monitor, on a yearly basis, progress or otherwise being made in learning achievements through the administration of tests in English and Mathematics in every public primary School from Primary 1 to Primary 6.

The School Performance Appraisal Meeting (SPAM) on the other hand sought to discuss the performance of individual schools in the annual Performance Monitoring Test (PMT), set new performance targets, and design strategies for attaining the set targets.

It was based at the Inspectorate Division of the Ghana Education Service Headquarters. The Division actually developed the PPM concept with technical and financial support from the DFID. It was also responsible for the training of the Test Administrators. In the regions, the Regional Education Offices were responsible for the coordination and monitoring of the test administration. The districts were responsible for implementing the administration of the test.

The PMT was organized once in a year on a 25% sample of pupils in each class from Primary 1-6 in all public primary schools in Ghana. In 2001, this was replaced with a sample of 20 pupils in each class which represents a larger percentage in participation for each school than the previous one.

The PMT was an achievement test in English and Mathematics, very simple in nature and strictly based on the relevant syllabuses and textbooks.
The strength of the Participatory Performance Monitoring was derived from the fact that information on it (the Test) was widely disseminated to stakeholders particularly those at decentralized levels through:

- the publication of an ‘Operational Manual’ for the Participatory Performance Monitoring concept;
- Organization of workshops and seminars for test administrators and other stakeholders;
- Conduct of SPAM at district, circuit, community and school levels.

Additionally, the Participatory Performance Monitoring succeeded in providing, for the first time, credible information on learning achievements of pupils in all public primary schools class by class and school by school.

The PPM created considerable awareness of quality issues in education among the general public. It also provided additional basis for identifying both performing and non-performing teachers for appropriate action. It served as a catalyst for generating healthy competition among schools and communities. The Participatory Performance Monitoring was cost-effective. For example, the unit cost in 1998 was ₵70,000.00 (GHC7.00) and rose to only ₵180,000.00 (GHC18.00) in 2000.

There was a general acceptance of the PPM concept by educational administrators, school communities, and indeed all stakeholders. The PPM served as opportunity for capacity building in test development and administration in the districts. The PPM’s sustainability was threatened by the lack of funding from the Government of Ghana. Where funds were released, they were released very late.
Poor communities were not able to generate funds locally for Performance Monitoring Test and School Appraisal Meetings in the absence of central government or donor funding. Incidents of test malpractices detected in some districts constituted a threat to the integrity and validity of the Performance Monitoring Test.

2.6.4 RATIONALE FOR A UNIFIED NATIONAL ASSESSMENT FORMAT

Continuous Assessment (CA), Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT), Participatory Monitoring Test (PMT), all past assessment systems, constituted an integral part of the teaching and learning process. All of these systems were based on the primary school curricula. They all sought ways of assessing the school curriculum in diverse ways. The strengths and challenges of the past assessment systems are indications of the need to have a National Assessment that will, among others, unify the systems into a formidable one with least challenges. For this, a National Education Assessment invited a more coordinated system of evaluation, a standardized and effective system which can put all pupils of our schools on one scale of measurement.

Everbu (1985: 64-70) asserts that curriculum evaluation does two things:

(i) it informs decision – makers on the state of affairs of certain curriculum programmes or syllabuses; and

(ii) enables teachers to evaluate themselves and the children they teach.

Curriculum evaluation could also create awareness among stakeholders and communities of the level of achievement of their schools as they are encouraged to do their part in helping with teaching and learning. It was therefore envisaged that a national assessment
system should be administered to apprise stakeholders of the strengths and weaknesses in the education system.

2.6.5 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT (NEA)

According to Kellaghan & Greaney (2004), an examination of National Assessments across the world reveals a number of motivations for carrying out National Assessments:

(i) National Assessments are carried out with the intention of raising standards.

(ii) National Assessments, when carried out, help to maintain standards.

(iii) They provide information that can be used to aid decisions about the allocation of resources.

(iv) National Assessments are carried out to obtain information that can be used to assign accountability for student performance.

(v) To alter the balance of control in an education system, a test may be used to ensure that what is taught in schools is less dependent on central authorities that mandated the assessment and the professional judgment of teachers.

(vi) To compensate for the poor assessment practice of teachers.
In a bid to adopt the dynamics of the National Education Assessment in the global education arena, Ghana has put in place an initiative that seeks to improve the implemented and attained curricula in English and Mathematics in the basic schools. This initiative is referred to as the Ghana Basic Education Comprehensive Assessment System (BECAS). The BECAS is a new assessment system that seeks to replace the national tests: the Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) and Performance Monitoring Test (PMT) instituted in the 1990s to monitor pupils’ achievement and progress in English and Mathematics.

The BECAS has been instituted to address the Ministry of Education’s Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2005:14) objective QE6 which states, “to develop a reliable pupil/student/learner testing and assessment system”. It is envisaged that it will provide quality information to the Ministry, the Development Partners, the Ghana Education Service, teachers and parents in a bid to improve instruction. The BECAS is made up of three assessment components: National Education Assessment (NEA) which I will, for distinction (from the World Bank Institute’s programme), refer to in this essay as the Ghana NEA; School Education Assessment (SEA) and Continuous Assessment/School-Based Assessment (SBA).

2.6.6 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT (NEA)

The main objective of the National Education Assessment, as currently administered, is to obtain information that can be used to assess the curriculum in order to assign accountability for student performance. (It is also to provide an educational context for interpreting the achievement results by the use of questionnaires). It serves as
a national indicator for education quality, programme and policy formulation and evaluation and reflects the overall quality of the educational system.

It assesses only Primary School children, specifically P3 and P6, in Literacy (English) and Numeracy (Mathematics) in sampled schools. At the pupils’ level, the NEA considers what is actually taught (Implemented curriculum) and how much of that is learned by the pupils (attained curriculum).

With regards to its purpose at the school level, the Ghana NEA considers the school as the institution through which the goals of the curriculum are implemented. Curriculum implementation can be facilitated by allocating the total facilities and material resources as well as human resources (teachers, parents, heads) necessary to achieve specified learning goals. The purpose of the Ghana NEA is trying to find out how available human and material resources are being utilized to enable the goals of the curriculum to be achieved effectively by both pupils and teachers.

Consequently, the Ghana NEA will address: “the minimum and desirable mastery level of achievement of the curriculum in English and Mathematics by the pupils, the ability of the classroom teacher to deliver lessons that could help pupils achieve mastery over aspects of the curriculum and those aspects of the curriculum that need to be looked at.” (Mereku, 2005). Cited in the Daily Graphic Page 8, of 24/06/2005).

2.6.7 School Education Assessment (SEA)

The SEA test is a minimum – competency-based test that reflects the “essential elements of the curriculum considered basic” (BECAS Report, 2005:3). These essential elements in curriculum are referred to as core objectives. Core objectives are defined as
“those objectives that a child at a particular grade level must achieve in order to be ready for the next level of schooling”. (BECAS Report, 2005:24). At the moment, the SEA is administered to pupils in Primary 2 and Primary 4. However, due to financial constraints, participation of primary 6 pupils has been put on hold. Since it is a nationwide test and which must be taken simultaneously in every sampled school, the headteachers and their assistants are expected to work together to administer the test in each school.

The test covers all content domains in the subject at each level and contains both multiple-choice and constructed-response items. In the latter, students are given no options, but are expected to write down their own answers to open-ended questions. The Primary 2 tests comprise fifteen (15) multiple-choice items and five (5) constructed-response items, whilst that of Primary 4 comprises thirty (30) multiple-choice items and ten (10) constructed-response items. The multiple-choice and constructed response items are scored 60% and 40% respectively. The test is designed to serve a diagnostic purpose in the sense that the results will show the areas of the curriculum in which the pupils’ strength and weaknesses lie. The teacher can then take the necessary remedial measures to improve the situation during the process of instruction. It is also expected that schools will use the results to make conscious effort to improve the implemented curricula in order to increase attainment in the subject and the whole school system.

It must be emphasized that the test is not meant to compare performance of pupils across schools or districts (ie. generate schools’ performance league tables). Also, it is anticipated that, besides its diagnostic purpose, subsequent SEA tests will provide schools with information on how well they are improving each year. The Ghana NEA
and SEA test items were developed by a group of experienced educators made up of the following: staff from the Academy for Educational Development (AED) (an American NGO in education); ASU/CRDD staff and other senior officers from the GES; a Technical Working Group (TWG) consisting of subject officers and representatives from WAEC, the GATE; UCC and UEW experts in educational measurement and evaluation and English Education, and foreign consultants in psychometrics and item bank development.

The items were trial-tested with the help of Circuit Supervisors in selected districts. The piloted items were analyzed and further revised where necessary. Several parallel items have been developed and stored in an item bank. The items have since been uploaded onto the internet and it is anticipated that educators in the districts will be able to assemble new tests from these items in subsequent years. As new items are developed, they will be stored in the item bank by the Assessment Services Unit (ASU).

Circuit Supervisors from the district offices monitor headteachers in the administration of the test and take delivery of test materials at Circuit Centres within twenty-four (24) hours after the administration of the test. The Circuit Supervisor is expected to mark (or oversee the marking) of the test in their circuits and return the marked multiple-choice and constructed-response answer sheets to the respective schools for analysis of strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher in turn returns summaries of pupils’ responses on each of the options provided for the multiple-choice items to the Circuit Supervisor. He is also expected to write a brief report of the results and discuss them with the Circuit Supervisor for the sake of remedial action and improved instruction. The Circuit Supervisor writes a summary of the schools’ reports on the
overall performance of his/her circuit on the test and sends it to the district education office. District summaries of the results are sent to the Regional Office and the Assessment Services Unit (ASU) for further analyses.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

“If we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures ….The spirit and style of student assessment defines the de-facto curriculum”. (Rowntree 1987:1).

In this chapter, I discuss the various aspects that contributed to my research inquiry. In designing any research, there are two aspects that need to be taken into consideration – Qualitative or Quantitative Research and the Methodology to be used in the data collection for either of them.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are used differently in research. In qualitative research, respondents are allowed to express their views on the phenomenon being discussed in a flexible and in-depth manner, whilst in quantitative research, respondents are limited and have no opportunity to express in-depth opinions. My choice for qualitative as against quantitative research was also motivated by the statement by Myers (2004:66) that “If there is one thing to distinguish humans from the natural world, it is our ability to talk”. Qualitative research methods are designed to allow researchers to understand people in their social and cultural contexts in which they live. It could be argued therefore that this rich understanding of the phenomenon in its particular social and institutional context could be lost when data is quantified. Hence, the interview approach was adopted to elicit views from teachers in a more natural environment that will enable a more relaxed and fruitful conversation.
The interview approach was chosen as it has been found to be the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2008). A similar view that has been expressed by Patton (1987) is that it is one of the commonest and most flexible data collection tools used in educational research. I therefore decided on the semi-structured interview approach to give respondents the opportunity to provide their views and give in-depth insights that add texture and flexibility to the rather rigid nature of quantitative research.

In fact, I adopted the epistemological position in my research. Hirchheim, (1992 cited in Myres, 2009) describes epistemology as the assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained. Burrell and Morgan (1985) explain epistemology to mean how one might understand the world and communicate that understanding to others as it deals with perception and the relationship between the researcher and what is known. This paradigm accepts subjective views of individuals which is interpretive to the researcher, to understand the subjective world of human experience, and to get to the inside of the respondent (Cohen et al, 2007). I therefore, consider the interpretive paradigm very useful for respondents to express their own views about the current assessment practice. My strategy was to ensure that the data was devoid of any external influence by giving out any clues by way of leading questions or imposing my ideas on them. This was a challenge, but respondents were allowed to freely express their sentiments which sometimes even went beyond the stipulated time we had mutually agreed upon.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress that qualitative research methods are designed for use in uncovering and understanding what lies behind any phenomenon which, in the case of this research, is an assessment system about which not much is known and seen
by way of results. The subjectivist or interpretivist methodology was preferred because this paradigm calls a greater amount of flexibility in research design and data collection which allows the researcher to gain insight into the views and opinions of the implementers of the system in their own context.

3.2 Method Used

Among the variety of data collection methods in vogue, interview is one kind that fosters one-on-one interaction with the respondent. It facilitates an immediate follow-up for clarification. It provides contextual information and is useful in uncovering respondent’s perspectives. It is also good for obtaining data on non-verbal behaviour and communication. However, the interview method which uses a guide as the instrument for data collection is prone to some limitations, such as being open to misinterpretation, due to cultural differences between the interviewer and interviewee. It is readily open to ethical dilemmas and dependent on respondent’s openness, honesty and the circumstances of the interviewee at the particular moment of the interview. Nonetheless, the researcher’s interpersonal skills, vigilance and skillfulness in conducting interviews are often used to minimize any bias that this method can cause (Kvale, 1996).

3.3 DESIGNING THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Before embarking on the instrument design, the purpose, objectives and research questions were examined critically in order to obtain appropriate instruments that would address the issues raised. There was the need to obtain the information to identify the audience, noting their social and educational backgrounds. This was to provide a fair idea about the respondents and how to choose and frame interview questions using the
appropriate vocabulary. I was also guided by the thorough literature search and readings and personal interaction with some teachers as well as my colleagues.

I chose the semi-structured interview method instead of questionnaires for the following reasons:

* The outline of questions is written down to guide the interview.

* In a survey, respondents are unable to express themselves or give an opinion about the issues at stake. Interviews are more discursive in nature and allow full participation of participants. By this method and the interactive approach, it allows participants the opportunity to express their views.

* There is no pre-defined structure; hence, participants have the opportunity to give detailed responses that enable the researcher to follow the direction of the participants. Therefore, the researcher has the opportunity to observe the physical and emotional behavior of the participants as the interview progresses, which cannot be obtained when using the quantitative method.

* It addresses questions differently from those addressed by quantitative research, and perceived problems are identified. The researcher remains open and flexible to allow possible concepts and variables to emerge differently from those that may be predicted earlier.

I decided to use the one–on–one interview method, instead of the focus group discussion method, bearing in mind the limitations associated with the focus group discussions, especially the dominance of the head teacher / Circuit Supervisor/ Municipal Director of Education (MDE) in the Ghanaian educational setting. I also preferred this approach as it allowed for confidentiality to each interviewee which paved the way for
openness for each person during the interview to obtain quality data. In fact, Assessment issues may not be interesting to discuss in public by teachers and educational managers; therefore, my aim was to open the discussion and explore in-depth issues on the topic being discussed and investigate in detail to uncover new areas and ideas that have not been anticipated.

3.4 INTERVIEWING

For the semi-structured interview, I used a series of open-ended questions that provided opportunity for the individual respondent to discuss the research topic in more detail with me. The purpose of the interview was explained to respondents. Where the respondents faced difficulty, I provided cues or prompts that egged them on to give further thought to the questions posed. I had already planned and identified areas that would be addressed in advance; yet I was also interested in and anticipated some new ideas on the topic from respondents. Nevertheless, I tried to cover all the key issues as planned for the interview within the limited time at my disposal.

I had to sustain and maintain the motivation during the interview to avoid boredom. I was able to establish a good rapport with effective eye contact and gestures which raised their confidence level and provided the necessary feedback from respondents. I had to constantly draw respondents’ attention to the interview topic anytime I suspected a digression. I managed to break the power asymmetries and barriers relating to my status as the interviewer/researcher and my professional status as a Senior Officer at the Ghana Education Service. As a result of the heat in the classrooms and the office of the head teacher, all the interviews were conducted under a tree behind the
classroom block. Yet, we encountered a series of interruptions from the teachers and pupils who traced their head teacher to ask questions or to collect something from him.

3.5 Identity and Negotiating Access

Kvale (1996) discussed the identity and role of the researcher in a research environment familiar to the researcher. He is of the view that an individual’s identity in relation to a research topic can influence the research process. He argues that, when informants can identify themselves experientially with the researcher, especially in sensitive issues, their fears and inhibitions are allayed and they are able to engage in informative talk with the researcher. This comes from empathic understanding between the researcher and the researched. For Kvale, it is not only the manner in which the field process is managed that matters, but also the position of the researcher in the research.

Being aware of my identity as a senior officer at the Ghana Education Service, Headquarters and its potential of limiting my access to informants who would be prepared to give information without feeling intimidated, I negotiated access through the Municipal Directors of Education (MDE). I formally wrote and requested to interview some officers at the Municipal Education Offices (MEO) and selected teachers in selected schools in the Ga East Municipal Education and the Adentan Municipal Education Directorates, and also the Nkwantanang M/A Primary School and the Presbyterian Primary School, Ashalley Botwe. I stated the purpose and the significance of the study and assured the interviewees of absolute confidentiality, anonymity and requested for their informed consent which was later obtained. These formalities were
employed to allay any anxieties and concerns and to build trust in any future engagements.

3.6 Plan and Conduct of the Interviews

Once access was negotiated through the MDE’s, I obtained the telephone numbers of all prospective respondents and made direct contacts with each one of them, explaining the purpose of the study to them. “People who agree to be interviewed deserve some consideration and so the researcher will need to fit in with their plans, however inconvenient they may be for you” (Bell, J. 2005:167). As a result of this, I requested for their preferences before finalizing my schedule.

Mindful of my identity, and further to put my interviewees at ease, I decided not to tape record the interviews. I scheduled all the interviews in a way that allowed me to have at least a two-hour break between each interview, thus giving me ample time to write out the discourse between me and the respective interviewees immediately after the engagement.

3.7 Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to select interviewees for the one-on-one interviews. These are ‘rich in information’ interviewees who are critical to the research questions of the study and are representative of the population. According to Patton, ‘validity, meaningfulness and insight generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with information – richness of the cases selected than with sample sizes” Patton, M.Q., (1997:61). In fact, access to informants with authentic views to inform the research must be considered. A sample size of 10 was used in the study comprising: 2MDEs, 2AD Supervisors, 2 Circuit Supervisors (CSs), 2 Headteachers (HTs) and 2
Classroom teachers (CTs). All these have direct experience with the various types of assessments in the school. For instance, the Municipal Director of Education (MDE) provides the overall oversight responsibility and support for the National and School assessments; the Assistant Director (Supervision) drives the programme of assessments in the schools in the municipality, the Circuit Supervisor trains and monitors the headteachers and classteachers in his/her circuit in the administration of the various types of assessments, and the headteacher and the classteacher ensure the effective administration of the assessment tests in the classroom (especially the CA/SBA) and the use of the test results. The interview questions appear in Appendix I.
CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF DATA

This chapter analyses the extent to which assessments and their reports impact on the effective teaching and learning of the English Language in Ghanaian schools based on the views of sampled teachers and educational administrators in the study areas. Various literature in assessment practice over the last few years and which have consistently emphasized the pivotal role of assessment in providing quality education have been consulted. Also, official documents and records e.g. NEA, SEA and CA reports and results have been very useful.

Nevertheless, it is instructive to note that, from both the design and data collected, I considered it expedient to manage the discussions from perspectives:- to discuss the use of assessment results to improve the teaching and learning of the English Language from the perspective of the education managers, the headteachers, and the teachers.

This arrangement has been influenced by my realization that, in interviewing people who belong to various groupings; they come across with views that reflect their distinct points of view. It is important for these to be identified, especially from the policy perspective, to enable future policy on assessment in Ghanaian Schools to accommodate these contextual concerns.

Responses from the headteachers, teachers and educational managers interviewed on the relationship between assessment and quality education delivery were in line and congruent with what is found in the literature consulted. It became crystal clear from the qualitative data analyzed that the role of assessment in education has evolved from that of
a mere annual or termly academic ritual, that educators use to promote learners from one grade level to the other, to a broader one of using assessment to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom. The responses of the respondents on each of the questions asked during the interviews will now be discussed.

At the end of the discussions, an attempt will be made to pull together the commonalities and differences that emerge from these different perspectives and what kind of conclusions can be drawn. Although it was not clear from this study whether or not all of the educators interviewed fully understood why schools were made to participate in the various assessment programmes, all of them came up with suitable explanations for assessment. During the interviews, however, assessment was continuously referred to as either ‘test’, ‘examination’, ‘weekly exercise/test’, or ‘class exercise’. It is worth noting that an interview guide with ten (10) questions was eventually used: (ref. Appendix 1).

4.1 How long have you been teaching in the Ghana Education Service?

Respondents’ answers to this question were very interesting. While the two headteachers had served the GES for periods ranging between thirty (30) and thirty-three (33) years respectively, the two municipal directors and one of the circuit supervisors had served for periods ranging between nineteen (19) and twenty – seven (27) years. The two teachers had been in the GES between eight (8) and sixteen (16) years respectively. The difference in position/rank vis – a – vis the number of years in the employ of the service explains the premium the GES places on higher education i.e. tertiary education/university. The fact is that, by this arrangement, one is tempted to conclude
that one gets promoted faster with a higher qualification, which is a motivation for teachers to aspire to get university education.

4.2 Respondents, particularly, the two Municipal Directors of Education (MDES) and the two headteachers (HTs) were asked to indicate their periods of tenure as heads of the Municipal Education Directorates and schools respectively. While the two directors had only short periods of three and five years experience respectively, the head teachers had been heads for periods ranging between eight and sixteen years. The teachers interviewed had taught for periods ranging between two and thirteen years. The circuit supervisors had been at post between four and seven years. The respondents’ number of years spent at their various positions gives the impression that they have had a feel of one type of assessment or the other.

4.3 Reacting to the question: Have you heard of BECAS before? An important finding was that both directors of education, their circuit supervisors and the two teachers from the urban schools had a clear understanding of BECAS and what it entails. Nevertheless, the two teachers from the rural schools were ignorant of the term, but had participated in all the assessment types before.

The following is what one of them said: "As for us, we are not introduced to any terms. All that we know is, the Circuit Supervisor comes to the school and tells us to prepare the children to write a test prepared by the Accra people". This brings to the fore the often-held perception that the rural teacher might not be current in educational matters and this ignorance could further be transferred to the classroom. This finding
might also explain the reasons for the wide divide between the knowledge base of the urban school-child and the rural school-child. After all, the Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops are usually conducted in the urban centres and by the time the training filters down to the rural schools, the knowledge had been adulterated and watered down. This may partly explain why the urban school child is often ahead of the rural school child academically.

4.4 Has your school or municipality ever participated in any BECAS assessment tests? All the respondents gave positive answers to this question. One of the respondents remarked thus:

"It is impossible to leave us out of this national exercise especially looking at it from the backdrop of the fact that we are next door to Accra which houses the headquarters of the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service”.

A circuit supervisor from the rural municipality also commented thus: "We are always used by the authorities in Accra as guinea-pigs to test their hypotheses or anecdotal evidence".

These responses appear to emphasize that national exercises are actually carried out even in the nooks and crannies of the country. These responses are actually a pointer to the fact that the assessment programmes that are being run in the country are national in character.
4.5 To the question: **Was your class involved?** All the teachers answered in the affirmative.

4.6 **How did your class/pupils fare in the test?**

One could see from the teachers’ non-verbal reactions to this question, a sign of anger and frustration. All the respondents gave, “I can’t tell” for the answer. When encouraged to explain their stance, they all, as if they had rehearsed the answer, said they did not have access to the pupils’ answer scripts, hence, they were unable to tell how badly or well they performed. What is more, the overall performance is analyzed on district bases. Consequently, no individual school could claim to have done well or badly. The difficult areas/topics were also identified on district basis. A municipal director commented as follows: “The present situation as it makes SPAM activities to be based on problems identified on district basis and not on school basis”.

4.7 **How did the test results impact on the teaching and learning in your school?**

The reactions to this question were very interesting since respondents had contrasting views on it. The two Directors of Education were unanimous in their positive stance. One of them remarked thus:

"If the results of the assessment tests are good, we encourage the teachers through their headteachers and circuit supervisors to work harder. However, if the results turn out to be bad, we meet with the circuit supervisors and sometimes with the headteachers to strategize to improve teaching and learning,"

However, the circuit supervisors, the headteachers and the teachers thought otherwise. A head-teacher suddenly jumped at me and in a rising tone commented in this regard:
"Officer, what type of correction can a child do if his marked exercise is not shown to him to see his mistakes to convince himself that he was indeed wrong?"

"We don’t even see the marked scripts of our children to check on the type of mistakes they (the pupils) have made to warrant the marks they have been awarded," a teacher quipped.

A circuit supervisor sarcastically chipped in thus:

"Look, my brother, even computers fail. We hear even spacecrafts often miss their landing targets, so please forget about computer marking and other stuff. It is possible that mistakes in marking will occur even with computers." From the comments above, it appears the results that are declared, without the pupils and teachers seeing the actual marked scripts, have been a disincentive to the teachers, and the pupils. If the tests are designed to be formative, then they are a non-starter since they help neither the teacher nor the pupil to identify and correct their mistakes. It is also possible that the marking had been improperly carried out even by the computer. After all, the computer slogan that, “garbage in, garbage out." holds true here.

4.8 In answer to the question as to whether in their opinion, assessment tests should be sustained or scrapped the responses here too were varied and interesting.

The two Municipal Directors and their Circuit Supervisors, except one, were in support of the sustainability of the assessment tests. They contended that it is the surest way of determining the standard of education service delivery, as espoused by researchers, as quoted in my literature review in chapter 2 of this study.
A Municipal Director observed that: "The only yardstick that can be used to measure the qualitative delivery of education and hence, teaching/learning is through assessment. After all, assessment seeks to measure the quality of teaching and learning that has taken place or is taking place."

An Assistant Director in charge of Supervision also had this to say:

"You take away assessment, and teaching and learning dies. In my view, the mere mention of an impending test administration pushes the teachers to work extra hard and ultimately pushes the pupils to also work hard. In fact, you take away assessment, and you destroy the very foundations of quality education service delivery"

One Circuit Supervisor also quipped in thus: "Assessment tests help us to distinguish between the hardworking and the lazy teachers".

The thrust of these responses confirms the educators’ belief in assessment as being the key axis on which quality education revolves. The import of the responses points to the fact that the high premium educators place on the value of assessment triggers their desire to establish a sound basis for effective teaching and learning. The education managers are motivated to support the assessment of learners as it seeks to improve the quality of education through its innate capabilities as a formative tool.

However, the other group, consisting of one circuit supervisor, the headteachers and the teachers had clearly negative views towards the tests, as they perceive them as additional work being added to an already full schedule. The following observations from some of the respondents were revealing:
"How do you declare test/assessment results in vacuum? Where are the marked scripts to justify and convince the pupils that they indeed had their answers right or wrong? The teachers need to know whether they have to change or maintain the existing methodology they are using in the classrooms (A Circuit Supervisor).

"In so far as the marked scripts are not sent to us for us to see our shortcomings in both content and pedagogy, I believe this is only an attempt to keep us busy in school. The tests do not solve any problems in their current state. They rather create problems for effective teaching and learning" (A Headteacher).

"Master, the big men in Accra only want to give us more work. How can we teach well if we don’t see or know our strengths and/or our mistakes? Massa, we want to see the marked scripts "filli-fillii” but not ‘419’ results. How can one name or identify a featherless bird? I seriously don’t think the tests are of any educational value" (A Teacher).

4.9 How can we improve the quality and usefulness of the tests be improved?

All the respondents, as a result of their vast and varied experiences in test administration and how they are scored, were almost unanimous in their responses. For instance, a Municipal Director had this to say about how the quality of the tests can be improved: “If the quality of a test is measured by the degree to which each component of a test contributes to the successful administration of the test, then I think the process of training the large numbers of Test Administrators (TAs) at one centre at the same time is unproductive, ineffective and not cost – effective. I think such trainings should be done in batches of much smaller numbers to enhance their effectiveness”.
The Director’s concern here implies that if the essence of the test is to find out how much knowledge the child has acquired in English Language over a given period of time, then supervision and invigilation of the test must be of high standard. This observation justifies the perception that most often, the supervision of the tests is poorly done, leading to collusion and other malpractices during their administration.

This condition obviously cannot give a true picture of what the testees really know and what the test sets out to investigate. From the responses on this question, it appears the classroom teachers’ problems in the area of Continuous Assessment tests still persist. A teacher commented in this regard: “Officer, I seriously think that, not until adequate methods are put in place to improve the administration of the Continuous Assessment tests, no ‘formative teaching’ can ever take place. When pressed to explain his position, he explained his stance as follows:

“There must be adequate provision of standard test items, in-service training of teachers in Continuous Assessment (CA), and effective supervision of teachers in the conduct of CA: timely supply of inputs, and reduction in class sizes”

This observation brings to the fore the deficiency of the classroom teacher in the administration of standard assessment tests in English Language. The absence of regular in-service training of teachers of English in the writing of reliable and valid test items derived from lessons taught, cutting down on the huge class sizes, especially in the urban centres and the effective supervision of the conduct of CA in schools, which is currently done by the HT, who himself is usually a classroom teacher.

A Circuit Supervisor who sighed with frustration remarked thus:
“We have always advised and appealed to them (teachers) to conduct the tests (Continuous Assessment), but the response is not as encouraging as we would have wished. They appear to lack confidence in its administration”.

This assertion by the CS is a clear manifestation of the lack of confidence in the classroom teacher in the area of effective test administration due to the lack of regular in-service training. This can also be attributed to the additional complaints of Continuous Assessment being tedious to administer.

4.10 **Are assessment tests useful to quality education delivery?**

All the respondents were positive in their responses that the tests are very useful but this can be realized on condition that certain activities are carried out. A Municipal Director of Education reinforced this view by declaring that:

“Indeed, if teachers and other local stakeholders are to take the tests seriously and the children to benefit from them, there should be regular School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) in each town/village to discuss the children’s performance after the declaration of each assessment test results. After these meetings, teachers will see the need to remedy the mistakes identified”

According to a Circuit Supervisor:

“Assessments and their resultant SPAMS are useful in so far as they keep the parents and the community abreast with the children’s performance. The results of the final BECE will not surprise anybody in the community after these meetings”.
These sentiments are indicative of the psychological pressure that comes to bear on the teachers and the children to work extra hard to reverse the trend if the performance is low, or maintain or raise it further if the performance is high.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY

The study sought to investigate the views of some educators on how assessments in English language can positively influence the teaching and learning of English in Ghanaian public schools.

The findings confirm that assessment is sine qua non to quality education delivery. Pupil assessment at the classroom level using the Continuous Assessment (CA) through the Performance Monitoring Test (PMT), Criterion – Referenced Test (CRT), National Education Assessment (NEA), School Education Assessment (SEA) and finally to the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) have existed and been administered in Ghanaian schools for many years.

Unfortunately, however, the results that are declared do not specifically inform the testees and their teachers of the specific items that testees answered wrongly for any remediation to take place. Teachers, students, educational managers and other stakeholders are regularly bombarded with statistical tables, graphs and bar charts in an attempt to explain the performance of the testees but the ultimate result is not being achieved. As an immediate measure, the CA should be made to curb this problem and this is why teachers should be given sufficient orientation in the conduct of the SBA, especially in the area of setting good test items. (see appendices 2,3,4,5 and 6.)
It also appears from the findings that many classroom teachers, especially from the rural areas, do not understand the tests and therefore do not appreciate the essence of the tests.

Consequently, they cheat by inventing marks for their children or assisting them during the test instead of allowing them to work on their own to enable them make their own mistakes for remediation. Teachers are also clamouring for regular in-service training to enable them write good test items. (see appendices 2 and 3).

The Municipal Directors, Circuit Supervisors, Headteachers and Teachers interviewed agreed that there were other socio-economic factors, apart from classroom practices, that influence children’s academic performance. These factors must also be addressed if indeed the government is committed to improving the instructional delivery in the classrooms. The study has also shown that insofar as the items used in assessments are not meticulously analyzed before they are administered, no formative teaching can take place, even after assessment.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The study, according to opinions of some critical stakeholders in education, has shown that assessment reports that have been produced have not had any serious impact on instruction in the English Language in the Primary Schools.

The charts, graphs, terminologies are meaningless to the uninitiated because they do not inform any reader about the true strengths and weaknesses of the testee. For instance, what are the criteria for determining minimum competency and proficiency levels of a test? These are not usually stated. Assessment in itself does not improve the educational
system but it is the uses to which the results are put that matter. The National Educational Assessment merely reflects what is going on within the educational system. Performance in the English language is crucial for national development because it is pivotal in the media of Science and Technology.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure that the errors of testees are identified, the test items should be coupled with the socio-economic backgrounds of testees. For instance, a child from a literate background will have a headstart in English language acquisition. On the other hand, a child from a non-literate background will have to be helped by the teacher to catch up with the child from the literate home. Teachers’ minds should be disabused of the perception that national assessments are competitive, to prevent them from helping the children to cheat during their administration.

With regard to the national assessment tests (and even for school assessments), the results should be analyzed on classroom basis at the district level to enable each teacher keep track of teaching and learning challenges in his or her class. The identified pedagogical challenges facing teachers are to be used as the basis for In-service Training (INSETS) while the learning challenges and strengths of pupils are to be used for remediation, enrichment, counseling and school community factor analysis, through the conduct of School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM).

It is recommended that sustained in-service training programmes in assessment practice for teachers be put in place. The training should emphasize the following:
a) Preparation of good lesson plans with specific objectives; standard test items;-
construction principles, preparation of item specification table, test item
construction, etc.

b) The District/Municipal/Metropolitan Examination Officer should be trained
in test construction, test administration and monitoring of the SBA in the
district.

c) In view of the fact that some trained teachers said they were not confident in
using it, it is recommended that the School – Based Assessment course in Colleges of
Education (Training Colleges) stands on its own as a core subject, rather than making it
an aspect of the Education course.

Since Assessment is an important component of the education system, it is
necessary to develop the capacity of teachers and other actors in education delivery to
implement it properly to achieve the national goals and objectives of education. This, to
my mind, can be achieved during teachers’ pre-service training or through intensive in-
service orientations. (see appendices 2 – 6).
REFERENCES


Ministry of Education, Science and Sports Document Capitation Grant Scheme, Mid – Year Report, 2006 Pg.6


APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR RESPONDENTS

1. How long have you been teaching in the Ghana Education service?

2. How long have you been in administration in this school/district?

3. Have you heard of BECAS?

4. Has your school/district ever participated in any of its programmes /assessment tests?

5. Was your class involved?

6. How did your class/pupils fare?

7. How did the test results impact on the teaching and learning in your class, and by extension, the school?

8. In your opinion, do you think the assessment tests must be sustained? Give reasons.

9. Do you see any shortcomings in any of the national assessments in the area of item quality, administration, scoring and dissemination of results? Give reasons.

10. What do you think must be done to improve the quality and usefulness of the tests?
APPENDIX 2

SETTING GOOD TESTS

A key pre-requisite for a good test is the Test Blueprint or the Item Specification Table. It helps to ensure test validity. It is prepared to guarantee that what is intended to be measured is measured and the measurement undertaken is not influenced by factors that are unintended. It also serves as a guide for item writers. It is used to instruct item writers what content, skill or knowledge will be measured and how the items should look like.

Preparing a Test Blueprint:

* Draw a three dimensional table. Put in the left column the content in the middle, the item format, and profile dimension in the right column.

* Under the profile dimensions, indicate the number of items to be set for each profile dimension.

Give an example of a Test Blueprint on Reading for an Upper Primary.

See Table I: for an example of a Test Blueprint on Reading for the Upper Primary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>ITEM FORMAT</th>
<th>LEVEL OF THINKING (PROFILE DIMENSION)</th>
<th>LOWER</th>
<th>HIGHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>OE</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>ES' A Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal Comprehension</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no of Questions</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY: :MC=MULTIPLE CHOICE  OE=Open - Ended  CE = Close = Ended
APPENDIX 3

WRITING GOOD TEST ITEMS

Good test items must have the following characteristics:

* Express the item as clearly as possible

* Choose words that have precise meanings (active verbs) wherever possible.

* Avoid complex or awkward word arrangements.

* Include all qualifications needed to provide a reasonable basis for response selection.

* Avoid the inclusion of non-functional words in the item.

* Avoid clues to the correct response.

* In order to beat the rote – learner, avoid stereotyped phraseology in the stem or the correct responses.
APPENDIX 4

Formal assessment methods

Formal assessment methods refer to the various means of classroom testing which are designed by the teacher.

Essay questions

In an essay question, for instance, pupils are free to answer in their own words. Such tests are, therefore, suitable for those classes where the pupils can compose their own answers. In setting an essay test, you may find the following guidelines helpful:

- The wording of the question must be simple and ask for something specific.
- The question must be one that can be answered by the pupils.
- It should not be vague or ambiguous.
- It must be based on the specific objectives of the topic taught.
- The questions should essentially demand the application of concepts and skills covered.
- Questions must be accompanied with a marking scheme showing a model answer and how the marks will be distributed among various parts of the answer etc.
APPENDIX 5

Short answer question types:

The two forms of a short answer test are:

- Question type
- Completion or fill-in-the-blank type

The following are the guidelines useful in writing these types of tests

- Avoid lengthy and winding statements.
- Write the items so that there can be one and only one answer.
- Use only one blank in an item.
- Take care not to provide a clue to the missing word through the use of other words.
- Place the blank at the end of the statement. If this is difficult, write the item in question form.
- Write the items so specifically that there can be one and only one answer.
- Provide sufficient space if pupils are to fill in a blank or write a short answer.
- The missing words in the statements should be important ones.
- Make sure that the answer to one question is not revealed in another question.
APPENDIX  6

Writing Multiple choice questions

The two main parts of the multiple choice question are:

the statement or question which is called the stem; and

the alternatives or answers are called the options / detractors / responses.

The following guidelines should be observed when writing multiple-choice items.

- Make the item as concise as possible
- Use at least four options for each statement or question.
- Ensure that each option is plausible, that is seemingly correct.
- Avoid ‘hints’ in the stem which are clues to the correct answer. For example, all options should be consistent with the singular or plural in the stem.
- Avoid any pattern in the positions of the answers e.g. ABCD/AABB/CCDD/ABAB/CDCD etc.
- Avoid favouring one answer position more than any other e.g. BBBBBBCBBBBD
- Avoid the use of ‘not’ in the stem. If ‘not’ must be used, underline it or write it in capital letters.
- Ensure that the answer to one question is not revealed in another.
- Avoid the repetition of words in the options.
- Avoid making the question incorrect by adding such words as ‘only’, ‘all’, ‘always’, ‘never’, sometimes.